

## THE SHIELD AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN AESCHYLUS' *SEVEN AGAINST THEBES*\*

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The article analyzes the descriptions of warriors in Aeschylus's tragedy *Seven against Thebes* that are given in the "shield scene" and determines the pedagogical dimension of this tragedy. Aeschylus pays special attention to the decoration of the shields of the commanders who attacked Thebes, relying on two different ways of decorating the shields that Homer describes in *The Iliad*. According to George Henry Chase's terminology, in Homer, Achilles' shield can be called "a decorative" shield, and Agamemnon's shield is referred to as "a terrible" shield. Aeschylus turns the description of the shield decoration of the commanders attacking Thebes into a core element of the plot in *Seven against Thebes*, maximizing the connection between the image on the shield and the shield-bearer. He created an elaborate system of "terrible" and "decorative" shields (Aesch. *Sept.* 375-676), as well as of the shields that cannot be categorized as "terrible" and "decorative" (Aesch. *Sept.* 19; 43; 91; 100; 160). The analysis of this system made it possible to put forward and prove three hypothetical assumptions: 1) In Aeschylus, Eteocles demands from the Thebans to win or die, focusing on the fact that the city created a special educational space for them and raised them as shield-bearers. His patriotic speeches and, later, his judgments expressed in the "shield scene" demonstrate a desire to justify and then test the educational concept "ἢ τὰν ἢ ἐπὶ τᾶς" ("either with it, or upon it") (Plut. *Lacae.* 241f.10); 2) Aeschylus turns the description of the decoration of the "decorative" or "terrible" shields into a core element of

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the plot. The decorated shields of all the attackers on Thebes described in the “shield scene” form a kind of single “mixed” shield, similar in complexity to the decoration on Achilles’ shield, which includes elements of intimidation, as it was on Agamemnon’s shield; 3) Eteocles wants to establish himself as the king-mentor for the people, which will most clearly appear in the “shield scene”, where he solves a series of military riddles. These riddles require him to correctly decipher what is depicted on the decorative or terrible shields of each of the attackers. Aeschylus uses the shield as pedagogical tool in the tragedy *Seven against Thebes*, to which Euripides and Statius will later offer their alternatives by referring to the decoration of the shields of the leaders who attacked Thebes.

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One question I will spare you,  
lest I provoke your laughter;  
the foe that each of them encountered in the fray,  
the spear from which each received his death-wound.  
These are idle tales alike for those who hear or him who speaks...

(Eur. *Supp.* 846-50; translated by E.P. Coleridge)

Numerous stories from the mythological history of ancient Greek Thebes are reflected in ancient poetry and prose of different periods. The struggle of Oedipus’ sons for their father’s throne is the central theme in Aeschylus’ tragedy *Seven against Thebes*, the only surviving tragedy from Aeschylus’ Theban cycle. The race for power between the brothers develops from an interpersonal conflict into a military one because the agreement on an alternate reign is violated. Of the two sons of Oedipus, only Eteocles rules in Thebes, and Polyneices is forced to recruit an army in Argos, thus becoming one of the seven attackers who besiege the city (Fig. 1. P. 160). It is important for Eteocles that citizens accept the current situation and not look for the rights and the wrongs (specifically, not make him guilty, which he fears in the early stages of the tragedy). The king demands that the Thebans win or die, making in these two speeches an emphasis on the alternative he needs, “either with it (shield), or upon it”.

There has been much research proving that Aeschylus made the description of the shields with which the seven leaders besiege Thebes central to *Seven Against Thebes*. In the Introduction to the translations of Aeschylus published in 2009, there is such a remark about *Seven against Thebes*: “At the heart of this drama is the “shield scene”, a set of seven pairs of speeches in which the Scout tells Eteokles which of the Argive commanders has been stationed at each of Thebes’ seven gates, describing the blazons on each of their shields”<sup>1</sup>. In this article, we will try to illustrate the point that the decoration of the shields with which the seven leaders attacked Thebes is of great importance for understanding the shield as pedagogical tool in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*. The question in the epigraph of who and with whom fought under Thebes, which made Euripides ironic, indicates his desire to present a different description of these events and to see in them a different from Aeschylus’ pedagogical dimension. The descriptions of the shield decorations are important not only for Aeschylus and Euripides, but also for Statius who includes them in *The Thebaid*.

#### «DECORATIVE» AND «TERRIBLE» SHIELDS IN HOMER AND AESCHYLUS

In *The Iliad*, Homer gives much attention to the Theban campaign and characterizes some of its participants, which, of course, is known to Aeschylus as well as the fact that Homer paid considerable attention to the warriors’ outfit and, in particular, to the military shields and their decoration. At the beginning of the last century, George Henry Chase pointed out that the descriptions of the shields found in *The Iliad* reflect two principles of decorating Mycenaean shields<sup>2</sup>: “The one a principle of decoration for its own sake <...>, the other decoration with terrible figures, intended to frighten the enemy”<sup>3</sup>. The first principle appears in the description of Achilles’ shield (Hom. *Il.* XVIII.478-608), and the second, in the description of Agamemnon’s shield (Hom. *Il.* XI.32-37), which

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<sup>1</sup> *Herington* (2009). P. IX.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the shield of Achilles, the Mycenaean terrible shields and their reconstruction, see: *Paipetis* (2010). P. 135-146.

<sup>3</sup> *Chase* (1902). P. 65.

depicts the Gorgon, whose terrifying appearance made the enemy flee in terror. Following G.H. Chase, we will call the first type of shields “decorative”, and the second — “terrible”<sup>4</sup>.

The description of how Hephaestus created and decorated the decorative shield of Achilles (Fig. 2. P. 161) occupies a significant fragment in the eighteenth song of *The Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* XVIII.478-608). On the shield there were images of celestial bodies and two cities: in the first city, the people feasted, danced, participated in wedding processions, crowded in the square and attended the trial, and in the second city, they prepared for the siege of the city, captured cows and sheep, fought in battles, and then they dragged off the bodies of the dead. In addition to the stories about war and peace, there were stories on the shield where adults and children were engaged in farming, and the ruler silently watched them work. The hero of one of these stories was a boy who “made pleasant music with a clear-toned lyre, and thereto sang sweetly the Linos-song with his delicate voice; and his fellows beating the earth in unison therewith followed on with bounding feet mid dance and shoutings” (Hom. *Il.* XVIII.569-72). This complex visual row involves many interpretations. P.R. Hardie remarks that if the astronomical images are more or less clear (Hom. *Il.* XVIII 483-9, 607, etc.), the other images of human life can be understood as “teeming abundance”; “an unbiased observer might suspect that a simple principle of addition, rather than any more elaborate pattern of symmetry, had been responsible for the final conglomeration of subjects”<sup>5</sup>. O. Taplin believes that Homer suggests an original way to “make us look through the war to the peace that lies behind it, to the peace that the warriors have abandoned and which many of them will never know again”<sup>6</sup>. It is indicative that the shield with the images of war and peace (where there was a place for a pedagogical story as well) was forged by Hephaestus who was known for binding Titan Prometheus to a rock for his innovation in the pedagogical field<sup>7</sup>, that is, for giving people the opportunity to teach each other.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Hardie (1985). P. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Taplin (1980). P. 15.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the pedagogical component of Aeschylus’s tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, see chapter four: Rogers (2005). P. 194-232.

The description of Achilles' shield is the first description of a work of art in ancient Greek poetry, an example of cosmological mapping, which significantly influenced the ancient literary tradition. Among the many imitators of Homer was, for example, Hesiod, who described the shield of Hercules, or Virgil, who depicted the shield of Aeneas. The "shield of Achilles", as Robert Holmes Beck observes, "doubtless was precedent for the artful embossing Aeschylus intended his audience to appreciate"<sup>8</sup> in *Seven against Thebes*. We can expand this statement by saying that the shield of Agamemnon was also precedent for Aeschylus. Aeschylus turns the description of shield decoration into a core element of the plot by not including the description of Achilles' shield in the tragedy, as Euripides does in *Electra*<sup>9</sup>.

Homer uses the word "σάκος" to refer to the shield of Achilles, and the word "ἀσπίς" to describe the shield of Agamemnon<sup>10</sup>. In both cases, we are talking about derivatives shields. It is apparently impossible to establish the exact type since *The Iliad* has some indications of both Mycenaean types of shields and some later shields<sup>11</sup>. Aeschylus also uses the words "σάκος" and "ἀσπίς" and their derivatives to speak about shields<sup>12</sup>. The shield, which is denoted by the word "σάκος", is a round (Aesch. *Sept.* 540) concave shield, which may have bosses about the center; the word "ἀσπίς" can probably be applied to any type of shield<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Beck (1975). P. 182.

<sup>9</sup> "In the center of the shield the sun's bright circle was shining on winged horses, and the heavenly chorus of stars, Pleiades, Hyades, bringing defeat to the eyes of Hector..." (Eur. *El.* 464-69).

<sup>10</sup> In *the Iliad*, the use of the word "ἀσπίς" and its derivatives is much more frequent than of the word "σάκος" and its derivatives.

<sup>11</sup> For archaeological parallels, see: *Snodgrass* (1999). P. 19-20, 32-33, 53.

<sup>12</sup> Thucydides also uses two words to designate a shield, one of which is ἀσπίς and the other is ὄπλον (Thuc. III.22-3; IV.12.1; IV.38.1; IV.96.2; V.71.1; VI.58.2; VII.45.2; VII.82.3). In one place, however, he distinguishes between light shields and hoplite arms, using for the former the word ἀσπίσι, and for the latter, the word ὄπλα (Thuc. IV.9.1). Thus, ἀσπίς has a broader meaning, while ὄπλον means the shield of a heavily armed hoplite warrior.

<sup>13</sup> Examples of the terms used by ancient authors see: *Liddel, Scott* (1996). P. 1581, 259.

Aeschylus' use of either of these words is not connected with the type of shield we are talking about. Describing the shields, Aeschylus retreated from the existing practice of decorating shields by adding new elements, which reflect his artistic conception, to the common ones (for which, according to G.H. Chase, he received a caustic comment in *The Frogs* by Aristophanes, *Ar. Ran.* 928f<sup>14</sup>). Not only did Aeschylus maximize the connection between the image on the shield and the shield-bearer, reflecting the character of each of the attackers on Thebes in the decoration of the shields, but he created an elaborate system of terrible and decorative shields, as well as of those shields that cannot be divided into terrible and decorative. For the purpose of the discussion, the latter can be divided into those mentioned to unite the defenders (*Aesch. Sept.* 19) or the attackers (*Aesch. Sept.* 43), and those mentioned to scare the inhabitants of Thebes (*Aesch. Sept.* 91, 100, 160)<sup>15</sup>. We will give them a brief description, since terrible and decorative shields belong to the attackers on Thebes and their detailed description will be presented below.

