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MANUELA GIORDANO*

Athenian Power: *Seven Against Thebes* and the Democracy-in-Arms

Abstract

The paper highlights the martial dimension of power in democratic Athens, and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* is interpreted as a significant case of this. The drama, a 'civic tragedy' in all respects, can be fully understood, it is argued, when set in the historical context of 467 BCE. Building on previous analyses, the paper deals with Aeschylean double construction of a masculine identity, represented in Eteocles and opposed to the chorus, on the one hand, and a warlike hoplitic warrior embodied in the Cadmean defenders and opposed to the Argive enemies on the other. It is also suggested that tragedy, an 'invention d'Athènes' nonetheless, plays a pivotal role in the construction of Athenian ideology.

KEYWORDS: Aeschylus; tragedy; *Seven against Thebes*; democratic ideology; Aristophanes; *Frogs*; hoplitic warfare

In assessing, in 1997, the main critical approaches to Greek tragedy, Simon Goldhill affirmed: "There is no natural, self-evident or obvious way of reading – but always only approaches, each with its history, its set of presuppositions and its own ideological commitments. . . . The question is how explicit, how sophisticated and how self-aware the discussion of that position is to be" (Goldhill 1997: 331). More than twenty years later, I still think it very important for us as scholars of tragedy to be both clear and aware about where we start from in approaching Greek tragedy in general, and/or one play in particular.¹

My approach to tragedy builds upon a number of studies that have helped to understand 'tragedy-in-context', that is, tragedy in its historical embeddedness. Fifth-century Athens was an interconnected society, where political, religious, martial, artistic and literary phenomena did not work

¹ See on this point Giordano 2005. See also the contributions published in Nicholson (2018).

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as separate provinces, as an etic perspective would assume, but instead formed a closely knit framework in which tragedy was considered not only an artistic textual product, but also a socio-political institution – part of a civic religious discourse – and a ritual performance.² This approach to tragedy is historical and anthropological at the same time: on the one hand it locates a tragic text in the specific time of its production, the fifth century BCE, and predicates that the meanings conveyed by the text can be best understood when related to the networks of meanings of its original context, and on the other it is anthropological because it involves reconstructing a perspective as close as possible to that of the ancient Athenians, something that anthropologists would call an ‘emic’ perspective.³

I have proposed a ‘simultaneous’ model made up of a hierarchy of contexts, which may enable us to take into account as many of the above-mentioned phenomena as possible. We may think of the public space, at once concrete and symbolic, acting as the higher context; the larger unit in which religious, political, and artistic elements were likewise embedded, and in relation to which their different contexts took on their meaning. As such, the public space enables us to think of these diverse contexts in their dynamic and meaningful interplay, rather than as discrete provinces (Giordano 2014: 151-5). By reasoning in terms of hierarchies of contexts we may therefore appreciate that tragedy in itself is a context placed within larger contexts, the festival of the Great Dionysia in the first place, as occasion for a performance integral to democracy in action (Goldhill 1987; Goldhill 2000) – a context within which ‘warfare’, ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ are equally relevant insofar as they informed the civic debate, that is the discourse(s) of the *polis*. As a shorthand term for what I have expressed so far, I will speak of ‘civic tragedy’, and in the present essay, building upon some former contributions (Giordano 2006a; Giordano 2006b; Giordano 2008), I propose a reading of the *Seven against Thebes* as an important example of this.⁴ We may be assured that a civic interpretation of our play does not rest on a solely etic perspective, since this is the role that a fifth-century witness bestows on the *Seven*. In a difficult wartime moment, as 405

² It goes without saying that in several contributions the social and political context of tragedy is hinted at, but for an approach consistently informed by the historical and socio-political dimensions of tragedy, Vernant and Vidal Naquet 1981, and most essays in Easterling 1997 are as yet the standard references. For a recent assessment, see Giordano 2014.

³ Ugolini 2000 is a particular noteworthy attempt at reading Sophoclean tragedy within the historical context of its time. For the relationship between history and tragedy see Meier 1993; Goff 1995; Beltrametti 2011; Carter 2011.

