There are many pitfalls to be avoided in any attempt to offer a literary critique of the element of locality in Sophokles’ *Oidipous at Kolonos*. The region of Kolonos Hippios and the adjacent Academy, where the play’s entire action takes place, is rich in literary and historical associations. Not only is it the scene of Oidipous’ own transfiguration, as the drama relates; it is also the vicinity haunted by the ideal Attic youth praised in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (1005ff), who go down ‘to the Academy, where the plane-tree whispers to the elm’; its fame in philosophical connexions is perhaps as great as that of any locality in the entire world, due to Plato’s having favoured it as the seat of his school; there is even, in the background, the shade of Sokrates himself, if we are to believe the *Lysis* (203A); in terms of *Realpolitik* too Kolonos has the melancholy distinction of being the scene of the overthrow of democracy in 411 by the revolution of the 400 (Thuc, 8, 67); and last, but far from least, Kolonos was the deme and place of origin of Sophokles himself, who, around his ninetieth year, chose his own birthplace as the setting for what was to prove his valedictory drama as well as, for us, the last in the 5th century’s great outpouring of tragic poetry. If ever, then, a place had mana, it is possessed by Kolonos. Such powerful associations are all too likely to produce in the modern mind the sort of romantic glow typified by Mahaffy’s reactions to this part of the Kephisos valley before the urban sprawl of modern Athens engulfed it:

‘I have wandered whole days in these delightful woods, listening to the nightingales, which sing all day in the deep shade and solitude, as it were in a prolonged twilight, and hearing the plane-tree whispering to the elm, as Aristophanes has it, and seeing the white poplar show its silvery leaves in the breeze, and wondering whether the huge old olive stems . . . could be the actual sacred trees . . . under which the youths of Athens ran their races . . . Now and then through a vista the Acropolis shows itself in a framework of green foliage.’

It is probably significant that Mahaffy dwells on the ‘nightingales’ and the ‘deep shade’, since these are echoes of what is, further, perhaps the most famous and widely-known of all the lyrics of Greek tragedy, the great 1st stasimon from the *Oidipous at Kolonos* itself, which praises and exalts as ‘earth’s fairest home’ (669) this very region of Kolonos. (Even among the

Greekless, this lyric's currency is great, due to Yeats' magnificently idiosyncratic version:

Come praise Colonus' horses, and come praise
The wine-dark of the wood's intricacies . . .

The very popularity of this passage may, however, give rise to further difficulties, in that this superb effusion may be viewed as complete in itself, no more than a simple excursus, custom-built, almost, to evoke this most romantic of literary localities; whence what Gellie has called 'the accents of tourist literature' may obscure the fact that the stasimon and its themes are in fact highly integral to the drama as a whole, in which I believe the element of locality to play a prominent and important part. What follows, while eschewing romanticism and historicity, is an attempt to support and expound Jebb's estimate that 'of all extant tragedies, this is the most intimately Attic in thought and feeling', by trying to establish a proper appreciation of the drama's abundant manifestations of terminology, themes, and ideas bearing on the concept of locality.

It is fair to say that such lines of approach have not been entirely neglected by critical opinion: Kitto hints at the 'imaginative use of topography' in the play; Gellie has remarked on its 'reinforcement to our sense of place'; John Jones has offered some perceptive comment on the 'full interdependence of man and place in late Sophocles'; and Winnington-Ingram even gives us a valuable appendix ('Locality in the OC') to his larger study, though this mainly confines its reference to the opening scene. Nevertheless, none of these studies seems to me to afford the element of locality the fundamental importance it merits in any assessment of the play. Again, a more thorough examination of the question may be called for, if only to counterbalance such gross aberrations as Waldock's view that Oidipous stays at Kolonos only as a 'pretext for securing the continuance of the drama', or Linforth's claim that 'except in the opening scenes of the play, the locality has no significance whatever'.

I begin with some general remarks before moving to the consideration of various passages in more detail.

The title, of course, tells us nothing, unlike such modern titles as The Mayor of Casterbridge or Lotte In Weimar. Ancient dramatic titles may not

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even be original to the 5th-century dramatists themselves: and such seem­
ingly locale-specific titles as Oidipous at Kolonos, Iphigeneia in Aulis, etc.,
were probably applied merely to distinguish between dramas involving the
same central figures: in the case in point, clearly, between our play and the
Tyrannos.

We find much more compelling evidence for a preoccupation with the
idea of locality when we turn to the frequency (and, in the characteristic
Sophoklean fashion, often the clustering) of significant vocabulary. Even
on a simple statistical level, and even when we allow for the OK’s being the
longest extant Greek drama, a consultation of the lexicon soon confirms the
impression that various words bearing on place and locality are propor­
tionately much more prominent than in the other 6 Sophoklean tragedies.
This is especially true of γῆ, which occurs no less than 36 times in the course
of the play, χώρα (16 times), χθών (16), χώρος (11), and τόπος (9), to say
nothing of their various cognates such as ἐγχώριος, ἔντοπος, χθόνιος and
so on, which also appear with considerable frequency. ‘Land’, ‘region’,
‘place’, then, are concepts which seem to receive strikingly frequent atten­
tion. Major specific details of the mise-en-scène at the grove of the
Eumenides at Kolonos are also prominent: ἀλσος (5), the grove itself; ἔδρα
or its variant ἐδρανον (a combined total of 8), the suppliant’s seat and
status that Oidipous occupies there (the strictly physical seat is a βήμα (1) or
a βάθρον (2, with a further interesting transferred use at line 1662); seats
and sitting are in fact very prominent, perhaps not unnaturally, in a
‘suppliant-play’ such as this: θάκος, θάκημα and cognates are, in addition,
much in evidence in connexion with the Polyneikes-scene.7) There is also a
considerable concentration on words emphasising the distinction between
the native inhabitants of the place (Ἐγχώριος (1), Ἐγχώριος (1), Ἐντοπος (2),
Ἑμπολις (2), ἄστος (5)) and the various outsiders and newcomers to the
locality (Ἐξνος/Ἐξεινος) occurs no less than 60 times in the course of the
drama!). Chief among these is Oidipous himself, whose indeterminate and
wandering status receives much (initial) stress (ἄλητης (5), πλανήτης (2)).

This context may also be used to point up the fact that the chorus of
Ἀττικοὶ γέροντες or γέροντες ἐγχώριοι (as the first Hypothesis to the play
describes them) are consistently characterised in terms of their identity as
local elders of Kolonos or, at most, of Attica in general. Thus they are (145)
Ἑφοροι τῆς ἄλσος, οἰκίτορες χθόνος τῆς (728), and the like (see lines
493, 841, 871, 1348 for other examples). They are, significantly, never call­
ed Ἀθηναῖοι (the closest to a national-political denomination of them is the
messenger’s ἄνδρες πολίται, 1579). Indeed, there is one pointed passage

7. This particular vocabulary-emphasis is examined by P.E. Easterling, PCPS 13 (1967),
pp.5–7; the present study owes much to the approach to the play adopted by this valuable
article.
wherein the Kolonean stranger sharply distinguishes between the local demesfolk (soon to appear as the chorus) and ‘those in the town’ of Athens itself (78f):

\[
\text{τοίς ἐνθάδ’ αὐτοῦ, μὴ κατ’ ἄστυ, δημόταις}
\text{λέξω τάδ’ ἔλθών . . .}
\]

A similar phenomenon can be observed with regard to the figure of Theseus: even the great synoikist himself is largely characterised in terms which tend to have only a general reference to ‘the land’, Attica as a whole, rather than to the political centre of Athens-city or the Athenian state as such. Thus he is variously ὁ κραίνων τῆς χώρας (862), γῆς σαρὰς (1630) and the like (for other examples, see 294f, 862, 884, 1476, etc.) Only once, and within twenty lines of the play’s end, is he ‘lord of Athens’, κοίραν ‘Ἀθήνων (1759).