In his patriotic speech, Eteocles uses the word “ἄσπιδηφόρος”. For him, shields (“ἄσπιδες”) are meant to unite the defenders (*Aesch. Sept.* 19). Calling on his fellow citizens to defend their city, Eteocles stresses the fact that the city once took care of them and educated them, and now the time has come to pay it back with care: “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<sup>16</sup> you to inhabit her and bear the shield, and to prove yourselves faithful in this time of need” (*Aesch. Sept.* 16-20)<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, Eteocles says that the city has created a broad educational space for its citizens, and on the other, highlights that the homeland

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<sup>14</sup> Chase (1902). P. 69.

<sup>15</sup> That is, those shields that Aeschylus mentions, but does not give them a description; those that are significant for him not because of the decoration, but because of the presence of a shield as such.

<sup>16</sup> Aeschylus uses the word “παιδεία”, which has a much broader meaning than the word “upbringing” and, rather, implies education as a unity of upbringing and education.

<sup>17</sup> Henceforward, all citations in this article (unless specified otherwise) are reproduced according to the electronic database of classical texts “The Perseus Digital Library”.

“raised the Thebans” exclusively as “shield-bearers”<sup>18</sup> and now it needs their protection. In his prayer at the end of the prologue, he concludes his thought by saying that Mother Earth also has to protect her sons (Aesch. *Sept.* 69-77). Right before the attack on the city starts, Eteocles makes his opinion regarding the proper conduct of the citizens in wartime more specific by saying that death in battle is a worthy reward to the city for nurturing (τροφεία) its citizens (Aesch. *Sept.* 477). Let us put forward the first hypothetical assumption, the proof of which will be developed through the analysis of terrible and decorative shields belonging to the attackers on Thebes: *Eteocles formulates the provisions of his educational conception “either with it, or upon it” and then tests it when forming the defense of the city.*

When the Scout describes the military prowess of the seven warriors preparing to march on Thebes, he mentions a shield (“σάκος”), which cannot be attributed to either decorative or terrible shields: “Seven warriors, fierce regiment-commanders, slaughtered a bull over a black shield, and then touching the bull’s gore with their hands they swore an oath by Ares, by Enyo, and by Rout who delights in blood, that either they will level the city and sack the Cadmeans’ town by force, or will in death smear this soil with their blood. And on Adrastus’ chariot they were placing remembrances of themselves for their parents at home, and were shedding tears while so doing, but no piteous wailing escaped their lips” (Aesch. *Sept.* 42-51). In the Scout’s speech, the reference to the shield is an indication that this union of seven attackers should not be underestimated: the actions of its members will be well coordinated through the joint decision-making process. In other words, the attackers will act as a single, united force, where seven will become one. Let us put forward the second hypothetical assumption, the proof of which will also be developed in the analysis of terrible and decorative shields belonging to the attackers on Thebes: *in the tragedy, the shields of all the attackers on Thebes form a kind of a single mixed shield, similar in complexity to the decoration on Achilles’ shield, which includes elements of intimidation, as it was on Agamemnon’s shield*<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Edmunds (2017). P. 97.

<sup>19</sup> In combining the two types of shields into one, as it seems to us, there is no contradiction. We categorize Achilles’ shield as a decorative one, but this

In the tragedy there are three more mentions of the shields that cannot be categorized as terrible or decorative. They are mentioned in order to use the view or sound of the shield to strike terror in the Thebans. The tension in the tragedy is increasing due to the special composition of the Chorus' parts, where there is an increase in "the noise of battle" and "the noise of lamentation"<sup>20</sup>. The Chorus sings: "The army of the white shield, ready for battle, rushes at full speed against the city" (Aesch. *Sept.* 89-90). And a little further: "Do you hear the clash of shields, or does it escape you?" (Aesch. *Sept.* 100); "Terror of their weapons of war shakes us, as the bridles in the horse's jaws rattle the sound of death" (Aesch. *Sept.* 121-3); "The hubs are creaking beneath the axles' load. <...> The air rages at the shaking of spears!" (Aesch. *Sept.* 152-5); "There is the clang of bronze-bound shields at the gates." In two cases, Aeschylus uses derivatives of "ἄσπις" (Aesch. *Sept.* 89 and 100), and in the third one — of "σάκος" (Aesch. *Sept.* 160).

Aeschylus' Chorus focuses on the weapons and armour of the attackers, appealing for the reasonable unity of the people preparing for defense. In Aeschylus, "war is presented as visible and audible horror" and since "the chorus can hear more than they can see of the approaching army, sound predominates in their first two songs and in the exchanges with Eteocles"<sup>21</sup>. Eteocles is trying to resist the fear of the Chorus being transmitted to all the townspeople. But the rattling of armour (including shields) creates such a panic that "the chorus can "see the noise" " (Aesch. *Sept.* 103). A description similar in emotional coloring is also present in Euripides: "Around the city a thick cloud of shields is kindling a shape of bloody battle..." (Eur. *Phoen.* 250-1) The sound of preparation for the battle outside the city walls and the sound of the chorus' lamentation inside the city make Eteocles so terribly angry that he breaks out in two angry passages that are close in content: men should stand on the defensive and women should stay at home and pray to the gods

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does not mean that there are no elements of terrible shields on it, since any shield, even falsely decorated, is primarily a shield. That is, its purpose is to protect from the enemies, and not to fascinate them with the beauty of the decoration.

<sup>20</sup> Hecht, Bacon (1991). P. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Bacon (1964). P. 28.

(Aesch. *Sept.* 200-2; 230-2). However, the male Theban defenders will not collectively ask for the gods' help in the battle (as the attackers did). Eteocles only swears to pray before the battle, and in case of victory, perform a number of ritual acts, including adorning the walls of the temples with the battle vestment of the attackers (Aesch. *Sept.* 278-9).

Having calmed down a little, the Chorus again continues to argue that the city is trapped in military noise (Aesch. *Sept.* 345-50). But the "degree" of noise, nevertheless, begins to decrease, and Aeschylus goes on to describe the seven pairs of warriors in the famous "shield scene". Let us put forward the third hypothetical assumption, the proof of which will also be developed in the analysis of terrible and decorative shields belonging to the attackers on Thebes: *the shields that are "generating noises" and frightening the Thebans allow Eteocles to establish himself in the role of king-mentor for the townspeople, which is clearly manifested in the "shield scene"*.

#### SHIELD-BEARERS: WHO ARE THEY?

At the instigation of the Scout, Eteocles makes an autocratic decision and sends one defender, the antipode of the attacker<sup>22</sup>, at each gate, thus leaving for himself in the "shield scene" the role of the wise king who solves a series of military riddles. These riddles, as it seems to Eteocles, require from him to correctly decipher what is depicted on the decorative or terrible shield of each of the attackers. Before proceeding to their description, we will consider a few questions regarding the literary tradition: *Who exactly is each of these seven? In what order are they described? Is there any indication of the ornament of their shields? (marked with a plus or minus, respectively, in Table 1. P. 157-158)*<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> For the original hypothesis, not related to the pride of the attackers, see: *Seth* (1967). P. 22-30, *Seth* (1968). P. 5-17.

<sup>23</sup> For convenience, we have compiled a table where not all the options existing in the literary tradition are presented. The origins and breadth of this tradition are enormous, as the commanders are listed, for example, in the Cyclic poem *The Thebaid*, attributed to Homer, in *The Thebaid* by Antimachus of Colophon, *The Phoenician Women* by Aristophanes and many other works that have or have not survived. In this article, we deliberately avoid the issue of who the leader of the attackers is, since in some cases, we cannot say that the leader is

In Aeschylus, the composition of the attackers on Thebes and the order of their presentation are as follows: Tydeus, Capaneus, Eteoclus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, Amphiarus, and Polyneices. Aeschylean Adrastus is not the leader of the Theban campaign. Neither is he in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus at Colonus* and in Euripides' tragedy *The Phoenician Women*. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, when Antigone and Oedipus meet Polyneices, he lists the military commanders with whom he leads the troops to Thebes (Soph. *OC*. 1360-75). Euripides has a different sequence in *The Suppliants* and *The Phoenician Women* (see Table 1. P. 157-158). Adrastus is the leader of the campaign only in *The Suppliants*, surprisingly becoming the eighth, not the seventh, attacker on Thebes. In his *Bibliotheca Historica*, Diodorus of Sicily says that Adrastus promised Tydeus and Polyneices to help him return to his homeland, and began with Polyneices (Diod. Sic. IV.65.7). Hyginus dedicates one of his *fabulae* to the seven attackers on Thebes (Hyg. *Fab.* 70) and, like Diodorus, states that Adrastus not only gave his army to Polyneices, but joint him in the Theban campaign.

In Aeschylus, each of the seven attacker-defender pairs must fight at one of the seven gates of the city. Aeschylus lists the gates in this sequence: the Proetid gates (Aesch. *Sept.* 377; 395), the Electran gates (Aesch. *Sept.* 423), the Neistan gates (Aesch. *Sept.* 460), the gate near Onca Athena (Aesch. *Sept.* 487; 501), the Northern gate (Aesch. *Sept.* 527), the Homoloid gates (Aesch. *Sept.* 570), the seventh gates (Aesch. *Sept.* 631; 714; 800)<sup>24</sup>. This sequence does not correspond to the location of the gates<sup>25</sup>, which indicates that it is important for Aeschylus to state exactly this sequence of the attackers on Thebes: Tydeus, Capaneus, Eteoclus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, Amphiarus, and Polyneices. Aeschylus constantly “skips” over the gates placing the attackers on

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precisely the one who was declared as such. So, for example, in Statius, Adrastus formally leads the attackers, but in reality the army is led by Capaneus, and after Tydeus' death, Hippomedon takes a number of key decisions. This and other examples should be the subject of a separate study.

<sup>24</sup> For the archaeological data regarding this gates, see: *Mozhajsky* (2018). P. 79-96.