⁴ Saïd (2005: 222) notes, cursorily, that *Seven* is a “political play” and Eteocles is a leader “defined only by relationship to the *polis*”.

BCE was for Athens, Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs* asserts that salvation may only come to Athens from a tragic poet; the god Dionysus in person goes down to the Underworld to pick the poet most fit for the task, having to choose between Aeschylus and Euripides. While the comedy is in itself a clear indication of the connection of tragedy with political and civic discourse, it provides us with specific indications of the way a tragic poet helps to boost civic morale. At 1019-27, the two tragic poets confront each other to prove themselves to be the most apt for the task at hand, and Aeschylus is encouraged to demonstrate the superiority of his tragedies over those of Euripides:

- EΥ. καὶ τί σὺ δράσας οὕτως αὐτοὺς γενναίους ἐξεδίδαξας;
 ΔΙ. Αἰσχύλε, λέξον, μὴδ' ἀθάρδως σεμνυνόμενος χαλέπαινε. 1020
 ΑΙ. δράμα ποιήσας Ἄρεως μεστόν.
 ΔΙ. ποῖον;
 ΑΙ. τοὺς Ἔπτ' ἐπὶ Θήβας.
 ὃ θεασάμενος πᾶς ἄν τις ἀνὴρ ἠράσθη δάιος εἶναι.
 ΔΙ. τουτί μὲν σοι κακὸν εἴργασται· Θηβαίους γὰρ πεπόηκας
 ἀνδρειότερους ἐς τὸν πόλεμον, καὶ τούτου γ' οὐνεκα τύπτου.
 ΑΙ. ἀλλ' ὑμῖν αὐτ' ἐξῆν ἄσκεῖν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπὶ τούτ' ἐτράπεσθε. 1025
 εἶτα διδάξας Πέρσας μετὰ τούτ' ἐπιθυμεῖν ἐξεδίδαξα
 νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους, κοσμήσας ἔργον ἄριστον.

[EURIPIDES And just how did you train them to be so noble? / DIONYSUS Speak up, Aeschylus and don't be a willfully prideful and difficult. / AESCHYLUS By composing a play chock-full of Ares. / DIONYSUS Name-ly? / AESCHYLUS My *Seven against Thebes* / every single man who watched it was hot to be warlike. / DIONYSUS Well, that was an evil accomplishment, because you've made the Thebans / more valiant in battle, and you deserve a beating for it. / AESCHYLUS No, you could all have had the same training, but you didn't go in that direction. / Thereafter I produced my *Persians*, which taught them to yearn always / to defeat the enemy, and thus I adorned an excellent achievement. (Trans. Henderson 2002)]

Aeschylus picks two tragedies, *Seven* and *Persians*, to show how he did his best to teach the Athenians. If line 1021 is, as is most likely, a quote from Gorgias – which attests to the tragedy's long-lasting reputation throughout the fifth century⁵ – the reference to the *Seven* must have been immediately understood by the audience, who would have had numerous occasions to become familiar with the tragedy, wholly or in part, including the repeat

⁵ 82 B 24 D.-K. Donadi (1977-1978) sheds doubt on whether verse 1021 is a quote of Gorgias. For our purpose, the essential point is that the public was fully able to understand Aristophanes' allusion to the martial content of the tragedy, even if the verse was not taken from Gorgias.

performances after the year 467 that made it well-known to public opinion as an inspiring model of martial *ethos*.⁶

Two facts stand out: of all his tragedies, Aristophanes' Aeschylus chooses *Seven* and *Persians* to represent the best and most significant of his productions; what makes these plays particularly relevant in terms of civic concern is that both taught martial virtues to the Athenians: they learned courage from the former, and desire to win in battle from the latter. In other words, *Seven* played its role as civic tragedy in providing martial paradigms, and it is in this respect that it proved to Aristophanes' audience that Athens needed Aeschylus again to save the city in a time of war.