It is equally notable that the political centre of Athens-city itself is considerably played down in the course of the drama, rarely being more than what it is for the chorus at 297, Theseus’ ‘ancestral town in our land’, πατρώον ἄστυ γῆς. Instead, after Antigone’s rather dismissive identification of ‘the city and its towers’ at 14ff and 24, the physical city of Athens plays no further part in the drama, while attention shifts powerfully to the immediate locale of Kolonos itself. This dichotomy is particularly clearly signalled at 24ff, where the identity of the city of Athens is recognised and dismissed as common knowledge, whereas the precise χώρος (24), the τόπος (26), is where all our interest is carefully centred.

These various stresses and emphases are, perhaps, the less surprising when we observe that they are, in fact, clearly prefigured in the bold question with which Oidipous opens the entire drama (1f):

\[
\text{τίνας χώρους ἀφίγμεθ’ ἢ τίνων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν;}
\]

‘To what parts have we come, or the city of what men?’ That is, what Oidipous expresses interest in is immediate vicinity, and the inhabiting race. This priority, even over the proud stones of Athens itself, is maintained throughout the whole work. The constant preoccupation is with Attica and its local people, and particularly with this precise spot, Kolonos itself, archetype of Attica, τάσδε χώρας τα κράτιστα γάς ἔπαυλα (668f), ‘Earth’s fairest home in this land’. This preoccupation, I believe, manifests itself to a greater or lesser degree in virtually every part of the drama, and contributes powerfully to the dramatic and thematic impact of the work as a whole. It is time to turn to the consideration of various detailed passages in order to substantiate this.

The first specific passage in which Sophokles deploys an obvious concentration on details of locality and landscape, in a particularly clear fashion, is
the Prologos; and here Winnington-Ingram’s work has already broken some of the ground convincingly, though I think that we may go even deeper. I have already stressed the direct and precise force of Oidipous’ first substantive remark in the play, the twofold question of the opening lines. The rest of his opening speech too is much concerned with his precise whereabouts and circumstances (eg. 9ff): ‘If you see any resting-place, either on profane ground or by groves of the gods, place me there and set me down, so that we may inquire where we are; for as strangers we must learn from the local inhabitants, and do what they tell us.’ Oidipous goes on to persevere in this keen interest in the locality extremely strongly: he repeats the gist of his opening question, directly or indirectly, another 5 times in the space of the next 50 lines (12, 23, 27, 38, 52), and, more Sophocleo, the vocabulary-clusters emphasise this, as χώρος in particular is heard over and over again: in Antigone’s χώρος δ’δ’ ίρος speech (16ff), and in the Kolonean stranger’s confirming χώρος μέν ίρος πας’ δδ’ ἔστ’ (54ff; cf. also 2, 24, 37, 38, 52). έδρα too is very prominent here, at 5 times in just over the first 100 lines (36, 45, 84, 90, 112). τόπος also is quite insistent (26, 56, 64; ἐκτόπιος 118). Less obviously, but still worth noting in view of their later insistence, χθών, χώρα, γή and ἀλσος all find mention before 100 lines have passed. Another aspect which receives much emphasis is the uncertain standing of Oidipous the stateless, wandering beggar, a stranger in a land of strangers: τόν πλανήτην Οίδιπουν (3); ξένοι πρός αστών (13); τοιόνδ’ ἀλήτην (50); πλανάτας, πλανάτας τις ὁ πρέσβυς, οὔδ’ ἐγχώρος (1230; as well as the numerous utterances of ξένος /ξεινος (whether from Oidipous’ mouth or addressed to him, these underline his insecure position as an incomer among residents).

What effects does Sophokles gain by means of this constant, pervasive insistence on the subjects of specific locality and the wandering Oidipous’ relation to the spot where he now finds himself? The first effect I should like to point to is perhaps best categorised in terms of what Oliver Taplin has called ‘significant action’ , a dramatic device particularly in evidence in Sophokles’ later plays whereby he succeeds in rendering intangible concepts in substantial terms (to paraphrase Taplin himself). The opening scenes of the OK offer several highly striking references of precise description of the seat(s) occupied by the blind old man - ‘seat’ in the double sense of ‘place to sit’ and ‘fixed place of sanctuary’ connoted by the word έδρα, once Oidipous realises that he has at last found his foretold χώρα τερμία (89) at a shrine of the Eumenides. His first seat is specified as an ἔξος πέτρος (19) by Antigone as she sits her tired father down on it. This being the first substantive action performed by the actors since their entry, it has a con-

8. See n. 5.
siderable force, particularly in the light of the importance which the ‘suppliancy-theme’ is soon to acquire. The special nature of this (apparently randomly-chosen) seat on the ‘unpolished rock’ is amply indicated by the Kolonean stranger’s first, agitated words (36f):

πρὶν νῦν τὰ πλείον ἱστορεῖν, ἐκ τῆς δ’ ἐδρας ἐξελθ’ ἐχεις γάρ χώρον οὐχ ἀγνον πατεῖν.

(‘Before you ask me any more, move away from this seat; for you are on ground on which it is not holy to tread’.)

The significance of the ἐδρα is further-emphasised by Oidipous’ refusal to comply even with so blunt a command, and one, at that, from one of the local folk whom he was only just now so anxious to defer to (44f):

ἀλλ’ ἔλεω μὲν τὸν ἰκέτῃ δέξαιτο ὡς οὐχ ἐδρας γῆς τῆς δ’ ἐξέλθομ’ ἔτι.

(‘Then may they [the Eumenides] graciously receive their suppliant; for I will never more move from my seat in this land.’)

The repetition of vocabulary here is extremely pointed, echoing and countering the Kolonean’s order to ‘move’ from this same ‘seat’, though Oidipous significantly expands the connotation of ἐδρα to include both the physical seat and his suppliant-posture ‘in this land’. The rapidly-mounting significance of this seat is further increased in Oidipous’ solemn invocation of the presiding Eumenides themselves (84ff): how but by destiny could he have been led to the random and unwitting taking-up of a suppliant’s posture on ‘this solemn seat not shaped by man’ (Jebb’s translation; literally ‘not hewn by the adze’, ἀσκέπαρνον;100f). By this point, the aura surrounding the seat is already so powerful and emphatic that we may well find in Oidipous’ occupation of it an excellent example of a ‘significant action’, symbolising the suppliant’s bond with the land and place that is to receive him, especially as we are by no means yet finished with Oidipous’ ‘seat’.

At the approach of the chorus, he and Antigone find concealment in the grove while awaiting developments. The chorus, when he reveals himself to them, exclaim in horror at this trespass on holy ground, and direct him to a spot on profane ground where he can sit with impunity, presumably (in view of the Kolonean stranger’s similar protests about infringement of hallowed ground) not identical with the first seat10, though conceived of in a dramatically-similar way (the chorus are, initially at least, prepared to count the new seat as a ἐδρανον (176f) for the suppliant; and Oidipous refers to both seats {pace Jebb, 264) as equally βάθρα). But what is especially interesting is, again, a remarkably minute description of this second seat and Oidipous’ progress to the act of sitting on it. For over 30 lines (170–202), the sum of both the dialogue (or, more accurately, the lyrics, for this section of

10. See Jebb, pp.xxxviif for the possible staging.
amoibaion forms part of the Parodos) and the stage-action is a minutely-described and executed advance by Oidipous from his hallowed location to his new unhallowed one — scarcely more than, at most, 20 paces on stage, but the focus of an acute tension as he gradually moves onto the dangerous vulnerability of profane ground, with only the chorus’ word and the general sanctity of Kolonos to protect them. As Gellie has said, ‘The careful inching away from the sacred ground is a reinforcement to our sense of place; we are given the sense that a step this way or that can make a difference’.