<sup>25</sup> This was pointed out by June W. Allison who suggested her own version of the interpretation of this discrepancy: *Allison* (2009). P. 137-138.

Thebes. If you start to establish the sequence of gates precisely from the Proetid gates, as Aeschylus does, and go counterclockwise or clockwise, there is a coincidence for the gate near Onca Athena or the Neistan gates, in which either Hippomedon or Polyneices respectively have to fight with the Theban commanders (Fig. 1a. P. 159).

It should be noted that not only Aeschylus “skips” over the gates (see: Eur. *Phoen.* 1104-1141; Apollod. *Bibl.* III.6.6), placing attackers on Thebes in his sequence<sup>26</sup> and giving priority to the issue of *who* is standing rather than *where* he is standing. It should also be noted that Statius in *The Thebaid* offers an exceptional arrangement of the defenders rather than the attackers (Stat. *Theb.* VIII.353-8).

G. Nagy emphasizes that the Aeschylean attackers on Thebes are “visualized directly, by way of direct speech as delivered by the Scout (to Eteocles as the chief defender of the polis)” and “indirectly, by way of a blazon on his shield, the word for which is *sēma* “sign, signal” (lines 387, 404, 432, 491, 518, 591, 643)”<sup>27</sup>. It seems to us that this is not even a double, but a triple visualization, since the association of an attacker with a specific gate is of special importance for Aeschylus. This statement is confirmed by the fact that the attackers drew lots<sup>28</sup> to decide which of the city gates each of them would attack with his army (Aesch. *Sept.* 55-56). Having told in detail about the preparation of the enemy for the battle, the Scout instructs Eteocles to immediately and single-handedly appoint those of the Theban warriors who will confront the attackers in which of the gates. This is what Eteocles does later. This contrast between the attackers and the defenders preparing for the battle is necessary for Aeschylus to demonstrate the difference between the brothers: Polyneices is shown as capable of organizing military alliances, while Eteocles is depicted as a person neglecting such methods of warfare. But Aeschylus moves beyond this difference: he enhances the difference between the brothers through the descriptions of the shields of those who fight together with each of them.

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<sup>26</sup> On the discrepancy between the gate names in Aeschylus and Euripides see: *Mozhajskey* (2018). P. 79-96.

<sup>27</sup> *Nagy* (2000). P. 102.

<sup>28</sup> In Statius, the defenders drew lots to choose the gates (Stat. *Theb.* VIII.353-8).

A. Bacon believes that in the scene with the description of the attackers' shields, "Eteocles progresses from uncertainty, or blindness, to knowledge about the workings of the family curse"<sup>29</sup>. It seems to me that this assessment unnecessarily exaggerates the role of Eteocles in the tragedy: the movement from ignorance to knowledge of how the family curse works is as necessary to Polyneices as to Eteocles. Despite the fact that each of the brothers chose their own path and their rate in moving along this path, the result is observed in the "shield scene". Eteocles assumes that he must solve the riddles by deciphering correctly what is depicted on the shield of each of the attackers, and these riddles are prepared for him not without the participation of Polyneices. In our opinion, these riddles were formulated by Aeschylus in a way that requires his audience to know Homer's text and, in particular, the fragments concerning the decorative shield of Achilles and the terrible shield of Agamemnon.

A. Poochigian underscores a rigid pattern repeated six times when Aeschylus introduces the pairs of the attackers and defenders. He believes that in the "shield scene", six Theban commanders are silently present on the stage so that Eteocles could draw attention "to an important aspect of the model behavior he espouses"<sup>30</sup>. If we agree that the audience sees the defenders and can form a judgment about the attackers only on the basis of the Scout's descriptions and Eteocles' comments, the question inevitably arises: why is it all about the attackers' shields and why can one only guess about the defenders' shields?<sup>31</sup> Even assuming that the audience sees the defenders' shields, they remain a mystery to the reader.

The second question that arises when analyzing the central scene of the tragedy: if Aeschylus takes two types of shields as described by Homer in *The Iliad*, the decorative shield of Achilles and the terrible shield of Agamemnon, then why does he use these patterns to describe the attackers' shields? As we know, Achilles and Agamemnon are successful shield-bearers, they managed to capture Troy. That is why the descriptions of the shields belonging to Tydeus, Capaneus, Eteocles,

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<sup>29</sup> Bacon (1964). P. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Poochigian (2007). P. 3.

<sup>31</sup> We only know about the decoration on the shield of one of the defenders, Hyperbius, who is confronted by Hippomedon.

Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, Amphiaraus, and Polyneices, based on the description of the shields of Achilles and Agamemnon, can be considered as an allusion to the victory of the attackers. In this vein, the prevailing opinion among the researchers that the “shield scene” anticipates the outcome of the battle seems to us more than controversial, as well as the opinion that the decoration of the Aeschylean shields “functions as an expression or enhancement of the heroic power inhering in their bearers”<sup>32</sup>. In this case, the defenders are completely devoid of heroic power since the descriptions of their shields are not presented. F.-G. Herrmann accounts for this by the fact that Aeschylus simply needs a contrast between the attackers striving for victory and the defenders, whose modesty is so great that they do not even lay claim to the shields: “It must be noted, though, that the denouncing of the attackers’ boasts and of their shield-devices almost invariably takes place before the opposing defender and his suitability is announced, i.e. that the deconstruction of the boasts of the attackers does not actually depend on the qualities of the specific defender”<sup>33</sup>.

Since Tydeus is the first attacker Aeschylus describes, the ornament on his shield should be of particular importance. Aeschylus uses of “ἄσπις” (Aesch. *Sept.* 385; 387; 400) three times and a derivative from “ἄσπις” only once (Aesch. *Sept.* 389). Aeschylus uses the word “σῆμα” (Aesch. *Sept.* 432) to describe Capaneus, which immediately indicates the decoration of his shield. Speaking about Eteoclus, Aeschylus uses the word “ἄσπις” and its derivative (Aesch. *Sept.* 465; 478). Pointing to Hippomedon and his opponent from the Theban side, Aeschylus uses the derivatives from the word ἄσπις five times (Aesch. *Sept.* 489; 492; 510; 512; 520) and the derivative word from σάκος once (Aesch. *Sept.* 522). Describing the shield of Parthenopaeus, he uses the derivatives from “σάκος” (Aesch. *Sept.* 540) and “ἄσπις” (Aesch. *Sept.* 559). Speaking about Amphiaraus and his opponent from Thebes, Aeschylus uses the derivatives from the word “ἄσπις” twice (Aesch. *Sept.* 590; 624). Describing the shield of Polyneices, Aeschylus uses one derivative from the words “σάκος” (Aesch. *Sept.* 642) and “ἄσπις” (Aesch. *Sept.* 661). In addition to Tydeus, the Aeschylean Eteocles pays special attention to the

<sup>32</sup> Hardie (1985). P. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Herrmann (2013). P. 57.

ornaments on the shields of Hippomedon, Amphiarus, and, of course, Polyneices. Further, we will explain why. For now, we can only assume that if we consider the length of Eteocles' response speech after the Scout tells about the attacker and speaks about the ornament on his shield, we will see the following figures: Tydeus (Aesch. *Sept.* 397-416, 19 lines), Capaneus (Aesch. *Sept.* 437-451, 14 lines), Eteocles (Aesch. *Sept.* 372-480, 8 lines), Hippomedon (Aesch. *Sept.* 501- 520, 19 lines), Parthenopaeus (Aesch. *Sept.* 550-562, 12 lines), Amphiarus (Aesch. *Sept.* 597-625, 28 lines) and Polyneices (Aesch. *Sept.* 654-676, 22 lines).

We can see that both in Homer and Aeschylus, the use of words is not connected with decorating the shield: the same shield is often called different words. It is possible to categorize the shields of attackers into terrible and decorative only according to their descriptions which we will analyze further. For Aeschylus, the sequence of the attackers on Thebes, their association with the concrete city gates and the ornaments on their shields, representing a series of military riddles for the defenders and, especially, for Eteocles, are important. Further, we will try to prove that all this allows Aeschylus to create a pedagogical dimension of the tragedy *Seven against Thebes*, to which Euripides and Statius will offer their alternatives.

#### TYDEUS

The first attacker described by Aeschylus is Tydeus who is preparing to attack the Proetid gates. Tydeus is so furious at the delay in starting the assault due to the prophecy of Amphiarus that Aeschylus portrays him as a dragon. On the shield of Tydeus there is a full moon surrounded by stars (Fig. 3 and 4. P. 162-163), which Eteocles regards as a bad prophecy for its bearer: if Tydeus is killed, Night with the moon and stars will fall on him. Researchers have proposed many interpretations for the image of Night that Tydeus is associated with. This image, on the one hand, can indicate moral blindness, and on the other hand, can serve as a hint at the moral blindness of the representatives of the house of Laius, since the moon reminds of Hecate, the goddess with whom the curse of the royal house of Thebes began. Tydeus shrieks, which makes the figures on his triple-crested helmet shake and the bells on the shield ring out a fearsome clang. C. John Herington calls Tydeus' helmet "a

part of the riddle”<sup>34</sup>, which is also related to the story of the house of Laius and which helps to unravel the Chorus’ part: “Indeed I speak of the ancient transgression, now swift in its retribution. It remains even into the third generation, ever since Laius — in defiance of Apollo who, at his Pythian oracle at the earth’s center, said three times that the king would save his city if he died without offspring” (Aesch. *Sept.* 742-9). In Statius’ *Thebaid*, the helmet of Tydeus is adorned with Mars (Stat. *Theb.* IV.111), which does not create such a multi-level mystery of his armour as in Aeschylean tragedy.

If you follow the analogy of the images, the heavenly bodies depicted on the shield of Tydeus are the same as on the shield of Achilles. Thus, his shield can be considered as decorative shield, but G.H. Chase, whose terminology we use throughout this article, calls the shield of Tydeus a terrible shield<sup>35</sup>. P.R. Hardie offers a dual interpretation of the shield of Tydeus. First, he, citing a study by Robert Eisler who collected examples of shields with stars from classical and other sources<sup>36</sup>, suggested that “the warrior, by bearing the image of a star, draws on its power in his own confrontations”<sup>37</sup>. That is, the shield of Tydeus has psychological, not magical effectiveness in battle, and is designed to scare the enemy. Eteocles oversimplifies the moon and stars on Tydeus’ shield<sup>38</sup>, underestimating the fact that these symbols emphasize his power to destroy. Then P.R. Hardie argues that “the first shield in the Aeschylean catalog should allude to the whole universe”<sup>39</sup>, that is, it provides an argument that allows us to call the shield of Tydeus a decorative shield, similar to the shield of Achilles.