While it may come to us as a surprise that in the Athenian reception, the martial aspect of the play was placed at centre stage, this is much in keeping with fifth-century public ethos. As has been recently pointed out, the first, constant, and vital concern of the young democracy of Athens was war; warfare and martial identity were the very foundation of the discourse on power of Athenian democracy (see for example Pritchard 2010). If in Greece in general ". . . war shaped Greek identities no less than Greek political, social, and economic life" (van Wees 2000: 81), this was even more true for a fifth-century Athenian citizen. We would do well to note that modern historical studies have elaborated an image of Athens as a model of democracy in political-institutional terms, with an emphasis on its structure of government. For fifth-century Athenians, however, their city was first and foremost a military power, an ἀρχή, a 'democracy in arms', and only secondly a 'democracy of institutions'. As Mossé notes (Mossé 1968: 221) the combined individual identity as both citizen and soldier mirrors the collective identification of military supremacy with political supremacy. Furthermore, at the time *Seven* was performed, Athenian military exploits, visual and tragic narratives formed the discrete parts of a single process of identity construction (Giordano, forthcoming).

While the testimony of Aristophanes shows the *Seven* to be an eminently civic tragedy as it deals with war as the most important issue of democratic agenda, the martial aspect of the *Seven* has received little attention, probably because, unlike *Persians*, the tragedy does not describe battles or military actions – with the exception of the messenger's laconic announcement of the mutual killing of the brothers (l. 805). In what follows, therefore, I will provide an overview of *Seven*, pointing out some civic themes

⁶ On repeat performances see Giordano 2014: 170-1; Lamari 2015. Note that the verb διδάσκω and its composites are repeated from verse 1019 to 1035 five times, each of which in relation to the function of the poet. On the interpretation of ll. 1019-1025 see Sonnino 1999: 69-72, who interprets the reference to *Seven* as a criticism of Pericles' military strategy, with good use of the historical context.

crucial for a *polis* in a time of war, from leadership to cult.⁷

Prologue (1-39): Eteocles' Speech

In the prologue, Eteocles acts as a figure wholly engrossed in civic concerns, the leader who feels his responsibility for the destiny of the community;⁸ at ll. 1-20, he enumerates the priorities for an army made of citizen-soldiers:

Κάδμου πολίται, χρῆ λέγειν τὰ καίρια
 ὅστις φυλάσσει πρᾶγος ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως
 οἴακα νωμῶν, βλέφαρα μὴ κοιμῶν ὕπνῳ.
 . . .
 ὑμᾶς δὲ χρῆ νῦν, καὶ τὸν ἐλλείποντ' ἔτι 10
 ἥβης ἀκμαίας καὶ τὸν ἔξηβον χρόνῳ,
 βλαστημὸν ἀλδαίνοντα σώματος πολύν,
 ὦραν τ' ἔχονθ' ἕκαστον ὥστε συμπρεπές,
 πόλει τ' ἀρήγειν καὶ θεῶν ἐγχωρίων
 βωμοῖσι, τιμὰς μὴ ἔξαιφθῆναί ποτε· 15
 τέκνοις τε, Γῆ τε μητρὶ, φιλτάτῃ τροφῶ·
 ἢ γὰρ νέους ἔρποντας εὐμενεῖ πέδῳ,
 ἅπαντα πανδοκοῦσα παιδείας ὄτλον,
 ἐθρέψατ' οἰκητῆρας ἀσιδηφόρους
 πιστοὺς ὅπως γένοισθε πρὸς χρέος τόδε. 20

[Men of Cadmus's city, he who guards from the stern the concerns of the State / and guides its helm with eyes untouched by sleep / must speak to the point. / But now you – both he who is still short of/ his youthful prime, and he who, though past his prime, / still strengthens the abundant growth of his body, / and every man still in his prime, as is fitting / – you must aid the State and the altars of your homeland's gods/ so that their honors may never be obliterated. / You must aid, too, your children, and Mother Earth, your beloved nurse. / For welcoming all the distress of your childhood, when you were young and crept upon her kind soil, / she raised you to inhabit her and bear the shield, / and to prove yourselves faithful in this time of need. (Aeschylus 1938)]

⁷ See Giordano 2006a and Giordano 2006b; on *Seven* and war see also Lamari 2007: 6-9; Torrance 2017. Torrance 2017a sees in the atmosphere of the play an implicit reference to the Persian sack of Athens. See on this issue already Saïd 2005: 217, who remarked “the chorus envisages the destruction of the city in vivid details that owe much to the sack and burning of the Acropolis by Xerxes' troops”. For martial and civic aspects, Echeverria 2017 and Edmunds 2017. I follow the edition of Sommerstein, Aeschylus 2009, with minor changes.