Moreover, when Oidipous eventually arrives at his new seat, it is again carefully described (192) as an αὐτοπετρον βήμα, a ‘ledge of natural rock’, where he is further instructed to ‘move sideways and crouch low on the stone’s edge’. What do these two seats, so minutely dealt with, have in common? The answer is that Sophokles has specifically, and surely deliberately, stressed that they are both unshaped by any human artifice and both are natural, of the land’s bedrock. Oidipous, then, has twice performed the significant and tensely-described action of taking a suppliant’s seat, though not on the usual altar or the like. Instead, this suppliant, guided by the gods, rests, at Kolonos, in contact with the primal substance of the land of Attica itself. It is this, together with the goodwill of its presiding deities, its native inhabitants, and its ruler Theseus, which will enable Oidipous to find salvation and transfiguration, and Sophokles has symbolically signalled as much from the very first actions of the drama.

Another major point to be observed concerning the opening sequences of the play involves the lavish care which Sophokles expends on painting a vivid word-picture of the mise-en-scène, the grove itself and the whole general area of Kolonos, inasmuch as this seems greatly to surpass the efforts he makes in similar cases in other plays. We may compare the effective but brief picture drawn for the audience in the opening lines of, say, the Elektra, where some 10 lines sketch for us the Argive plain, the palace of Mycenae, the growing dawn and its birdsong. In the OK, however, the locale receives more lavish (and frequently-extended) treatment. The first description is Antigone’s (14–19): the holy grove, dense with laurel, olive and vine; the song of many nightingales within it; the unpolished rock-seat. This reasonably extensive description alone might be taken as broadly equivalent to the Elektra-passage; yet within 40 lines we receive an even more impressive and confirmatory description of the whole region, from the mouth of the Kolonean stranger (54–63): ‘This whole place is sacred . . . ‘; a description which evokes the presiding deities of this unique area, confirms its enormous significance for the whole country (57f),

11. See n. 5.
12. ἀντόπετρον codd.; but Musgrave’s correction is generally accepted.
announces the proud name of Kolonos itself (58–61), and climaxes with the remarkable conceit of 62f,

τοιαύτα σοι ταύτ’ 'εστίν ὁ ξέν', ὦ λόγοις
timómen', ἀλλά τῇ ξυνουσίᾳ πλέον

with its affecting claim that the place's significance will be discerned by attachment to it far more readily than by lofty descriptions (and what but ξυνουσία here at Kolonos is Oidipous' dearest wish?). Even by line 63, then, we have had much vivid and suggestive description of the spot where Oidipous has recognised the 'watchword of his fate' (46) and with which he has already demonstrated such a consistent, almost harping, preoccupation; and we have further heard how just such an involvement with the region and its deities is a vital part of the mental outlook of the local populace too.

Yet there is still more descriptive detail of the locality elsewhere in the play (even ignoring, for the moment, the first Stasimon itself, which takes up much that has already been given exposition by Antigone and the stranger: the dense grove, the nightingales, the presiding deities, the timelessness of the place; all are expanded to even greater effect). Thus in the Parodos there is considerable passing reference to the grove, which reinforces our mental image of it: (125f) ‘This untrodden grove of the maiden goddesses . . .’; (156ff) ‘Let not your steps trespass on this green, voiceless glade, where the bowl of water blends its stream with the flow of honied offerings . . .’. Nor should we ignore the scene of ritual propitiation of the Eumenides which the chorus insist should be undertaken on Oidipous' behalf (466ff). If, as Oidipous himself is certain (96ff), his arrival there was guided by the goddesses themselves, and if they have hearkened to his earlier (and far more sublime) prayer (84ff), we may wonder why any further propitiation should be necessary. At least part of the answer would seem to be a definite design on Sophokles' part to build up an even more distinct impression of the interior of the grove and its rituals because of the prominence which these unseen parts of the locale acquire at the end of the play. This may help to explain the otherwise slightly odd and redundant impression we receive from these, again, highly precise details of topography and procedure (466ff): the holy drink-offerings to be fetched from an ever-flowing spring, the well-worked bowls and their rims and handles garlanded with fresh wool, the three streams of libation which 'the ground under the dark shade drinks', the 'thrice nine' sprays of olive offered with unvoiced prayer, the retiral without looking back. Ismene significantly inquires about the exact spot where the ritual is to take place (503f):

τὸν τόπον δ’ ἵνα

χρῆσει μ’ ἐφευρεῖν, τούτο βουλομαι μαθεῖν,

to which the answer is τούκειθεν ἀλσοῦς, ‘on the further side of the grove’
(presumably accompanied by a gesture by the koryphaios towards the rear of the stage-area), with the further detailed information that there is a ‘guardian’ there (If Jebb’s suggestion for ἔποικος is right; another resident, a local inhabitant, at least). The dramatic effect is again to conjure up a vivid mental vision of the locality and its deities in the audience’s minds, and to associate them with the unlikely figure of the ragged old suppliant (as Gellie suggests, ‘Men would one day approach the tomb of Oedipus in this way’). Some of the words used, moreover, such as μετάμφυλλος (482), ἐλαίας (484), and θαλλοίσιν (474) remind us of and reinforce the earlier descriptions of the grove’s dark thick-grown, mystical interior (cf. 16ff) and look forward to the expansion of these descriptions in the first Stasimon (667ff).

The reason why so much effort is expended on painting a clear and extensive description of the location of the action and its immediate surroundings is surely because precise location is important in this tragedy as in no other of the seven, not even the Philoktetes. The action of the Antigone, say, could happen anywhere; this is simply not true of the OK. This emerges particularly clearly from Oidipous’ words in his profound prayer to the presiding Eumenides when he realises that, in their grove, he has found his foretold place of release (84ff). He finds significance in the fact that theirs is the first ἔδρα in this land at which he has taken up his suppliant’s posture:

ดน πότνιαι δεινώπες, εὖτε νυν ἔδρας
πρώτων ἔφ’ ὠμόν τῆς δε γης ἐκαμψ’ ἐγὼ . . .

Apollo had long foretold this encounter (87ff):

δς μοι . . .
ταῦτην ἐξεξε παῦλαν ἐν χροών μακρῷ,
ἐλθόντι χώραν τερμίαν, ὅπου, θεῶν
σεμνῶν ἔδραν λάβομι καὶ ἐξενόςτασιν . . .

The Eumenides themselves, he is equally sure, have guided his aimless wanderings to their own shrine here at Kolonos (96ff):

ἐγνωκα μέν νυν ὃς με τήνδε τήν ὄδον
οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅπως οὐ πιστόν ἔξ ὠμόν πτερόν
ἐξήγαγ’ εἰς τόδ’ ἄλοςς, οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε
πρώταις, ὑμῖν ἀντέκυρα’ ὀδοπορόν,
νήφων ἀοίνοις, κατ’ σεμνόν ἐξόμην
βάθρον τόδ’ ἀσκέπαρνον.

A form of progressive focus is what emerges out of these lines: long wandering in time and space finally arriving at Apollo’s foretold χώρα τερμία in this land, at this particular ἔδρα of the Eumenides, at this very grove, where Oidipous now finds himself seated on this precise ‘seat not shaped by man’.

How much more specifically could a dramatist prescribe a precise spot or one filled with more significance for human and divine destiny? It is because the grove of Kolonos is not only the scene of Oidipous’ last mortal moments and strivings but also their target that is so greatly transcends the status of the average tragic mise-en-scène, and is so extensively and recurrently given detailed description by Sophokles. The effects of this careful depiction of the locale are particularly powerful in the play’s opening sequences, as I have been attempting to demonstrate; they also bear special fruit, as we shall see, in its closing scenes.