We agree with June W. Allison, who believes that we should “unfold” the image on the shield of Tydeus, seeing on it not just the moon, “but an entire ethereal scene”<sup>40</sup>. The sequence of attackers is important for Aeschylus, and Tydeus, who appeared first, was supposed to scare the

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<sup>34</sup> Herington (2009). P. 120.

<sup>35</sup> Chase (1902). P. 70.

<sup>36</sup> Eisler (1910). P. 84.

<sup>37</sup> Hardie (1985). P. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. P. 13; Allison (2009). P. 141.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Hardie (1985). P. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Allison (2009). P. 140.

Thebans not just with a terrible shield, but with a decorative shield — a shield that distinguishes him from others and serves as an analogy to the shield of Achilles. This hypothetical assumption is supported, for example, by Aeschylus' desire to ensure consistency with Homer, who praised Tydeus' military prowess in the fourth book of *The Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 368-400). In the fifth book of *The Iliad*, Homer characterizes Diomedes, the son of Tydeus. He writes that he is a brave man and just as lucky in battle as his father. Describing Diomedes' armour, Homer recalls the young man's father again: "...the wise-hearted son of Tydeus do I liken him in all things, knowing him by his shield and his crested helm, and when I look on his horses; yet I know not surely if he be not a god" (Hom. *Il.* V.181-4). Further on, Homer mentions that Troy needs powerful protection from Tydeus' son, "that savage spearman, a mighty deviser of rout" (Hom. *Il.* VI.277-8), thus emphasizing the courage and strength of the son who is not inferior to his father in military characteristics. Tydeus, to whom Athena had promised immortality but then was horrified by his deeds and changed her mind, granted immortality to Diomedes, which indirectly deepens the connection of the father and the son with the invulnerable Achilles<sup>41</sup> and his decorative shield. This connection is completely uninteresting to Euripides, since Tydeus is never the first attacker in any version (see Table 1. P. 157-158).

Aeschylean Eteocles says that the well-decorated armor of Tydeus will not cause wounds, trying, thereby, to shift the emphasis from the physical strength of this warrior to his appearance. In *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides, Antigone and her attendant look at the attackers from the city wall and also pay attention to the armour of Tydeus. Antigone asks the attendant about the identity of the warrior who looks "quite different" (Eur. *Phoen.* 133). The attendant answers her: "Tydeus, the son of Oeneus, Aetolian battle-spirit in his breast" (Eur. *Phoen.* 134). This definition once again points to the episode from the past of Tydeus, when he was exiled from his hometown. Antigone replies that she understands who he is; she knows that Tydeus and Polyneices are both married to the daughters of Adrastus. She speaks of Tydeus: "What a foreign look his

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<sup>41</sup> In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid consolidates this connection by narrating about the rivalry over the shield of the killed Achilles and how worthy Diomedes proved himself in this situation (Ov. *Met.* XII.620-2).

armor has, half-barbarian!” (Eur. *Phoen.* 137-8). However, from this fragment, it is completely incomprehensible what exactly Tydeus is wearing<sup>42</sup>. The attendant tells Antigone that all Aetolians have such shields and they are all unerring marksmen with their darts. This strange answer, which is focused on only one element of Tydeus’ armour, the shield, suggests a warning: never judge a warrior by his appearance, judge him by his military strength. In *The Suppliants*, Euripides emphasizes the military prowess of Tydeus and his skills with a shield, as well as the fact that “his was a richly ambitious nature, a spirit equal to deeds, not words” (Eur. *Supp.* 907-8). The last remark brings down the defense strategy of Eteocles, which was proposed by Aeschylus and implies that only the defenders of Thebes can prioritize the deed over the word. The logic of the description of Tydeus in Euripides contradicts the logic in Aeschylus, where Eteocles, on the contrary, wants to convince others that they should not be too afraid of Tydeus, since he is only remarkable for his armor.

In *Seven against Thebes*, the screaming and arrogant Tydeus is confronted by Melanippus, the native of Thebes, because he is “he is full noble and reveres the throne of Honor and detests proud speech” (Aesch. *Sept.* 409-10). It seems to Eteocles that Melanippus will defeat Tydeus, because he “is truly born of our land” and his blood tells him to defend his motherland. Here Aeschylus probably wants to hint that Tydeus is an outcast; he is the one who has lost touch with his roots and, having become related to Adrastus, has not found new ones. Aeschylean Chorus anticipates the death of Melanippus with the words: “But I shudder to watch the bloody deaths of men cut down for the sake of their own people” (Aesch. *Sept.* 419-421). Eteocles wants the emotional state of Tydeus, forced to postpone the attack on the city, to be perceived not as a dangerous force, but as an insane desire to serve, and Melanippus will fall victim to this desire. Eteocles’ words about Melanippus and Thebes as his mother needing protection fit into the educational conception of “either with it, or upon it”, which Eteocles outlined at the beginning of the tragedy.

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<sup>42</sup> This is indicated elsewhere («a lion’s skin with shaggy mane upon his shield», Eur. *Phoen.* 1120-3). Pseudo-Apollodorus claims that the head of a boar was depicted on Tydeus’ shield (Apollod. *Bibl.* III.6.1.)

The cruelty with which Tydeus will deal with Melanippus will terrify Athena, who will deprive Tydeus of immortality. When Statius describes the horrible details of this episode in *The Thebaid*, he does not describe the shield of Tydeus, but merely indicates that he inadvertently let go of his round shield and received a mortal wound from Melanippus. However, the episode of Eteocles' deathly ambush suggests that the shield of Tydeus in Statius is decorated in the same way as in Aeschylus (that is, in my logic, it is a decorative shield): when Tydeus attacks a Theban warrior with a spear and shield, the warrior falls down and asks for mercy appealing to Night and the stars who favour Tydeus (Stat. *Theb.* II.650). For Statius, as well as for Aeschylus, Tydeus plays an important role in the narrative, since he is close in spirit to Polyneices, whom Statius sympathizes with. In Statius, Tydeus best fits the Aeschylean description as “principal teacher of evils to the Argives”<sup>43</sup> (μέγιστον Ἄργει τῶν κακῶν διδάσκαλον) (Aesch. *Sept.* 573). Tydeus is “fierce and aggressive ... he nevertheless does not lend himself to facile assessments: most importantly, he cannot be regarded as a plainly hubristic figure, such a role being reserved for Capaneus”<sup>44</sup>.

For Aeschylus, it is important that Tydeus is the first attacker on Thebes, and his armour appears the first of a series of military riddles for Eteocles. Sending Melanippus against Tydeus, Eteocles indicates his understanding of the decoration of the attacker's shield as a military riddle and the logic of the riddles, which, as he thinks, successfully follows from the educational conception “either with it, or upon it” that he has already designated. Further developments show that Eteocles will implement this logic, regardless of whether the attacker carries a decorative or terrible shield.

#### CAPANEUS

The second Aeschylean attacker on Thebes is Capaneus, a giant with a shield, on which a naked man with a burning torch in his hands is

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Holmes Beck, citing H. Patzer, calls Tydeus a man “who “more than all (the others)” (presumably meant to include Polyneices) “taught Argos evil ways”” Beck (1975). P. 182-183; Patzer (1958). P. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Marinis (2015). P. 345.

depicted. Capaneus is preparing to attack the gates of Electra, which is confirmed, *inter alia*, by Pausanias (Paus. IX.8.3). Capaneus is considered “a grotesque exaggeration, of the impiety of Tydeus”, who, unlike Tydeus, who chose darkness as his symbol, prefers fire, that is, an image associated with the light, including the light of knowledge and the ability to construe the truth<sup>45</sup>. Capaneus does not go first, but turns out to be closely associated with Tydeus, who does go first: he is first after the first<sup>46</sup>.

The possibility of juxtaposing Tydeus and Capaneus is confirmed by a fragment from *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides (Eur. *Phoen.* 1120-3), which we have already referred to. Anthony J. Podlecki suspects that this description is incomplete, since there is a gap of one or several lines at this place of the text, where, probably, Tydeus’ dress and the image of Prometheus carrying the torch are explained<sup>47</sup>. In Euripides’ *The Phoenician Women*, Capaneus is described as the last of the attackers on Thebes. But it is Capaneus that captivates Antigone’s attention. Antigone asks her attendant very similar question about all the warriors: “Who is this?” And who is this? ...”, but she asks a completely different question about Capaneus: “But where is the one who utters those dreadful insults against this city?” (Eur. *Phoen.* 178-9) She is looking for Capaneus on the battlefield as thoroughly and reacts to him almost as emotionally as to Polyneices<sup>48</sup>. Antigone prays to the gods to pacify the pride of Capaneus who promised to bring to his city many of “the Theban girls as captives”.

Like Tydeus, Aeschylean Capaneus demonstrates a combination of courage and pride, but Capaneus has a different type of shield: he bears a terrible shield<sup>49</sup>, like all the others attackers who will be discussed below.

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<sup>45</sup> Herington (2009). P. 120.

<sup>46</sup> In Diodorus, Capaneus begins the list of those who expressed their consent to Adrastus to support Polyneices (after Tydeus has already done so) (Diod. Sic. IV.4).

<sup>47</sup> Podlecki (1962). P. 366.

<sup>48</sup> In Sophoclean *Oedipus at Colonus*, where a fairly moderate description of the attackers on Thebes is presented, Capaneus is given the second detailed description after Amphiaraus: “While Capaneus, the fifth, boasts that he will burn Thebes to the ground with fire” (Soph. *OC.*1318-9).