⁸ On Eteocles see now Edmunds 2017.

In this first speech we should note three elements pointing to civic concerns: 1) Eteocles' identification with the *polis'* interests, introducing the traditional imagery of the ship as symbol of the state, of which he proclaims himself steersman and leader; 2) the centrality of appropriate utterances for the destiny of the city (Thalman 1978; Giordano 2006b: 57); 3) the mention of Γῆ μήτηρ, 'Mother Earth', at 16.

If the passage could be adapted to diverse war contexts, in Athens the reference to the native soil is most particular: Γῆ, the 'Earth', is every Athenian's true mother, who generated, nurtured, raised and supported the city's inhabitants until, like adult plants, they reached their maturity as the οἰκητῆρας ἀσπιδηφόρους, "shield-bearing dwellers" of 19, and to whom, after death, they will return.⁹ This is not the place to address the larger significance of the theme of autochthony in Athens, but it is interesting to note that roughly in the same period of our tragedy, the celebration of the earth as the mother of the Athenians might have been elaborated in the epitaphios logos, the funeral oration with which the Athenians celebrated their dead and glorified Athens, the Mother-city. Here too Aeschylus makes Eteocles the spokesman of a two-fold Athenian point of view, that of autochthony on one hand, and on the other, that of the Athenian ideology, as Loraux points out in relation to funeral orations, in which the individual fights primarily for the sake of the city.¹⁰

***Parodos* (78-180): Presentation of Women's Perspective: Fear and λιταί**

The *parodos* shows the women intervening in the public space with supplications, and imploring the gods to save the city. Here, as well as in the first *stasimon*, the chorus describes the lot of a besieged and conquered city, particularly referring to the fate of women as expressed in ll. 87-95 – the collateral damage, in Meineck's terms¹¹ – where the issue of supplication comes to the fore most vehemently:

ἰὼ θεοὶ θεαί τ' ὀρόμενον κακὸν
 βοᾷ τειχέων ὑπερ ἀλεύσατε.
 ὁ λεύκασπις ὄρνυται λαὸς εὐ-
 τρεπῆς ἐπὶ πόλιν διώκων πόδα.
 τίς ἄρα ῥύσεται, τίς ἄρ' ἐπαρκέσει

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⁹ For Γῆ as *kourotrophos* in Athens see Pirenne-Delforge 2004, Parker 2005, 426-36.

¹⁰ On funeral oration see Pritchett 1971: 106-204, 249-51; Clairmont 1983; Loraux 1993. On autochthony see, among others, Calame 2011. On autochthony and motherhood see Loraux 1990; Leduc 2015.

¹¹ Meineck 2017.

θεῶν ἢ θεᾶν;
 πότερα δῆτ' ἐγὼ πάτρια ποτιπέσω
 βρέτη δαιμόνων;

95

[Ah, ah, you gods and goddesses, raise your war cry over our walls to drive away the onrushing evil! / The army of the white shield, ready for battle, rushes / at full speed against the city. / Who then will rescue us, which of the gods or goddesses will help? / Or shall I fall in supplication at the feet of / our ancestral gods' statues?]

That the behaviour of the chorus, however, would have triggered a reaction of empathy in the audience, as Meineck suggests, may be the projection of a modern appraisal: the confrontation of the chorus with Eteocles may reveal a different perspective (2017: 66-8).