The prominence of the concept of locality retreats somewhat in the sequence in which Oidipous is reunited with Ismene (310ff); yet even here it is by no means entirely absent. Ismene is the first of several people who have an encounter with Oidipous at the grove of Kolonos. The cynical will echo Waldock’s mild sarcasms (“The grove becomes a general rendezvous for all who have business — and there are many — with Oedipus”14), and see no more than dramaturgical convenience at work. Remove the sarcastic overtones, however, and Waldock’s remark can be seen to express a true and significant dramatic fact. For Sophokles does offer sufficient clues to suggest that the encounter of Ismene (and thus by extension, presumably, those of Theseus, Kreon, and Polyneikes too) with Oidipous is of a piece with his own recognition of the hand of fate and the gods in guiding him, so apparently randomly, to the grove of Kolonos (46, 96ff). Thus, with her first words, Ismene hints that she has located her father and sister ‘with difficulty’ (325) and ‘not without toil’ (328); and later she claims to have ‘suffered greatly in seeking where you were living’ (361f). She has tracked Oidipous down against all the odds, and tracked him down precisely here, in a way that must confirm Oidipous’ own (by now frequently-stated) sense of the critical nature of his location at the grove of Kolonos.

Further, Ismene’s news is thick with the names and titles of great places and people: the Kadmeians and Thebes, hollow Argos, Polyneikes and his brother, Kreon, the Delphic hearth, Phoibos Apollo (361–420 passim). All of these, the wider world of Greece, are somehow now beginning to focus their interest down on the old beggar at Kolonos. It is again notable how the terminology of the earth clusters up to emphasise the chthonic nature of the incipient struggle for possession of Oidipous in this sequence: γῆ (356, 399, 400, 441, 447, 462); πέδον (380, 415); κόνις (406); χθών (449). Thebes or Attica: which ‘earth’ will receive Oidipous’ bones? The previously dubious chorus are certainly in no further doubt; they conclude that, in the person

14. See n. 6. With much more insight, Jones (op. cit., p.227) says ‘In mattering for itself, locality matters for the man who arrives and dies; Oedipus does not happen to die at Colonus...’
of Oidipous, they may indeed have no less than ‘a saviour of this land’ (τήσδε γῆς σωτήρα, 462f).

With the arrival on the scene of Theseus himself, the whole theme of locality comes to a clearly-expressed climax. Theseus’ opening words contain a reminder of the importance of fixity of abode, precisely what Oidipous has been yearning for from the play’s very beginning (cf. 45); Theseus is the more sympathetic to the erstwhile ‘wandering beggar’ Oidipous (his poor, homeless status has been greatly emphasised: 3, 20, 50, 123f, 166, 347ff, 429, 444) in that he, Theseus, has equally tasted at first hand the bitterness and insecurity of exile and foreign danger (562–6). We are then reminded of just how critical the present juncture is for Oidipous himself (585) and for the parties who may try to claim him (587). In short, here at Kolonos is a man who is of surpassing interest not just to Athens, but to Thebes too (589) and indeed the whole of Greece (597). As Oidipous details the mystical, chthonic blessings which his grave will bestow, we can observe another clustering of by now familiar vocabulary: χθών (605); γῆ (599, and especially in Oidipous’ great speech of 607ff, where we have the powerful phrase (610) φθίνει μὲν ἵσχυς γῆς. The chorus too immediately after this (630) use γῆ to echo their earlier view of Oidipous as τήσδε γῆς σωτήρα (462f); as does Theseus himself (635) ). Theseus’ response is unhesitating and munificent, granting Oidipous’ dearest wish, and indeed in formal and nationally-ratified terms. Since, as he says (631ff), Oidipous has come as a suppliant, offering ‘no mean benefit for this land and for me’, he, Theseus, will never spurn ‘this man’s grace’ (χάρις, 636, another important word in the OK), but will rather ‘establish him as a citizen in the country’ (637, χώρα δ’ ἐμπάλιν κατοικίω). Not only does Theseus thus finally remove the threat of expulsion; he transcends Oidipous’ suppliant-status by granting him formal rights to what he has so long craved, that is, a resident’s status, fixity of abode in Attica, συνουσία. The word is, in fact, significantly used at 647, and reminds us of its earlier striking appearance in the Kolonean stranger’s mouth (62f), when we heard that the Kolonos-region was to be especially valued οὐ λόγοις . . . ἀλλὰ τῇ ξυνουσίᾳ πλέον. This Oidipous now has the freedom to experience for himself. An even more climactic moment follows, as Theseus offers him further freedoms (638ff):

εἰ δ’ ἐνθάδ’ Ἥδυ τῷ ξένῳ μίμειν, σὲ νῦν τόξῳ φυλάσσειν· εἰ δ’ ἐμοῦ στείχειν μέτα τόδ’ Ἦδυ, τούτων, Οἰδίπους, διδομὶ σοι κρίναντι χρήσθαι τῇ δὲ γάρ ξυνουσίᾳ.

Oidipous’ reply is sublimely decisive. Even now, when he has security (637),
and choice (638ff), and indeed the tempting prospect of such regal quarters (Theseus' own palace, 643) as he has not known for many long years of miserable beggary, Kolonos and its grove remain as much the undisputed focus of his deepest interests and attachment as ever they were. It would not even be θέμις (644) to contemplate a removal from this place which we remember to have been foretold by Apollo himself (87ff) as Oidipous' παύλα, his χώρα τερμία, his ἔδρα καὶ ἐξενόστασις, for, as Oidipous himself now roundly states (644), 'This is the place', ὁ χώρος ἔσθ' οἴδε, in which he will smite his enemies and aid his friends, everlastingly, approaching as near to divine status as was possible for a mortal in terms of fifth-century eschatology. The emotional pitch of the exchange between the two men is progressively raised at this point, the rheseis of both moving into stichomythia at 642, and further into antilabe from 652, until, with a final assurance by Theseus that 'no-one will take you from here (ἐνθένδ', 657; very immediate), the chorus strike into the great stasimon of Kolonos' praise, which further describes and celebrates the land of Attica which is now Oidipous' land, and especially its archetype, Kolonos itself, where, as he himself has just implied so strongly, he will henceforth dwell forever. Waldock would have it that Sophokles keeps Oidipous from accepting Theseus' invitation to his palace merely as a pretext for securing the continuance of the drama; could he, rather, have gone to any greater lengths to indicate that Kolonos constitutes the very epicentre of momentous and transcendental significances for Oidipous?

And so to the Kolonos-stasimon itself. It is firstly worth stressing again that this is no mere picturesque excursus, but is integrated thoroughly into the larger structure of the drama, in which it has a highly functional part to play; extending the description and glorification of what is now Oidipous' home, confirming the rightness of his choosing to abide there, and further preparing the backdrop against which the remaining trials of Oidipous, and his eventual transfiguration, will take place. Thus the chorus address their words directly to Oidipous (ξένε, 668) as they take up Theseus' injunction about guarding him (638f). Similarly, at the lyric's conclusion, its theme is taken up by Antigone when she invokes protection against Kreon not directly from the chorusmen but by an apostrophe to the land itself, the glories of which, having just been celebrated, must now be made good (720ff):

ω πλείστ' ἐπαίνοις εὐλογούμενον πέδον,

νῦν σοῦ τὰ λαμπρὰ ταῦτα δὴ φάινειν ἔπη.

The stasimon itself repays closer attention. We may again note how Sophokles employs a focussing-device to concentrate attention right down on the immediate location of Kolonos itself (668f): τάσδε χώρας τὰ κράτιστα γὰς ἐπαύλα, τὸν ἀργήτα Κολωνόν, 'fairest on earth — in this land — Kolonos', thus moving from the broadest terms of reference to the
most local and immediately specific. The lyric expands its reference outwards again from the first antistrophe (681ff) so as to include the Kephisos-plain and Attica as a whole; but at its conclusion the chorus revert once more to the immediate vicinity of Kolonos itself (715, ταῖς δε ... ἄγυιαῖς), to round off the reference of the ode in the same highly localised way in which it began.

Kolonos itself is finely depicted in Sophokles’ typically vivid, almost impressionist, manner, which treats the grove and its surroundings in terms of sound (671f), colour (670, 673, 674, 685, 701), darkness (676), movement (679, 689, 718), and windlessness (677f); the suggestions of growth, fertility, the sprouting of vegetation and the flowing of water echo and expand earlier references to the grove’s mysteriously dense growth (one wonders whether the illusion might have been aided by the profusion of the fresh spring greenery of Dionysia-time around the actual theatre). The gods’ strong association with the locality is again heavily emphasised: Dionysos, Demeter and Kore, the Nymphs, the Muses, Aphrodite, Zeus, Athene, Poseidon and the Nereids all figure, associated with Attica or, more often, specifically Kolonos, thus increasing even further the already heavily-numinous aura of the *mise-en-scène*.