<sup>49</sup> While Aeschylean Capaneus is an embodiment of brutal force, in Statius’ *Thebaid*, he embodies primitiveness: the giant, leading his soldiers on

Capaneus, who is challenging Zeus, is confronted by Polyphontes, who is favoured by Artemis, a goddess who strictly follows the inviolability of ancient customs. Eteocles believes that the excessive recklessness of Capaneus, who has the phrase “I will burn the city” on his shield, is now in the hands of Polyphontes, who is “man of fiery spirit”. Further developments will show that the death of Capaneus will become a divine intervention in the affairs of people: Capaneus is stricken by the bolt of Zeus. That is, he is consumed by fire, thus again actualizing his association with the image of fire, about which Euripides writes in *The Phoenician Women* and *The Suppliants*. He also indicates that Capaneus fell off the ladder (Eur. *Phoen.* 1172-84; Eur. *Supp.* 497-500) (Fig. 5. P. 164). Euripides has two opposite descriptions of Capaneus. Both in *The Phoenician Women* and in Aeschylus, Capaneus is portrayed as a proud person, but Euripides does not describe the ornament on his shield: “As for the madness of Capaneus, how can I describe it? He was going about with a long scaling-ladder, and boasting that even the holy fire of Zeus would not hold him back from giving the city to utter destruction. And even as he spoke, he climbed up beneath the hail of stones, crouched under the shelter of his shield, rung by smooth rung going up the ladder” (Eur. *Phoen.* 1172-9). In *The Suppliants*, Euripides describes Capaneus as a noble warrior, which completely contradicts both Aeschylus’ description and his own: “That is Capaneus; though he had ample wealth, yet he was the last to boast of his prosperity; nor would he ever vaunt himself above a poorer neighbor, but shunned the man whose sumptuous board had puffed him up too high and made him scorn mere competence, for he held that virtue lies not in greedy gluttony, but that moderate means suffice. He was a true friend to his friends, present or absent; of such the number is not great. His was a guileless character, courteous in his speech, that left no promise unperformed either towards his own household or his fellow-citizens” (Eur. *Supp.* 861-871). Adrastus gives this characterization of Capaneus to Theseus, after which Theseus decides to bury Capaneus separately from other military commanders who fell under Thebes. The following conversation takes place between Adrastus and Theseus:

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foot, easily juggles with a shield, on which a three-headed Hydra is depicted (Stat. *Theb.* IV.165-171).

Adrastus: Will you bury him apart as a consecrated corpse?

Theseus: Yes; but all the rest on one funeral pyre.

Adrastus: Where will you set the tomb apart for him?

Theseus: Here near this temple I have built him a sepulchre

(Eur. *Supp.* 935-8).

This story is continued in Virgil, when Aeneas in the underworld first meets Evadna (Verg. *Aen.* VI.447-8), the wife of Capaneus, who threw herself into the funeral pyre of her husband, and later three of the seven attackers on Thebes: "But now his destined way he must be gone; Now the last regions round the travellers lie, Where famous warriors in the darkness dwell: Here Tydeus comes in view, with far-renowned Parthenopaeus and Adrastus pale" (Verg. *Aen.* VI.477-80). Virgilian Aeneas does not meet Capaneus, since he was resurrected by Asclepius, so it is Parthenopheus<sup>50</sup> who appears in the company with Tydeus<sup>51</sup> and Adrastus.

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<sup>50</sup> See: *Pollmann* (2001). P. 11-12.

<sup>51</sup> Once again, let us get back to the relationship between Tydeus and Capaneus. In Hyginus, we find that Diomedes, the son of Tydeus, and Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus, were the most faithful friends (*Hyg. Fab.* 257). Homer confirms this in the fourth book of the *Iliad*. When Agamemnon talks briefly about the military campaign of Tydeus and Polyneices on Thebes, and then compares Diomedes, the son of Tydeus, with his father, though not in favor of the former: "Such a man was Tydeus of Aetolia; howbeit the son that he begat is worse than he in battle, though in the place of gathering he is better" (Hom. *Il.* IV.399-400). Sthenelus stands up for Diomedes and tells Agamemnon: "Son of Atreus, utter not lies, when thou knowest how to speak truly. We declare ourselves to be better men by far than our fathers: we took the seat of Thebe of the seven gates, when we twain had gathered a lesser host against a stronger wall, putting our trust in the portents of the gods and in the aid of Zeus; whereas they perished through their own blind folly. Wherefore I bid thee put not our fathers in like honour with us" (Hom. *Il.* IV. 404-410). This "defensive speech" did not please Diomedes: he interrupts Sthenelus saying that he is not angry with Agamemnon, because he understands what grief awaits the Achaeans if they are defeated under Troy. When Diomedes finished his speech and jumped off the chariot, his armour rang so that the bravest man would be scared (Hom. *Il.* III.421). This episode allows us to say that in Homer, Diomedes is described not only as a strong warrior, but also as a wise man. Diomedes, unlike Sthenelus, knows how to suppress his emotional impulses and, like his father, shows respect for other commanders.

In addition to Aeschylus, Statius refers to the ornament on Capaneus' shield when describing his military prowess: "But Capaneus, on foot and looking down by a whole head's height upon the host, wields the burden of four hides torn from the backs of untamed steers and stiffened above with a covering of massy bronze; there lies the Hydra with triple-branching crown, lately slain and foul in death."<sup>52</sup> (Stat. *Theb.* IV.165-71). Like Aeschylus, Statius describes the shield of Capaneus as a terrible shield.

Sending Polyphontes against Capaneus, Eteocles does not make allowance for the fact that Capaneus, unlike Tydeus, has a terrible but not a decorative shield. Eteocles continues to unravel the ornaments on the attackers' shields like military riddles, each of which is new to him, but close in complexity to the previous one. He considers each subsequent riddle as one more opportunity to "test" the educational conception introduced by him earlier.

#### *ETEOCLUS / ADRASTUS*

The third proud commander, Eteocles, surrounded by frenzied and tearing horses, will be confronted by Megareus (Aesch. *Sept.* 473). Eteocles is preparing to attack the Neistan gates. On his shield there is an armed warrior climbing the ladder to the tower, from which, according to the inscription, even Ares himself will not be able to fling him down. An indication of the ladder remains without any detail. "The ladder is, in any case, a good illustration of the kind of military information contained in Seven: reality (the scaling ladder) disguised in fictional robes (drawn on a shield and never used in proper action)"<sup>53</sup>. Eteocles does not so much interpret the image on this anti-Theban hero's shield as he wants to mock at him: when Megareus wins, he will immediately capture two people and a city (Aesch. *Sept.* 477-9). This ironic vision, according to G. Nagy, is "a mirror image of what would happen if Megareus and Thebes were captured: instead, Megareus will capture the named man and, in addition,

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<sup>52</sup> Here and below, cited by: Publius Papinius Statius, *The Thebaid. Vol I-II*. Translated by John Henry Mozley. London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. 1928.

<sup>53</sup> *Echeverría* (2017). P. 83.

the unnamed man and the unnamed city in the picture, since the picture is on the captured shield”<sup>54</sup>.

In this contrast between the attacker and the defender, Aeschylus breaks the usual structure when the Scout describes the enemy’s armour and gives him a moral characterization, and Eteocles supplements this characterization and instructs how to resist him. Eteocles does not characterize the attacker but just speaks of Megareus as a warrior protecting Thebes: “Whereas in every other case he is quick to bring accusations of blasphemy, impiety, and folly, here he moves swiftly to name his chosen defender, and makes unusually brisk work of the matter, turning instantly to the next contender”<sup>55</sup>. This is probably explained by the fact that the name of the attacker is consonant with the name of the king of Thebes, and it would be strange to bring charges against his “twin”<sup>56</sup>.

Sophocles gives a modest description for the anti-Theban hero of Eteocles: “Eteocles is third, of Argive birth” (Soph. *OC.* 1316). Euripides, on the contrary, characterizes him quite thoroughly in *The Suppliants*: “The next I name is Eteocles, a master of other kinds of excellence; young, lacking in means to live, yet high in honor in the Argive land. And though his friends often offered gifts of gold, he would not have it in his house, to make his character its slave by taking wealth’s yoke upon him. Not his city, but those that sinned against her did he hate, for a city is not to be blamed if it should get an evil name by reason of an evil governor” (Eur. *Supp.* 873-880). Neither of these characteristics clarifies the ornament on his shield described by Aeschylus, which allows qualifying the shield of Eteocles as a terrible shield.

In the literary tradition, Adrastus often appears among the seven attackers on Thebes instead of Eteocles (Table 1). In Euripides’s *The Suppliants*, Theseus asks Adrastus about the campaign against Thebes, intending to present Adrastus’ response as some instruction for the young Athenians: “Of what lineage sprang those youths, to shine so bright in courage? Tell it to our younger citizens, from your fuller wisdom; for you are skilled to know. I myself beheld their daring deeds, too high for words to tell, by which they thought to capture Thebes” (Eur. *Supp.* 841-

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<sup>54</sup> Nagy (2000). P. 116.

<sup>55</sup> Herington (2009). P. 120.

<sup>56</sup> Cm.: Vidal-Naquet (1979). P. 96-118.

5). At the end of the tragedy, Athena appoints the son of Adrastus and the son of Tydeus leaders of the second campaign against Thebes. Hyginus, like Euripides, pays much attention to the role of Adrastus in the first military campaign against Thebes. After listing all the attackers on Thebes, Hyginus reports that they all perished, except Adrastus, who initiated the campaign of the sons of the fallen on Thebes (Hyg. *Fab.* 70). In Hyginus, there is a son of Adrastus, not of Eteocles, among the epigones (Hyg. *Fab.* 70).

In *The Phoenician Women*, Euripides describes the decoration of Adrastus' shield as follows: "Adrastus was at the seventh gate; a hundred vipers engraved on his shield, [as he bore on his left arm the hydra] the boast of Argos, and serpents were carrying off in their jaws the sons of Thebes from within our very walls" (Eur. *Phoen.* 1134-8). As we have mentioned above, in Statius' *Thebaid*, Capaneus had a shield decorated with Hydra (Stat. *Theb.* IV.165-71). Anthony J. Podlecki suggests that the image of the hydra on Adrastus' shield is "an obvious analogue to the sphinx and her depopulating"<sup>57</sup>. In Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, Sphinx was depicted on the Parthenopaeus' shield. It should be noted that of Adrastus' military equipment, more attention was attracted not by the shield, but by his talking horse (see, for example, Prop. 37-8).

The terrible shield of Eteocles is another riddle to the Theban king Eteocles, which he solves according to an already worked out scheme. Sending Megareus to defend the city fits into Eteocles' educational conception again, since Megareus is a shield-bearer that the Theban mother earth raised and who "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" (Aesch. *Sept.* 477-9).