First Episode: a Confrontation of Religious Attitudes

In this first episode, Eteocles contests the chorus of women, and the resulting opposition between the two points of view serves not only to construct two gender-related polarized views, but also as a way of propounding a model of civic behaviour in religious terms.¹² The scene hinges primarily on a cultic question, i.e. the best way to address the gods in a moment of danger; the women display an attitude which contrasts with Eteocles' priority of strengthening morale, as the exchange at ll. 211-18, 230-3 shows most pointedly:

- XO. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ δαιμόνων πρόδρομος ἦλθον ἀρ-
 χαῖα βρέτη, θεοῖσι πίσυνοσ, νιφάδοσ
 ὅτ' ὀλοᾶσ νειφομένασ βρόμοσ ἐν πύλαισ:
 δῆ τότ' ἦρθην φόβῳ πρὸσ μακάρων λιτάσ, πόλεωσ
 ἴν' ὑπερέχοιεν ἀλκάν. 215
- ET. πύργων στέγειν εὔχεσθε πολέμιον δόρυ.
 οὐκοῦν τάδ' ἔσται πρὸσ θεῶν: ἀλλ' οὖν θεοῦσ
 τοῦσ τῆσ ἀλούσῆσ πόλεοσ ἐκλείπειν λόγοσ.
 . . .
- ET. ἀνδρῶν τάδ' ἐστί, σφάγια καὶ χρηστήρια 230
 θεοῖσιν ἔρδειν πολεμίων πειρωμένουσ :
 σὸν δ' αὖ τὸ σιγᾶν καὶ μένειν εἰσω δόμων.

[CHORUS But trusting in the gods I came / in haste to their ancient statues, when the deadly blizzard / of falling stones thundered against the gates. / Just then I set out in fear to pray to the Blessed Ones /that they spread their protection over the city. / ETEOCLES Pray that the rampart withstand the en-

¹² See Giordano 2006a for further details.

emy spear. / Yes, the outcome is in the gods' hands – but then, / it is said that the gods of a captured city abandon it. . . . / It is the man's duty to offer victims and sacrifices/ to the gods when they test their enemy; / your duty is to be silent and to remain inside the house.]

The question of λέγειν τὰ καίρια of line 1 takes on a precise meaning. Aeschylus presents a dialectic confrontation between two opposing approaches:

1) Hoplitic civic religiosity embodied in Eteocles and manifested in ritual acts of sacrifice and prayer, described in terms of reciprocity.

2) The religiosity of the Chorus, based upon a supplicatory attitude, is tendentiously described by Eteocles as negative and socially disruptive. The women's position is represented in acts of supplication and supplicatory prayers (λιταί).¹³

The chorus addresses the gods with gestures of supplication and λιταί, and shouts liturgical implorations and laments, in a destabilizing reaction of terror in response to the sight and sound of the enemy army. Eteocles scolds the women violently for such behaviour, demoralizing for the city and the army, and in contrast offers a decalogue of ritual gestures and words that aim to strengthen morale and instill courage when the *polis* is at war: prayer (εὐχή), sacrifice and divination (Giordano 2006a). On the trail of this reading, Lamari (2007) has drawn a parallel between the “male-oriented viewpoint” of Aeschylus with the female-oriented perspective of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.¹⁴

First *Stasimon*: a Re-Modulation of Feminine Attitude

At 262-4, the women of the chorus explicitly announce their change of attitude and speak according to the instructions they have received from Eteocles:

ET. σίγησον, ὦ τάλαινα, μὴ φίλους φόβει.
 XO. σιγῶ: σὺν ἄλλοις πείσομαι τὸ μῶρσιμον.
 ET. τοῦτ' ἀντ' ἐκείνων τοῦπος αἰροῦμαι σέθεν.

¹³ As Zeitlin 1990: 104 has argued, in Aeschylean drama, the playwright uses the opposition between male and female to encompass *polis*-related issues larger than politics of gender, and to present “the differing patterns of power relations between the sexes and invoke the qualities symbolically associated with each”. On women and tragedy see also Foley 2001.

¹⁴ In this opposition, the scholar has seen an implicit reference to Solon's political measures on women's lamentation in Aeschylean drama (Lamari 2007: 17); on this issue, see now Palmisciano 2017: 105-11 and *passim*.

[ETEOCLES / Be silent, wretched woman; do not terrify your own men. /
 CHORUS I am silent. I will suffer what is destined together with the others. /
 ETEOCLES I welcome this sentiment of yours over what you said before.]