In the second strophe we find use made of the device of emphasis by means of geographic contrast. That characteristically Attic crop, the olive (and the social and economic strength which it had symbolised since the days of Solon), is especially celebrated by contrasting its flourishing growth in Attica (700, ὄ τὰδε θάλλει μέγιστα χώρα) with its lesser status in both Asia and the Peloponnese, presumably as a shorthand for the rest of the Greek world, thus again pointing out how Kolonos-Attica may serve as an exemplar and focus for all of Greece, in a fashion reminiscent of the ‘focus’ of 668–70.

Finally, in the second antistrophe (which begins with a neat echo of the word used to describe Kolonos’ pre-eminence right at the start of the lyric: κράτιστον — κράτιστα, 707 & 668) we close with Poseidon’s gift of bit and oar, another ‘glory of the land’ most high, a ‘praise for our mother-city (ματρόπολει)’, the broader term serving to remind us that Athens-city is by no means to be simply identified with Attica as a whole.

In sum, then, we find here no simple touristic effusion on the standard beauties of the country, but rather a lyric sequence thoroughly integrated into the drama, and powerfully continuing to emphasise the motif of locality in highly striking ways that can be paralleled elsewhere in the play, and which continue to suggest the intense pre-eminence of this area to which Oidipous has now become so firmly attached.

16. Reading Porson’s plausible supplement [χθονός].
The scene in which Oidipous confronts Kreon also contains more play with the theme of locality than may appear at first sight. Thus there is subtle point in Kreon's very first words (728):

\[ \text{άνδρες χθονός τήσδ' ευγενείς οἰκήτορες. . .} \]

He of course means to address the chorus in this way; but there is ironic force in the fact that Oidipous too now has a formal claim to be included in any such address: has not Theseus himself just now made a public grant to him of formal status in the land (637)? And if the word ευγενής is to be applied to anyone, does not Oidipous merit it more than most? (Compare the emphatic τό γενναίον of line 8 as what has especially brought him through his years of trial.) This subtle touch seems very Sophoklean, underlining for us the fact that, though Kreon may not know it, the Oidipous he finds himself dealing with now has a status and identity different from those of the old Oidipous whom he thinks to encounter and manipulate so easily.

What emerges with fundamental clarity out of what follows is the unbridgeable divide between Oidipous' attitude to his new land and his old one. The false-faced wheedling of Kreon produces a savage outburst from the forewarned Oidipous which culminates in a curse, almost indeed a prophecy, directed at Kreon, Thebes, and Oidipous' own false sons (784ff). 'You come to fetch me,' he says, 'but not to bring me home — rather to plant me nearby so that your city may be unscathed by troubles from this land (πόλις δέ σοι κακώ ν ανατος τήσδ' ἀπαλλαξθῇ χθονός). 'He then goes on with terrible power (787ff):

\[ \text{οὐκ ἔστι σοι ταύτ', ἀλλά σοι τάδ' ἔστ', ἐκεί χώρας ἀλάστωρ οὐμός ἐνναίων ἄει ἐστὶν δὲ παισὶ τοῖς ἐμόισι τῆς ἐμῆς χθονός λαχεῖν τοσοῦτον, ἐνθανεῖν μόνον.} \]

('But that is not for you; rather this is for you — my avenging spirit on the country, ever dwelling therein. And it is my sons' lot to inherit only this much of my land, to die in.')

That is, Oidipous is representing his posthumous influence on Thebes as exactly the inverse of that which he will bring to bear on Attica, to which he has promised mystical benefits as a 'saviour of this land' (462f), when it receives his 'slumbering and buried corpse, cold in death' (621f). But Thebes will receive his everlasting enmity, and all of him that will dwell there will be a destructive force, his vengeful ἀλάστωρ. As to his sons, all they will inherit out of their dynastic ambitions is enough Theban soil to give them a grave; which provides a powerfully ironic contrast with Oidipous' own imminent chthonic fate at the grove of Kolonos, opposing their destined disappointment and disaster to his achievement and
transfiguration. Kolonos, indeed, continues to claim him entirely, and he reiterates his overwhelming determination not to stir a jot from it (798): ήμάς δ' ἔα ζήν ἐνθάδ' ('Allow me to live here', a very immediate and permanent note); and (811f):

άπελθ', ἐρώ γὰρ καὶ πρὸ τῶνδε, μηδὲ με φύλασσ' ἐφορμῶν ἐνθα χρή ναίειν ἐμὲ.

('Go — for I will speak on behalf of these men too — and do not keep a watchful blockade on me in the place where I must abide', which simultaneously stresses Oidipous' attachment to Kolonos and the way in which his new status there gives him virtually a place in its community and a right of speech.)

The scene climaxes with the unscrupulous Kreon making vigorous attempts to prise Oidipous away from this immoveable cleaving to Kolonos by threats to seize the two daughters and Oidipous himself, which Oidipous begs the chorus to resist. His agonised pleas (823 and 831) οὐκ ἔξελάτε τὸν ἀσεβῆ τῇσδε χθονός; and ὦ γῆς ἄνακτες seem to mark the start of more clusterings of pointed vocabulary: γῆ recurs at lines 862, 871, 884, and 915, while χθήν awaits Theseus' arrival to reappear in his mouth at lines 912, 924, and 926. χώρα too appears at lines 909 and 934, with the cognate εγχώριοι at line 871. Notable too is the chorus' rallying-cry (841), βάτε. . . ξυντοποι as they respond to Oidipous' cry for aid. All of these insistent words help to emphasise the centrality of the land of Attica in all these doings (and perhaps implicitly contrast it with the very different nature of the land of Thebes, since σῆς χθονός pointedly appears twice in Theseus' strictures to Kreon; 912 & 924), as Attica's newest inhabitant appeals to the land and its native population for aid against the incursion which would try to wrest him away from it. Theseus, on entering, fittingly answers the summons of ἰώ γάς πρόμοι (884) by pronouncing once again the proud name of the crucial locality ( . . .τοϋδ' . . .Κολωνοῦ, 889)

The ever-slippery Kreon's last throw is an attempt to undermine Oidipous' unexpected acceptability in Attica by harping on his being a polluted outcast from Thebes: he revives the use of the tendentious word ἀλήτης (949; cf. also 746) which was much used of Oidipous in the earlier stages of the drama before Theseus accepted his supplication (636f). More, he even tries to insinuate that this should render Oidipous obnoxious to the Areiopagos (947f), 'which is of this land' (χθόνιον ὄνθ'), with its general oversight of public morality and ritual purity. This provokes Oidipous to a long and spirited rebuttal of Kreon's calumnies which climaxes in words which sum up where his essential trust lies (1006ff):

εἰ τις γῆ θεοῦς ἐπισταται
tιμαῖς σεβίζειν, ἥδε τῷδ' ὑπερφέρει.
‘If any land knows how to revere the gods with due rites, this one excels therein; this land from which you tried to steal me, the aged suppliant, and have carried away my daughters.’

His concluding stroke is a solemn invocation of the Eumenides to support his essential innocence, with a significant demonstrative (1010, τάσδε τάς θεάς), doubtless accompanied by a gesture, which forcibly redirects the audience’s attention to the grove and its presiding goddesses, where he has placed his faith and his cause from first to last.