#### HIPPOMEDON

The fourth attacker on Thebes is Hippomedon<sup>58</sup>, preparing to attack the gate near Onca Athena. He is described as a crazy giant, resembling a screaming bacchante, who threatens Thebes like a "dangerous snake".

<sup>57</sup> Podlecki (1962). P. 366.

<sup>58</sup> According to one version, presented, for example, in Hyginus, Hippomedon, like Capaneus, has family ties with Adrastus (Hyg. *Fab.* 70).

Hippomedon is confronted by Hyperbius, a brave and impeccable defender of Thebes, who wants to try his fate in an honest battle. On the shield of Hippomedon, a Typhon spewing flame, wrapped in black smoke and circled by knots of vipers is depicted, and on the shield of the Theban defender is Zeus with a lightning in his hand<sup>59</sup>. G. Nagy, pointing to the smoke on Hippomedon's shield, gives the following comment: "...historians of the Greek language have remarked on how far and wide its basic meaning of 'smoke' has spread, generating a spectacular variety of "words relating to obscurity, blindness, or else to the darkening of one's wits, stupidity, or even to becoming blind to one's own self, pretension, boasting, vanity"<sup>60</sup>. That is, Hippomedon with such an ornament on the shield is a person who deserves to be struck by a divine thunderbolt. That is why Eteocles claims that there will be a combat between two mighty warriors with a predetermined outcome, since "no one yet has seen Zeus conquered" (Aesch. *Sept.* 514).

Aaron Poochigian stresses that "Hyperbios "was selected" long ago to meet Hippomedon in battle because (1) he was his personal enemy and (2) because he bears a shield emblazoned with Zeus in opposition to Hippomedon's Typhon"<sup>61</sup>. It is no coincidence that Eteocles says that "Hermes has appropriately pitted them (the attacker and the defender) against each other" (Aesch. *Sept.* 508-9). In Aeschylus, the confrontation between Hippomedon and Hyperbius is presented as the confrontation of the two, who "will bring together from on their shields two gods in war with each other", where Hermes is necessary in order to make it clear how one side should behave against the other<sup>62</sup>.

In *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides, Hippomedon attracts the attention of Antigone, who looks from the city walls at the attacking warriors. Pointing to Hippomedon, Antigone asks: "Who is that one with the white crest, who marches before the army, lightly bearing on his arm a shield all of bronze?" (Eur. *Phoen.* 119-121). She asks the attendant the name of this warrior as well as some information about his family. He

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<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that this is the only case when Aeschylus describes the decoration not of the attacker's shield, but of the defender's.

<sup>60</sup> Nagy (2000). P. 111-112.

<sup>61</sup> Poochigian (2007). P. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Herrmann (2013). P. 55.

answers her: “He claims to be Mycenaean; by Lerna’s<sup>63</sup> streams he dwells, the lord Hippomedon” (Eur. *Phoen.* 125-6). Hippomedon is as interesting to Antigone as Capaneus: “Significant here is the fact that Antigone draws attention to giants as they appear in paintings and does not merely liken Hippomedon to a giant to be conjured up in one’s imagination. The warrior is thus elevated to visual artifice as an indication of the threat he poses...”<sup>64</sup>. In this tragedy, Euripides says that Hippomedon approached the gates of Thebes “with this device in the middle of his shield: Argus the all-seeing dappled with eyes on the watch, some open with the rising stars, others hiding when they set” (Eur. *Phoen.* 1114-7). In *The Suppliants*, Euripides characterizes Hippomedon without mentioning his shield ornament: “...from his very boyhood he refrained from turning towards the allurements of the Muses, to lead a life of ease; his home was in the fields, and gladly would he school his nature to hardships with a view to manliness, always hastening to the chase, rejoicing in his steeds or straining his bow, because he would make his body useful to the city” (Eur. *Supp.* 882-8).

Aeschylus, unlike Euripides, does not mention any cosmic elements on Hippomedon’s shield. But ancient authors often associated Typhon with celestial bodies: stars, the sun, and the moon (Apolloed. *Bibl.* I.6.3). We might suggest that this shield could be qualified as a decorative shield if Typhon had been depicted, for example, with stars. Aeschylus indicates indirectly that Hippomedon’s shield is intimidating. The Scout says he shuddered in fear when he saw Hippomedon spinning his shield. June W. Allison suggests a dance metaphor in this description, referring, among other things, to “wedding on the Shield of Achilles young male dancers spin”<sup>65</sup>. However, this is not about the decoration of Hippomedon’s shield, but about his “military dance” with a shield that cannot be unequivocally attributed to terrible shields.

According to L. Micozzi, the description of Hippomedon’s shield as “flammeus orbis” in Statius (Stat. *Theb.* IV.132) reminds of “ἄλωος”

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<sup>63</sup> Reference to Hippomedon as one of the participants in the campaign against Thebes is present in Pausanias, who even mentioned the ruins of Hippomedon’s house in Lerna (*Paus.* II.36.8).

<sup>64</sup> O’Sullivan (2008). P. 186.

<sup>65</sup> Allison (2009). P. 142.

(Aesch. *Sept.* 489)<sup>66</sup>. According to A. Marinis, the ornament on this shield and the way Hippomedon handles it indicate that this attacker's military aggression is combined with maenadic rage. The Statian Hippomedon's shield "is central in a yet more profound sense: firstly, it represents an essentially (and generically) tragic story, best known from Aeschylus' Danaid trilogy: far from embodying a martial or heroic exploit, it betokens a treacherous criminal act"<sup>67</sup>.

The image of Typhon, the earth god, on Hippomedon's shield creates a sophisticated contrast with the mother earth, which Eteocles in his first patriotic speech called the teacher of the Thebans as shield-bearers. Eteocles notices this and raises the level of protection from the human to the divine level, inviting Hermes as a judge. Having dealt with the ornament on the terrible shield of Hippomedon, Eteocles continues to solve military riddles according to the scheme he has already tested.

#### PARTHENOPAEUS

The fifth attacker on Thebes is the young and haughty Parthenopaeus, who prepares to attack the Northern gates. Like many attackers on Thebes, he was a blood relative of Adrastus (see, for example: Apollod. *Bibl.* I.9.13). He also bears a terrible shield. From Parthenopaeus ("a warrior, half man, half boy", Aesch. *Sept.* 533), this gate is defended by a decisive Actor, who prefers not to boast, but to act. The Scout says that Parthenopaeus cares for his weapon more than for the gods and his own eyes, which again reflects the motive of moral blindness, when ambition is placed above virtue. Eteocles believes that Actor will not let the warrior who has Sphinx on his shield into the city, because Sphinx is a symbol of the past suffering of Thebes.

In *The Suppliants*, Euripides gives a lengthy characterization of Parthenopaeus, not mentioning his shield decoration: "Next behold the huntress Atalanta's son, Parthenopaeus, a youth of peerless beauty; from Arcady he came to the streams of Inachus, and in Argos spent his boyhood. There, when he grew up, first, as is the duty of strangers settled in another land, he showed no pique or jealousy against the state, became no quibbler,

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<sup>66</sup> Micozzi (2007). P. 146.

<sup>67</sup> Marinis (2015). P. 347.

chiefest source of annoyance citizen or stranger can give. But he took his stand amid the army, and fought for Argos as he were her own son, glad at heart whenever the city prospered, deeply grieved if ever reverses came. Although he had many lovers among men and women, yet he was careful to avoid offence” (Eur. *Supp.* 888-900). In Euripides’ tragedy *The Phoenician Women*, when Antigone asks about Parthenopaeus, the attendant calls him Atalanta’s son<sup>68</sup> (Eur. *Phoen.* 150). Further, Euripides speaks of the ornament on Parthenopaeus’ shield: “Parthenopaeus, son of the huntress, led a company bristling with thick rows of shields, and he had his own device in the centre of his shield: Atalanta slaying the Aetolian boar with an arrow shot from far” (Eur. *Phoen.* 1104-9). Aeschylus and Euripides introduce a very different ornament for Parthenopaeus’ shield. In Aeschylus, this ornament reflects a direct threat to Thebes, and in Euripides, an indirect one, since it indicates the strength of Parthenopaeus’ mother and, accordingly, of his own (Fig. 6. P. 165).

At the beginning of *The Thebaid*, Statius mentions that he was struck by poetic inspiration and wants to tell the reader the story of the campaign against Thebes, because such warriors as Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus and Capaneus participated and died in it (Stat. *Theb.* I.43-5). Further, characterizing Parthenopaeus, Statius also recalls his mother Atlantis and says that she would not have allowed her son to take part in this campaign. Then he writes, “his innocent shield adorned with his mother’s Calydonian battles” (Stat. *Theb.* IV.267-8). We should agree that “what distinguishes him is an “innocent” urge for battle, reflected in his shield”; it is as “innocent” as the one we see in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*. The Sphinx depicted by Aeschylus on Parthenopaeus’ shield is certainly a very aggressive ornament that Statius decided to borrow for Polyneices’ sword (Stat. *Theb.* IV.87).

The ornament on Parthenopaeus’ shield, like that of Tydeus, alludes to the story of the house of Laius, that is, it is addressed directly to Eteocles. But Eteocles does not consider Parthenopaeus’ terrible shield as something extraordinary. For him, it is just one of the riddles, the search for the solution to which has become a usual practice.

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<sup>68</sup> In Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, Parthenopaeus, as the son of Atalanta, receives the most extended characteristic (in comparison with descriptions of the other attackers) (Soph. *OC.* 1320-22).

AMPHIARAUS

The sixth warrior, preparing to attack the Homoloid gates, is the wise, decent and pious Amphiaraus, who, by the will of fate, found himself on the same side as the enemies. There are no images on his shield (“No symbol was fixed to his shield’s circle”, Aesch. *Sept.* 589-90), which would have allowed Eteocles to call Amphiaraus an arrogant man like he labeled the other attackers on Thebes. Eteocles can only simplify his task by making “Amphiaraos guilty by association”<sup>69</sup>.