Eteocles has thus succeeded, at least for the moment, in reducing the chorus to silence, a passage which aptly represents the marginalization of women's voices in fifth-century Athens, and the effort of the male citizen, imbued with militaristic ideology, to control their emotional expression.

Second Episode: The Scene of the Shields

I take this part of the tragedy, the scene of the shields, to be its core, where the tragedy's martial character is to be seen in providing paradigms for the new Athenian agenda. In this scene, in fact, Aeschylus describes the appearance and behaviour of the warriors in antithetical terms on two fronts: in the progressive opposition between the Argive warrior (the messenger) and his Theban adversary (Eteocles), the poet contrasts two models of warfare, one negative and one positive. While the Argive attackers represent the anti-hoplite characterized as barbaric, wild and out of proportion, the Cadmean warriors represent a model for the hoplite-citizen.¹⁵ So for example Capaneus is described as a savage warrior, spurning men and gods alike in 423-9:

ΑΙΤ. Καπανεύς δ' ἐπ' Ἠλέκτραισιν εἴληχεν πύλαις,
 γίγας ὄδ' ἄλλος τοῦ πάρος λελεγμένου
 μείζων, ὁ κόμπος δ' οὐ κατ' ἄνθρωπον φρονεῖ, 425
 πύργους δ' ἀπειλεῖ δειν', ἃ μὴ κραίνοι τύχη·
 θεοῦ τε γὰρ θέλοντος ἐκπέρσειν πόλιν
 καὶ μὴ θέλοντός φησιν, οὐδὲ τὴν Διὸς
 ἔριν πέδοι σκῆψασαν ἐμποδῶν σχεθεῖν.

[SCOUT Capaneus is stationed at the Electran gates, / another giant of a man, greater than the one described before. / But his boast is too proud for a mere human, / and he makes terrifying threats against our battlements – which, I hope, chance will not fulfil! / For he says he will utterly destroy the city with god's will or without it, / and that not even conflict with Zeus, / though it should fall before him in the plain, will stand in his way.]

¹⁵ Detienne (1968: 126) highlighted the *hybris* of the Argive side and the *sophrosyne* of the Theban side: “rejétant l'insolence, les paroles de défi, maîtrisant son ardeur, le défenseur de Thèbes met sa force au service de la cité, de son chef, de ses dieux. Si, dans les *Sept contre Thèbes*, Eschyle rejette toute une série de conduites guerrières . . . , c'est que, dans la cité classique, le guerrier comme type d'homme a disparu: il a cédé la place au citoyen-soldat”.

In sharp opposition to this type of warrior stand Cadmean defenders, exemplified, among the others, by the figure of Actor, whom Eteocles describes in 554-7:

ἀνήρ ἄκομπος, χεῖρ δ' ὄρᾳ τὸ δράσιμον,
 Ἄκτωρ ἀδελφὸς τοῦ πάρος λελεγμένου·
 ὃς οὐκ ἔασει γλῶσσαν ἐργμάτων ἄτερ
 ἔσω πυλῶν βέουσαν ἀλδαίνειν κακά.

555

[A man who does not boast, but who knows the thing to do / Actor, brother of him I named before. / He will not allow words that lack deeds / to overrun his gate and increase fear.]

The scene of the shields thus continues the construction of the civic discourse begun in the first part of the drama, relating to the religion of the *polis* at war, and extends it to the ideal hoplite warrior by use of another polarization.