The scene closes with some exact directions from Theseus to Kreon, whom he escorts off in pursuit of the rest of the Theban band and the stolen daughters, should they be held ‘in these regions’ (ἐν τόποισι τοῖσδ’, 1020); Theseus has already taken counter-measures to meet the possibility that they may be speeding towards the borders, and has no fear that they can escape out of the land. These precautions were taken as soon as he entered, and were equally strikingly precise (897ff), urging his followers to hurry to ‘where the twin-branched highroads meet.’ Whether or not Jebb is right in thinking that these were details ‘about which an Athenian audience in the theatre would not trouble themselves’ (ad 1055; though he himself takes trouble in a lengthy appendix to speculate on the topography of the flight and pursuit), we may well reflect that the actual landscape of Kolonos and its environs was only a matter of a mile or two from where the audience sat in the theatre listening to these references, and would have been very familiar to the majority of them. Certainly Sophokles is far from being as cavalier about similar details of the locality later in the play, as we shall see; not least in the ensuing lyric, which takes up this concern for precise topography and makes it a main theme of the song.

The famous first Stasimon’s popular currency overshadows all the other lyrics in the play, but it is an interesting fact that most of the others too are more or less extensively concerned with matters of locale. This is strongly the case with the second Stasimon (1044ff), though with interesting differences from the angle of approach of the first, which offered reflective praise of the locality; the second by contrast deploys a spread of vivid and specific topographical references designed to fill out an exciting picture of the combat taking place offstage to rescue Oidipous’ daughters. As with the first Stasimon, we find in the lyric an expansion of the audience’s imaginative conception of the locality of the drama. This time there is understandably much less immediate concentration on Kolonos itself (though we are certainly not allowed to lose sight of Kolonos’ share in events; thus 1065f, δεινός δ’ προσχώρων Ἀρης stresses the warlike might of the immediate inhabitants of the vicinity, again notably contrasted with
non-Kolonean Athenians, δεινά δὲ Ὀθήσειδᾶν ἀκμά. Also, the mentions of Poseidon and Athene, specifically called ἵππια, at 1070ff seem to refer to their cults at Kolonos (Pausanias 1, 30, 4), and are obviously apropos in this context of a cavalry battle. But otherwise in this lyric the topographical references widen out to put before the audience’s mental vision a series of images of greater Attica which complement the narrower Kolonos-Kephisos valley emphasis of the first Stasimon. With this wider scope we now hear of other areas of Attica bordering on or near Kolonos: the Daphne-region and Eleusis (1046ff; see Jebb ad loc. and Appendix on these identifications); the ‘snowy rock of Oie’, probably on the Aigaleos-ridge (1059ff; see Jebb). These references are, reasonably, to country west or north of Kolonos, the Thebans’ ‘natural’ route to either Oinoe and Dryoskephalai, or perhaps Phyle, and so home. But they also complement the references in the first Phyle, and so home. But they also complement the references in the first Stasimon which, even when they moved out from Kolonos itself, looked largely north and east of Kolonos, to the Kephisos-plain. Thus by this stage we have heard, in lyrics and iambics, something not only of Kolonos itself but also of much of Attica to the west of the Hymettos-divide. Sophokles is effectively building up a remarkably detailed image of the wider landscape centred on Kolonos and its environs with which his protagonist’s fate is intimately concerned.

A second aspect of this lyric which parallels the first Stasimon is its catalogue of Attic deities whose support is claimed: Apollo, the Potniai (with hints of the Eleusinian Mysteries), Athene, Poseidon, Zeus, Artemis. These are called upon at the lyric’s climax to give aid to ‘the people who hold this land’ (1087, γὰς τᾶς δε δαμοὔχοις) and again to ‘this land and its citizens’ (1095, γὰ τᾶς καὶ πολίταις). This final phrase is no simple redundancy: it exactly echoes the twofold preoccupation which was heard on Oidipous’ lips in the very first lines of the drama; place and population.

After the restoration of the girls to their father, the succeeding scene shifts our attention to the arrival of Polyneikes, the last of those who, having ‘business’ with Oidipous, effect a conjunction with him at the grove of Kolonos. Theseus, who has encountered him at the nearby Kolonean precinct of Poseidon, in suppliant posture, describes him to Oidipous as (1156f)

...οὐκ ἐμπολίν
οὐκ ὄντα, συγγενῇ δὲ...

(‘Not your countryman, but your kinsman’), with a strongly ironic echo of line 637, where Theseus endowed Oidipous with resident-status in Attica. Polyneikes is indeed kin to but not any longer ἐμπολίς with Oidipous, because Oidipous has been made ἐμπολίς of Attica, by Theseus himself, in
whose mouth this rare word now appears again for only the second time\(^{17}\) in extant Sophokles. Oidipous agrees under much duress to receive his son, to be tempted for the last time to give up his hard-won έδρα at Kolonos; and one of things that helps to drag this concession from him is the recognition that another man’s έδρα too must receive respect (1163ff\(^{18}\)). But before we see Oidipous subjected to his final tempting, the chorus sing the third Stasimon.

This is another very famous lyric, with its theme of ‘Never to be born is best’, dwelling on the sufferings and trials of old age, which the aged chorus can describe with great sympathy for Oidipous, yet also looking forward to the intransigence which the old father will display in facing the blandishments of the son in the next scene. And here again we find Sophokles having recourse to a topographical image to symbolise both of these aspects, that of the storm-beaten headland, which is continually battered by the waves but which endures unmoved and silent, just as Oidipous will endure the trials of the encounter with Polyneikes. This reference is not particularised as are those of the two previous stasima (Sophokles makes no attempt to suggest, eg., Sounion), but is no less powerful, in its comparison to some ‘north-facing, wave-beaten, wintry cape’ (1240ff) of this grim, enduring old man, seated motionless on the bedrock of the land here at Kolonos, where indeed Poseidon’s presence is so strong (cf. 707ff; etc.). This image is rounded off with an elaborate poetical version of the cardinal points of the compass (1245-8), from which the waves of trouble are visualised as coming. Gellie finds that this ‘says nothing’ and resembles a ‘weather-map’\(^{19}\): does it not rather once again give a powerful sense of cosmic forces focussing down from all sides on this one old man, enduring at Kolonos in everything’s despite?

‘Polyneikes is present here’: Antigone signalises her brother’s arrival for the benefit of her blind father (1253). In his opening sentences Polyneikes remarks on the pathos of his encounter with his father and sisters ‘in a strange land’ (ξένης ἐπὶ χθόνος, 1256), and his opening harangue continues to employ a high concentration of ‘land’-terminology, particularly γῆ (1287, 1292, 1296, 1303, 1307); πεδίον (1312) and πάτρα (1330) also occur. Polyneikes is indeed much concerned with territorial questions, as he charts his delicate course in and about the shoals of international diplomacy, intrigue and aggression. And again we hear the great names of a wider Greece being rolled out before the lonely figure at Kolonos: ‘Dorian Argos’, the ‘Apian land’, its king Adrastos, the ‘seven-fold spear-host’, with a ringing catalogue of its chiefs, all directed at the silent, motionless, and (we

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17. But see n. 15.
18. See n. 7.
must remember) squalid-looking old man whose extreme degree of ragged and dirty beggarliness has just been pointedly re-emphasised by Polyneikes (1258ff) and is further stressed by Oidipous himself when he eventually replies to his son (1357ff). This again suggests the immense paradox of all these momentous doings affecting the wider world of heroic Greece which somehow hang on the reactions of this insignificant-looking old man obstinately planted at Kolonos. It also emphasises what his location at the grove of Kolonos has already done to transform Oidipous: the erstwhile beggar, of no account to anyone in his wanderings through the world, barely able to survive the hardships of hunger, exhaustion, and raggedness; obliged to be obedient to everyone’s smallest word, and forced to resort to extreme pleading and supplication for the humblest favours has, since the moment of his arrival at Kolonos and his firm avowal never willingly to budge from his εδρα γης τήσδε (45), steadily risen in esteem and influence, and has received personal visits and attentions from some of the greatest men and powers in Greece — Theseus and Athens, Kreon and Thebes, and now Polyneikes, this last representing no less than a form of Panhellenic league, the famous Seven and their powers who, with ‘seven hosts behind their seven spears’ (1311f), have followed Polyneikes against Thebes. The squalid suppliant previously at everyone’s whim is now receiving supplication himself, and the destiny of much of Greece now hinges on the merest word from him. (Ironical it may be, but the regal note in Oidipous’ closing words to Polyneikes is unmistakeable, and truly reflects the commanding demeanour he has reassumed: 1393ff).