In *The Phoenician Women*, when Antigone asks her attendant about Amphiaraus, she is surprised at his ability to control horses, not armour. Further, the Scout says that the clairvoyant’s shield is not decorated with an emblem: “...he had no boastful sign, but weapons chastely plain” (Eur. *Phoen.* 111-2). Thus, Amphiaraus’ shield is a rare exception, since Aeschylus and Euripides are similar in their descriptions: “For he does not wish to appear the bravest, but to be the bravest, as he harvests the fruit of his mind’s deep furrow, where his careful resolutions grow” (Aesch. *Sept.* 591-4). Although his shield clearly indicates the impeccable nature of Amphiaraus, this simplicity can be interpreted not only as the disconnect of Amphiaraus from the other attackers on Thebes, but also from himself. According to June W. Allison, this simplicity in the absence of an emblem on Amphiaraus’ shield is a complex matter: he was able to do without what others could not by decorating their shields<sup>70</sup>.

Amphiaraus’ shield cannot be qualified either as a terrible shield (although emptiness can also be scary), or a decorative shield (though emptiness is not so simple and gives rise to many complex associations). Aeschylean Amphiaraus is probably the one who does not need a shield at all, since he already knows the outcome of the battle for everyone and himself. That’s why “he does not need either the mask of terror which would disguise his helplessness, or the mask of virtue which would disguise his desires”<sup>71</sup>.

When the Scout characterizes Amphiaraus, he indicates that he continues to instruct and predict: standing in front of the Theban gates, he condemns Tydeus and blames Polyneices for his desire to destroy his

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<sup>69</sup> Herington (2009). P. 121.

<sup>70</sup> Allison (2009). P. 144.

<sup>71</sup> Bacon (1964). P. 27.

native city. The prophecy given by Amphiaraus in his speech to Polyneices is another riddle for Eteocles, who has no choice but to call the wise prophet a stupid blind man. The wise man is confronted by Lasthenes, who does not love strangers: "He has the wisdom of an old man, but his body is at its prime" (Aesch. *Sept.* 622). Lasthenes is supported only by the hope that he will change his mind and not get into the battle, having seen the defeat due to his vision of a prophet. Further events will show that the amazing death of Amphiaraus, who was swallowed by the earth, turned out to be unrelated to Lasthenes. In *The Suppliants*, when Euripides praises each of the attackers on Thebes, Adrastus speaks of Amphiaraus and his death: "As for the noble son of Oecleus, him, while yet he lived, the gods snatched away to the bowels of the earth, and his chariot too, manifestly blessing him" (Eur. *Supp.* 925-7).

Homer writes about Amphiaraus in *The Odyssey*: "...Oicles Amphiaraus, the rouser of the host, whom Zeus, who bears the aegis, and Apollo heartily loved with all manner of love. Yet he did not reach the threshold of old age, but died in Thebe, because of a woman's gifts. To him were born sons, Alcmaeon and Amphilocheus" (Hom. *Od.* XV.244-8). According to one version, Alcmaeon<sup>72</sup> led the second campaign against Thebes to kill his mother Eriphyle in order to avenge his father's death. In Pindar, the features of Alcmaeon's shield are presented through a direct speech of Amphiaraus, which draws a parallel with Aeschylus's descriptions in *Seven against Thebes*<sup>73</sup>: "By nature the genuine spirit of the fathers is conspicuous in the sons. I clearly see Alcmaeon, wielding a dappled serpent on his blazing shield, the first at the gates of Cadmus" (Pind. *Pyth.* 8.44-47). According to Margaret Foster, "shield, then, can be understood as symbolizing the hero's assumption of his father's military prowess, while the image of the snake upon it highlights his inherited mantic abilities"<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Sophocles devoted to the history of Amphiaraus' family three no longer extant tragedies (in addition to the *Epigones* tragedy, where Alcmaeon was to play an important role): *Amphiaraus*, *Eriphyle* and *Alcmaeon*. Diodorus of Sicily, describing the campaign on Thebes and the epigones' campaign on Thebes, devotes most of the story to Amphiaraus and Alcmaeon, respectively (Diod. Sic. IV.65-66).

<sup>73</sup> Nagy (2000). P. 102.

<sup>74</sup> Foster (2017). P. 157.

Statius, wishing to preserve the Aeschylean logic of depicting the piety of Amphiaraus, indicates that Apollo accompanies Amphiaraus during the battle and even “his shield too and his helm he sets afire with starry splendours” (Stat. *Theb.* VII.694-5). Statius describes the ornament on Amphiaraus’ shield as follows: “...far seen he stands, conspicuous and terrible with stern spear, and flashes the conquered Python on his shield” (Stat. *Theb.* IV.221-2). In this description, the semantic emphasis is not on the shield, but on the warrior: “Though brightly shining, the shield is denied any autonomous standing... Meanwhile, the notion of plain martial valor is equally a trait of Amphiaraus’ Arcadian soldiers, who are nurtured by Pan and possess a *nuda uirtus* (“naked valor,” 4.229)”<sup>75</sup>.

Thus, the shield of Amphiaraus is a non-standard riddle for Eteocles, who is used to deciphering the ornaments on the shields. Amphiaraus is Apollo’s servant, who once warned Laius about his fate. All this is well known to Eteocles, who is faced not just with another military riddle, but with a warning about his own fate, which he, like Laius, does not want to accept.

#### POLYNEICES

The last attacker on the seventh gates is Eteocles’ brother, eager to proclaim himself the new king. The king of Thebes himself will confront his own brother, because he is eager to protect his city and his family honour (Fig. 7. P. 166).

After the Scout tells Eteocles that the seventh attacker on Thebes is Polyneices, he characterizes him and describes his armour as follows: “He holds a shield, a perfect circle, newly-made, with a double symbol cleverly fastened on it: a woman modestly walking in the fore leads a man in arms made, it appears, of hammered gold. She claims to be Justice, as the lettering indicates, “I will bring this man back and he will have his city and move freely in his father’s halls” (Aesch. *Sept.* 642-8). Summing up all this, the Scout adds that Polyneices is an enemy who will not shun acting in a fraudulent way, i.e. Dike (Δίκη) cannot accompany him. Eteocles blows up after these words: “As for him whose name

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<sup>75</sup> *Marinis* (2015). P. 352.

is so very fitting, Polyneices, we shall know soon enough what the symbol on his shield will accomplish, whether the babbling letters shaped in gold on his shield, together with his mind's wanderings, will bring him back" (Aesch. *Sept.* 659-61). As in the case of the decorative shield of Eteoclus, the king of Thebes wants not so much to interpret the ornament on Polyneices' shield as to snipe at it.

G. Nagy writes that the man and woman on Polyneices' shield can be interpreted as an anonymous man and anonymous woman<sup>76</sup>, not Polyneices and Dike. If they are still Polyneices and Dike, then the decoration of this shield can remind us of Tydeus, against whom Eteocles sent Melanippus, a blood relative of Dike. The question arises: if Dike has already taken the side of the defenders, how can she be on the side of the attackers at the same time ("unless she is to play some impartial role, and deal with the claims of both sides as being equal"<sup>77</sup>). Eteocles ignores the demand for equality, which Polyneices speaks about while explaining his motives. There are two possible options for Polyneices: to die with Eteocles in battle or force him to return his reign. It seems that Polyneices does not see the third option — to kill his brother and capture Thebes. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Polyneices explains why he needed to recruit an army and attack Thebes: though Eteocles was able to exile Polyneices, "he had neither defeated me by an argument of law" (Soph. *OC.* 1297). In Aeschylus, the episode of the confrontation between the brothers recalls the final fragment from the *Odyssey*, where everyone knows that all further hostilities will not be in the interest of justice, but someone else is needed to prevent them. In Homer, Athena appears with a shield "in the likeness of Mentor both in form and in voice" (Hom. *Od.* XXIV. 531-37), and in Aeschylus, it is Amphiaraus, who cannot cope with the role of the judge and mentor.

George Henry Chase, comparing the Aeschylean description of the decorations of the attackers' shields with archaeological evidence, believes that the decor on Polyneices' shield is an innovation that has no analogues, and it should be considered as Aeschylean dramatization of the quarrel between the brothers<sup>78</sup>. In our opinion, all the images on the

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<sup>76</sup> Nagy (2000). P. 117.

<sup>77</sup> Herington (2009). P. 120.

<sup>78</sup> Chase (1902). P. 69.

attackers' shields serve to dramatize the events. Eteocles equally "recognizes the shields as masks of terror, mere appearances, without real power to harm"<sup>79</sup>, but Polyneices' "mask" causes a deeper emotional reaction. Since Amphiarus has already given a prophecy that Dike cannot be on the side of the attackers (Aesch. *Sept.* 580-6), Eteocles wants to interpret the ornament on Polyneices' shield as a mask of pseudo-virtue.

In *The Phoenician Women*, when Antigone sees Polyneices, she admires his armour, but says nothing about the shield: "How distinguished he is with his golden weapons, old man, flashing like the morning rays!" (Eur. *Phoen.* 168-169). The Scout further states the following: "... upon his shield for a device were the colts of Potniae galloping at frantic speed, revolving by some clever contrivance on pivots by the handle, so as to appear distraught" (Eur. *Phoen.* 1124-7). Here we again see the difference between the shield decorations described by Aeschylus and Euripides. In *The Suppliants*, Euripidean Adrastus gives a rather spare positive characteristic of Polyneices: "... while I myself may truthfully tell the praises of the son of Oedipus, that is, Polyneices" (Eur. *Supp.* 928-9). As usual, there is no indication of the shield decoration, but the characteristic itself is unusual: Adrastus says nothing about the military prowess of Polyneices.

In Seneca's *Phoenissae*, Polyneices' shield first prevents him from hugging Jocasta (Sen. *Phoen.* 469-71), and then acts as a reliable defense against Eteocles (Sen. *Phoen.* 482-3). However, no description of the shield decoration is provided. In the fourth book of *The Thebaid*, where Statius gives a description of the attackers' shields, he only mentions that Polyneices has the same armour (Fig. 3. P. 162)<sup>80</sup> he used that night when he fought with Tydeus (Stat. *Theb.* IV. 84-7). Further, when Antigone asks Polyneices to reconsider his desire to attack Thebes, a short description of Polyneices' shield appears without mentioning its ornament: "his royal helm and the purple trappings of his charger, and his buckler's glancing gold — though he himself was not meanly armed, and his cloak shone with no common luster" (Stat. *Theb.* XI.397-401). After

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<sup>79</sup> Bacon (1964). P. 27.