The hoplite vs. anti-hoplite opposition in fact forms the first level of Aeschylus' manoeuvre, the most evident and most direct. The second level has a wider scope and meaning, to which I can only briefly refer, and consists in reinterpreting the Homeric model of the warrior. I have already attempted to demonstrate that Aeschylus not only represents the Argive heroes as an example of barbarism, but that he does so by merging this with elements of the Homeric warrior, contrasting it with the new model of Athenian hoplitem (Giordano 2006a). In this sense the Homeric reading Aeschylus offers in *Seven* is fundamental for understanding not only this tragedy but also the function of tragedy as a genre in relation to the epic in fifth-century Athenian discourse, whereby civic tragedy becomes a form of social critique of the epic model. Central to this process of reuse is the iteration of the term κόμπος and its cognates, which appear nine times in the scene of the shields. Κόμπος means both noise and boasting, and therefore plays a primary role in transforming the acoustic display of the Argive heroes into useless and ineffective boasting.¹⁶ Whereas the Argive warriors are marked by acoustic and visual ostentation, the Cadmean champions emit neither sounds nor noise. Rather, they are characterized by their silence and restraint. In describing these warriors, the exalted 'virtues of display' of the individual are transformed into internal virtues such as steadfastness, moderation, and courage, for the sake of cohesion and exaltation of the group.

If in Athens the hoplite represented territorial community and, as Herman recently observed, "the hoplites were described as prototypes of the

¹⁶ Cf. 404, 425, 436, 464, 473, 480, 500, 538, 554 and 794 where the vanity of κόμπος is emphasized.

exemplary type of Athenian manhood, fit in body and disciplined in spirit” (Herman 2006: 250),¹⁷ in *Seven*, the Cadmean warriors bring out the identity and the interest of the entire *polis*, in contrast to the Homeric Argives, as shown in the examples quoted above.

This new image of the warrior is eminently Athenian: in Athens, citizens and soldiers are one and the same, and Athenian discourse makes a point of joining autochthony and warfare, where mother earth nurtures her children as “shield-bearing inhabitants”, οἰκητήρας ἀσπιδηφόρους of 19. It is in this context that the tragedy brings to the fore the exemplary image of the hoplite warrior, personified by the Theban defenders, set against a “Homeric-aristocratic” warrior identified in the Argive attackers. The ethic of the hoplite phalanx requires self-control in battle, as hoplite strategy works in so far as the entire phalanx moves together in tight ranks, and every soldier respects the position (τάξις) where he is stationed and moves together with the rest; consequently, hoplitic warfare rejects those behaviours that imply loss of control, which, on the contrary, characterizes Homeric martial behaviour. The *Seven* provides a beautiful example of hoplitic behaviour in the portrait of Megareus, at 473-80:

ET. Καὶ δὴ πέπεμπται κόμπον ἐν χεροῖν ἔχων
 Μεγαρεύς, Κρέοντος σπέρμα τοῦ σπαρτῶν γένους,
 ὃς οὔτι μάργων ἵππικῶν φρυαγμάτων 475
 βρόμιον φοβηθεὶς ἐκ πυλῶν χωρήσεται,
 ἀλλ’ ἢ θανῶν τροφεία πληρώσει χθονί,
 ἢ καὶ δὺ’ ἀνδρῶν καὶ πόλισμ’ ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος
 ἑλῶν λαφύροις δῶμα κοσμήσει πατρός.
 κόμπαζ’ ἐπ’ ἄλλῳ, μηδὲ μοι φθόνει λέγων. 480

[ETEOCLES Indeed, he has already been sent, his only boast in his hands, / Megareus, Creon’s seed, of the race of the sown- men. / He will not withdraw from the gate in fear of the thunder of the horses’ furious snorting;/ but either he will die and pay the earth the full price of his nurture, / or will capture two men and the city on the shield, / and then adorn his father’s house with the spoils].

In conclusion, while the new military engagement following the foundation of the Delian League (477 BCE) was the primary concern of the Athenian *polis*, *Seven against Thebes* portrays a *polis* at war, and delineates inspiring models of behaviour in the spheres of both warfare and religion. Such delineation could be seen to sustain and foster the communal effort

¹⁷ See also Herman 2006: 246-57, where the scholar highlights, among other things, the identification of Athens’ collective interests with those of the individual hoplites, and how Athenian politics tended to promote the entrance of the largest possible number of citizens.

to raise Athenian military power, which will soon lead Athens to the construction of her empire. It is thanks to this play that Aeschylus will be remembered in the fifth century – as Aristophanes’ *Frogs* attests – for having significantly contributed to the new discourse of power in the civic Athenian arena.

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