This amazing reversal of circumstances has been triggered by one thing alone: Oidipous’ early recognition that he had come upon the ‘watchword of my fate’ (ξυμφοράς ξύνθημ’ έμής, 46) before the grove of Kolonos, in accordance with the word of Apollo and the guidance of the Eumenides to his final resting-place beside their Kolonean shrine. Since that moment, the suppliant has become the supplicated; indeed, he is now in his turn being treated almost like one of the deities of the place himself (cf. Polyneikes’ virtual identification of Oidipous with the Eumenides themselves at 1434: προς τούδε πατρός τῶν τε τούδ’ ’Ερινύων). Kolonos, then, has already done much to restore to Oidipous the status and power that he once enjoyed; soon it is to give him something far more desirable than temporal pomp and power — eternal release and transfiguration. The Polyneikes-scene sees Oidipous being appealed to, and behaving, almost like one already divine: beseeched for supernatural aid, and instead rendering and foretelling superhuman destruction and hatred. It is well timed that,

20. It would be tedious to catalogue the many points in the play where such ideas occur; but see especially: (hunger, hardship) 3-8, 20, 347-352, 1258-1263, 1357-1359; (obliged to obey others) 12f, 79f, 170-172; (driven to extreme pleading) 49f, 275ff.
immediately afterwards, the gods themselves intervene with the long-foretold (94f) signs which are to hasten on the departure of Oidipous from this world and his acceptance into theirs, as the thunder sounds and Oidipous asks for ‘some man of the locality’ (ἐὰν τις ἐντοπος, 1457) to summon Theseus to him.

From 1518 Oidipous launches into what proves to be his last speech. At this great climax it is again observable that locality is of major importance in his words to Theseus, as Oidipous declares that he will show the way himself to ‘the place (χώρον) where I must die’ (1520), and later urges ‘let us now make our way to the place (χώρον)’ . . . (1540f). Theseus is forbidden to reveal where the grave is hidden ‘or in what regions (τόποις) it lies’ (1523) when he accompanies Oidipous there alone. There follows the masterly touch often remarked on, the mystical inversion of what has been Oidipous’ lot for so many long years as, here at the last, the sighted are unerringly led by the blind old man. Oidipous now rises and gives the command and the physical lead for all the other characters to follow him on his last journey, amid a burst of, again, remarkably precise directions (1540ff):

χώρον δ’ . . .
στείχωμεν ἢδη, μηδ’ ἔτ’ ἐντρεπόμεθα.
ὁ παῖδες, ὥδε’ ἐπεσθ’ . . .
χωρεῖτε, καὶ μὴ ψαύετ’, ἀλλ’ ἔατε με
αὐτόν τὸν ἱερόν τύμβον ἐξευρεῖν, ἵνα
μοιρ’ ἀνδρὶ τῷδε τῷ σκρύβῃναι χθονί.
τῇδ’, ὥδε, τῇδε βάτε· τῇδε γὰρ μ’ άλλη
Ερμής ὁ πομπὸς ἢ τε νεφέρα θεός.

(‘But let us now go to the place, and hesitate no more. My children, follow this way . . . Come, and do not touch me, but rather allow me to seek out myself the sacred tomb where it is this man’s portion to be hidden in this earth. This way, thus, come this way; for this way guiding Hermes leads me, and the goddess of the Underworld.’)

Oidipous (who understands fully that he is about to meet whatever mystical consummation his death may be taken to involve) rises from his seat on the αὐτόπετρον βῆμα and moves away from his hard-won and hard-preserved fixity, his ἔδρα, before the grove for the first and only time since he arrived there in in the opening moments of the drama; and then only to seek out the even more precise spot which is to give him the release of the grave. Here again we surely have a ‘significant action’, symbolic of Oidipous’ moving from mere human attachment to the soil of Attica, before the grove of Kolonos, to something even more chthonic and mysterious, incorporation into that soil, somewhere within the deeper confines of the holy places of Kolonos. Fittingly, and again mirroring closely his earliest concerns as he came upon this locality of such transcendent importance to him, his parting
blessing is — in addition, of course, to his supreme ally and friend Theseus — upon the land of Attica itself, and upon its people (1552ff):

\[ \text{ἄλλα, φίλτατε ξένων,} \]
\[ \text{αὐτός τε χώρα θ' ἥδε πρόσπολοι τε σοι} \]
\[ \text{εὐδαιμονες γένοισθε . . .} \]

(‘But, dearest of friends, blessed be you yourself, and this land, and your people. . .’) And so Oidipous passes from our sight, followed by all except the chorus, who sing their fourth Stasimon, a quiet prayer that Oidipous may be kindly received by the powers of the Lower World.

This is the only lyric in the play not to make significant use of ideas of locality (unless we are to view the comparatively extensive description of Hades which it includes as a broadly parallel element: the ‘Stygian house’ with its ‘gates of many guests’ and the ‘caverns’ of Kerberos, past which Oidipous is to be granted clear passage to the ‘plain of the dead’, a striking phrase which recurs several times in the play (νεκρόν πλάκα, 1564 and 1577; ἀσκοποι . . . πλάκες, 1681). The lyric does, however, fully maintain the preoccupation with the chthonic powers which has pervaded the drama since Oidipous’ first encounter with the presiding deities who inhabit the grove of Kolonos. Oidipous himself in his last words had invoked Hermes Psychopompous and Persephone (1548); now the chorus add Aidoneus, the Erinyes themselves (ὡ χθόνιαι θεαι, 1568), Kerberos, ‘the son of Ge and Tartaros’ (i.e. Thanatos, 1574), and the unspecified δαίμων δίκαιος (1567) who will ‘raise him to honour in requital for the many sorrows that came to him without cause’.

Oidipous may no longer be before the audience’s eyes; but the speech of the messenger who retails his final doings is so minutely concerned with the immediate area of Kolonos, and describes Oidipous’ subsequent movements so precisely that we can certainly follow him in our mind’s eye right up to the moments just before his miraculous passing. The messenger charts his progress ‘from here’ (ἐνθένδε, 1587) to the καταρράκτης οδός the ‘sheer threshold’ (surely to be identified with the χαλκόπους οδός of 57, the ‘brazen-footed threshold’, apparently a cleft in the vicinity of the grove which, like the χάλκεος ούδός of Epic phraseology, was thought to give access to the Underworld, and thus afford chthonic protection to the whole country; ἔρεισμ’ ‘Αθηνών, 58. The identification of the two expressions seems assured by the expansion of 1591, χαλκοῖς βάθροις γηθεν ἐρ-\[ ριζωμένον, ‘rooted to earth by brazen steps’).’

21. Text partly doubtful; but Linforth’s efforts (art. cit., Appendix, pp.187ff) to undermine this general sense seem misguided.

22. Pace Jebb, pp.xxxiiifff, who would distinguish the two ὁδοί, largely basing this case on an inference from an obscure scholiastic quotation from the athidographer Iistros of Cyrene.
Peirithoös' firm pact is commemorated; standing midway between it and the Thorikian stone, the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb, he sat down, and shed his sordid clothing, and ordered water to be fetched to wash him from ‘the hill in view, that of Demeter Euchloös’, probably the knoll about a quarter of a mile north of Kolonos Hippios. This passage (1590–97), although so rich in precision of detail, is nevertheless obscure in its references, as we know virtually nothing of these evidently well-known landmarks of the Kolonos-region; the scholia are of little help, and a dubious text does not improve matters. Yet there can be little doubt that these features were very real and familiar to the vast majority of the audience, sitting, indeed, little more than two miles from them in the Theatre of Dionysos; and so carefully and exactly does Sophokles pinpoint this location that it would have been virtually tantamount to a ‘map-reference’ for anyone who wanted to go and sit in this spot for himself. One aspect of the force of this astonishing precision is well assessed in Jebb's characteristically perceptive note (1595f): ‘The power and the beauty of this passage are in no way lessened for us because we know nothing of the basin or the stone, the tree or the tomb. Rather it might be said that the very fact of our ignorance illustrates the spirit in which these details are introduced. Their significance is essentially local. . . They show us how the blind man, who had never been at Colonus before, placed himself at precisely the due point in the midst of its complex sanctities. The god made him as one who had the most intimate and minute knowledge of the ground.’

There is a second important point to be considered here, however. We should also note that this carefully-described spot where Oidipous sits is his last location in mortal life. When the gods' summons indicates that the time has come (1627f), all except Theseus are sent from the place (τόπων ἐκ τῶνδε, 1641), whereupon Oidipous must be taken to meet his fate at last, in whatever marvellous fashion it may be that causes Theseus to perform the ritual gesture of apskopos which wise mortals perform in the face of divine epiphanies (1650ff). Sophokles, then, has offered us an amazingly detailed description of exactly where Oidipous went to meet his destiny; and it is reasonable to assume that it would have been even more vivid and precise to the original audience, with their local knowledge of the Kolonos-area as it was. He wisely refrains from similar precision about the manner or the goal of Oidipous' departure, leaving us to accept the general suggestiveness of Theseus' proskynesis to Earth and Olympos (1654f) and of the messenger's own guess (1661f): ‘But there was either some escort from the gods, or the floor of the lower world was sundered for him with goodwill, and without

23. I accept Jebb's view that the scholion on 1593 implies that the reference is to some sort of permanent memorial connected with the two comrades' κατάβασις εἰς Αἰδοῦ, clearly apropos at this point.
pain’ (the word here translated ‘floor’ is βάθρον, the same word that was earlier used to describe Oidipous’ first fateful point of contact with the primal bedrock of the land of Attica (101), as he assumed his ‘solemn seat unhewn by the adze’ in the precinct of the Eumenides.) It is at this point that Sophokles reaps the full reward for all the careful efforts made earlier in the drama to suggest the detailed landscape of the grove and the surrounding area of Kolonos to the audience’s mental vision; all of this is now grafted onto the unaltering stage-scene into or behind which Oidipous has so recently vanished24, and which now remains as a symbol of the whole imagined landscape of Kolonos and Attica that the poet has elaborated so carefully throughout the drama, and which has now taken Oidipous to itself. In stage terms, the man and the place have become one: χώρος μὲν ἵρος πᾶς ὡ δ’ ἐστ’ (54).

The final sequence acts in many ways as a coda to all that has passed. The way in which Oidipous has now blessedly escaped the hardships of his previous life is emphasised by the contrast which Antigone expresses at 1685ff: now it is she and Ismene who must undergo what Oidipous is free from; it is they who now lack a fixed abode and status, and must struggle to ‘find a bitter livelihood, wandering to some distant land or on the waves of the sea’. They too must now somehow grapple with the problems of Thebes, Kreon and Polyneikes (1769ff). The significant chthonic vocabulary again appears frequently in these last exchanges: Oidipous is invoked (1700ff) as ὁ τόν ἀεὶ κατὰ γάς σκότον εἰμένος (reminiscent of the first descriptions of the saving Eumenides as Γης τε καὶ Σκότου κόραι (40), and γυνυκεῖαι παιδίσκες ἀρχαῖος Σκότου (106). It is twice repeated (1705 & 1712) that Oidipous’ passing has been γάς ἐπί ξένας. Theseus accedes to the daughters’ wishes to go to Thebes out of respect for Ἰτό κατὰ γῆς (1775). Antigone wishes to view the χθόνιον ἔστιαν (1726) of Oidipous’ transfiguration, but is restrained by the explicit prohibition that anyone should approach τούσδε τόπους (1761). Theseus is confident that he will thus hold the χώραν... αἰὲν ἄλυπον (1765); and, above all, mourning is out of place where χάρις ἐκ χθονία (1752) exists.

It is perhaps exactly this, χθονία χάρις, with which the play as a whole is most deeply concerned, and which may serve as a useful concept around which to draw together some conclusions from this study. The Oidipous at Kolonos is concerned with Oidipous’ progress towards an immortal transfiguration which he has earned through strength of spirit and triumph over almost insupportable hardships and obstructions; and the main issues

24. It is perhaps fruitless to speculate on how this may originally have been enacted (I would incline to the view that Oidipous’ departure would most probably be via one of the parodoi); in any event, it seems clear that the final transfiguration is suggested as still very much in the vicinity of Kolonos and the grove; see Jebb, pp.xxxiiiif.
that the play treats are the comparative honesty, piety, and humanity of those who would genuinely accept him and those who would only cynically manipulate him. Given the fate foretold for Oidipous by Apollo himself, what is involved here may be very accurately categorised as χθόνια χάρις, what is given and received between Oidipous and Athens, during his last moments in the course of the drama, and thereafter eternally, when he himself has joined the χθόνιοι, the protecting spirits which throng so thick in Attic soil. Thebes, on the other hand, utterly fails to gain the precious inheritance of Oidipous' chthonic blessing (indeed, Oidipous seems to predict exactly the inverse of this for Thebes, the visitation on his former country of his ἀλάστωρ (787f), his spirit's eternal, scourging destructiveness). Athens wins his blessings, while Thebes fails, because Athens deals with Oidipous justly and without deviousness (even the initial repugnance of the chorus at 226ff is honest, and honestly overcome by Oidipous' representations and their own sense of humanity and justice; Theseus, of course, does not even require any admonition before intuitively going to the heart of the matter (565ff): 'I would never turn aside from helping to save any stranger, such as you are now; for well I know that I am a man, and that I have no greater share of tomorrow than you'). Thebes' behaviour towards Oidipous, whether in the person of Kreon or Polyneikes, is just the reverse of this; one is duplicitous, unscrupulous, and outrageously violent, while the other is self-seeking, opportunistic, and many years too late in recognising his obligations. Attica thereby earns what Oidipous has to give her, and he is received by land and people, becoming εἰμπολάς in life and a presiding spirit of benignity in death; whereas Thebes and his sons inherit only his ἀλάστωρ and his ἀραί. Attica surpasses Thebes in humanity, just dealing, and respect for the gods. These are deeper, intuitive qualities, proceeding from the heart rather than the head, not a simple matter of political decision, far less expediency — the levels on which Kreon and Polyneikes operate. If such timeless qualities may be said to draw their origin and strength from anything, Sophokles seems to suggest that they are the subtle product of the interrelationship of place and population — the land, its deities, and its people: (62f)

τοιαύτα σοι ταύτ', ἦστίν, ὡ ἔγειν', οὗ λόγοις
tιμώμεν', ἄλλα τῇ ξυνουσίᾳ πλέον

It is these who ultimately offer χάρις to Oidipous in accepting him and allowing him to achieve the consummation of his destiny; and he renders back eternal chthonic χάρις to land and inhabitants after his transfiguration. The emphasis, which pervades the whole drama, on the grove of Kolonos and the land of Attica is thus seen as thematically central, since these constitute the goal as well as simply the scene of Oidipous' strivings,
and it is with these that he is finally united, in chthonic fashion, thus making permanent and immanent the blessings to be won by the drama's central values. Man and place become one in greatness, to the eternal profit and glory of both. In consequence, the inhabitants of the place will for ever after be able to reflect (as did the chorus in the first stasimon) on their land's true, abiding glories, and find eternal validity in the sentiment that thereafter immediately rose to the chorus's lips (726f):

\[\text{καὶ γὰρ εἰ γέρων ἔγῳ,}
\text{τὸ τῆςδὲ χώρας οὐ γεγήρακε σθένος.}
\]

('Even if I am old, this land's strength has not grown old'.)