<sup>80</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus, describing this episode, indicates that the lion's head was depicted on the shield of Polyneices (Apollod. *Bibl.* III.6.1).

the battle, when the brothers are buried in the same funeral pyre, Antigone recognizes the shield of Polyneices in the flame: "I recognize the broken buckler and the charred sword-belt, ay, it was his brother!" (Stat. *Theb.* XII.439-40). In both cases, Statius uses the same word "*clipeus*" (he uses this word to describe the shields of all the attackers on Thebes). In Statius, military prowess is a distinctive feature of the Argive warriors, and Polyneices looks so virtuous that the sphinx is now engraved on his sword, and not on Parthenopeus' shield. It seems that Statius particularly sympathizes with Polyneices, especially when he says that the Thebans under the command of Eteocles are preparing for the battle: "None rush to draw the sword, or take pleasure in covering their shoulders with their father's shield..." (Stat. *Theb.* IV. 349-50).

Thus, the terrible shield of Polyneices is a special military riddle for Eteocles, since not anyone, but he himself must confront this threat. After the riddles come to an end, with Polyneices' shield being the last of them, the reader / spectator of Aeschylus' tragedy inevitably asks the question: Was Eteocles able to solve them or was he just trying to? A precedent of solving riddles successfully occurred in the history of the house of Laius once: Oedipus did it. Having solved the Sphinx' riddle, he saved his own life and the lives of the Thebans. Eteocles, evidently, failed to solve the riddles, since he died in a combat with Polyneices and could not save the lives of the Thebans who defended the city.

THE PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION  
OF THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WARRIORS  
(*THE VERSIONS OF AESCHYLUS, EURIPIDES AND STATIUS*)

In the tragedy *Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus created an elaborate system of terrible and decorative shields (Fig. 8. P. 167)<sup>81</sup>, as well as shields that cannot be categorized as either terrible or decorative. By mentioning the shields, Aeschylus managed to indicate that: 1) Eteocles builds the city defense relying on an educational conception that can be called "either with it, or upon it", 2) he tests it in a "shield scene", having

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<sup>81</sup> The original visualization of this system is presented in the illustration to the Russian translation of the tragedies by Aeschylus, whose artistic editor was L.I. Orlova (Moscow, 1978).

previously established himself as a king-mentor for the townspeople, 3) Eteocles deciphers the decor on the shields of the attacking warriors as military riddles, which allows us to assume that the shields of all the attackers on Thebes in the tragedy form a single mixed shield, similar in decoration to the shield of Achilles, where there was a place for heavenly bodies, animals, people, and whole cities. If we indulge in fantasies for a while, we can imagine that this “mixed shield” is based on Amphiarasus’ shield, in the center of which is the ornament of the decorative shields of Tydeus and Hippomedon (?). Circle-wise are the ornaments of the shields of all the other warriors attacking Thebes, whose shields we categorized as terrible shields. But, of course, this is only my authorly imagination.

Aeschylus emphasizes the behavior, character and uniform of the warriors and, in particular, the attackers’ shields that depict something defying the gods. The defenders of the city, on the contrary, are presented as respecting customs and gods, and therefore justice is on their side. According to Mark Griffith, “the shield symbols described in the Scout’s and Eteocles’ speeches seem pretty conclusive as to the greater degree of justice and divine approval belonging to the defenders of the city”<sup>82</sup>, which I cannot agree with. In my opinion, the “shield scene” serves not only to create “moral contrasts between the hybridic devices on the shields of the Argives”<sup>83</sup>. *Seven against Thebes* cannot simply be defined as a tragedy where the opposition of the smart and the noble to the stupid and the misguided is demonstrated. Not only does Aeschylus want the reader / spectator to understand how important it is to be on the right side in wartime conditions. In my opinion, Aeschylus’ instructions are reduced to the following: the best way the king can take care of the city is to raise worthy citizens so that they could resist the unworthy ones, if necessary. Citizens, according to Aeschylus, are the children of the city, who at the right time should understand that they have been raised as shield-bearers.

The significance that Euripides attaches to the description of the decoration of the attackers’ shields in *The Phoenician Women* and the characteristics that he gives them in *The Suppliants* allow us to talk about

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<sup>82</sup> Griffith (2017). P. 114.

<sup>83</sup> Beck (1975). P.180.

his desire to present his vision of the pedagogical dimension of the story about the siege of Thebes. In *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides the following aspect is clearly shown: despite the fact that Eteocles counts upon the defense of the city, and Polyneices — upon its destruction, both brothers want to use the city for their own purposes. While Aeschylus wants to instruct the reader / spectator using the images of the defenders, Euripides shows in *The Suppliants* that the images of the attackers can also be educational examples. When Adrastus finishes praising the attackers on Thebes for their military prowess and human qualities, he concludes that “noble nurture” is courage that can be taught and it is better when this education goes in a virtuous way (Eur. *Supp.* 909-17). I agree that “Euripides’ aim in the shield-narrative (Eur. *Phoen.* 1104-40) can be none other than to “dismantle” the Aeschylean sequence of shield-descriptions at the central scene of the Redepaare (Aesch. *Sept.* 375-676), to effectively annul the relation between signifier and signified”<sup>84</sup>.

The same goal is pursued by Statius who draws inspiration from Aeschylus, but offers his pedagogical dimension for this story. When Statius describes in detail each of the attacking warriors under the command of Adrastus, he gives them a moral characterization that is not negative like Aeschylus’. In Statius, the description of the warriors and the decoration of their shields have a completely different pedagogical dimension than that of Aeschylus: the goal is not to show the moral flaws of the attackers on Thebes, thereby anticipating their defeat, but rather, on the contrary, demonstrate their strength that will fail to defeat the other strength by a fluke of providence. Aeschylean *Seven against Thebes* inspired not only Euripides and Statius, but it was they who managed to create two alternatives that help to see the shield as pedagogical tool in Aeschylean *Seven against Thebes* and the multidimensionality of his “shield scene”.

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<sup>84</sup> *Marinis* (2015). P.344.

TABLE 1

SOME VARIANTS IN THE SEQUENCES OF THE ATTACKERS  
ON THEBES IN LITERARY TRADITION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Aesch. Sept.	Tydeus (+)	Capaneus (+)	Eteoclus (+)	Hippomedon (+)	Parthenopaeus (+)	Amphiararus (+)	Polynceus (+)	
Eur. Supp.	Adrastus (-)	Capaneus (-)	Eteoclus (-)	Hippomedon (-)	Parthenopaeus (-)	Tydeus (-)	Amphiararus (-)	Polynceus (-)
Eur. Phoen.								
180-182 <sup>2</sup>	Hippomedon (+)	Tydeus (+)	Parthenopaeus (+)	Polynceus (+)	Adrastus (+)	Amphiararus (+)	Capaneus (+)	
1090-1141	Parthenopaeus (+)	Amphiararus (+)	Hippomedon (+)	Tydeus (+)	Polynceus (+)	Capaneus (+)	Adrastus (+)	
Soph. OC.	Amphiararus (-)	Tydeus (-)	Eteoclus (-)	Hippomedon (-)	Capaneus (-)	Parthenopaeus (-)	Polynceus (-)	
Diod. Sic.	Adrastus (-)	Polynceus (-)	Tydeus (-)	Amphiararus (-)	Capaneus (-)	Hippomedon (-)	Parthenopaeus (-)	
Stat. Theb.	Adrastus (-)	Polynceus (-)	Tydeus (+)	Hippomedon (+)	Capaneus (+)	Amphiararus (+)	Parthenopaeus (+)	
Apollod. Bibl.	Adrastus (-)	Capaneus (-)	Amphiararus (-)	Hippomedon (-)	Polynceus (+)	Parthenopaeus (-)	Tydeus (+)	
Hyg.	Adrastus (-)	Polynceus (-)	Tydeus (-)	Amphiararus (-)	Capaneus (-)	Hippomedon (-)	Parthenopaeus (-)	

<sup>1</sup> Seneca maintains the same version in *Phoenissae*: Adrastus initiates a campaign against Thebes consisting of seven military commanders, including Polyneices, but does not represent the sequence of warriors.

<sup>2</sup> Here, the decoration of the shields is important for Euripides, although it is invisible to the reader, if we take into account the following dialogue (Eur. *Phoen.*142-4): — Antigone: How do you know them so clearly, old man? — Old servant: I saw and learned the devices on their shields before, when I went with the terms of the truce to your brother, since I looked closely at them, I know the armed men.

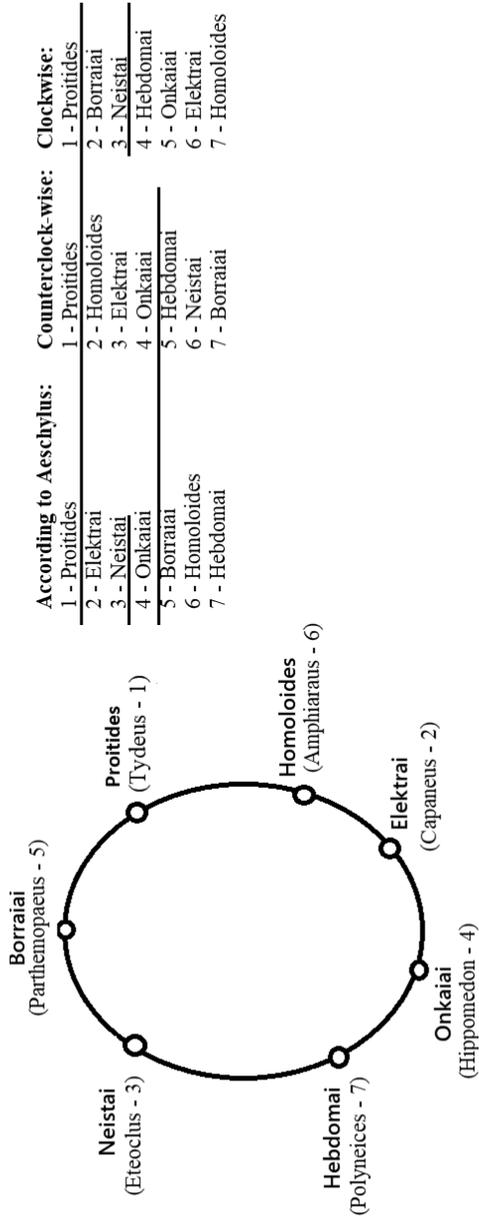


Fig. 1a.

The sequence of mentioning the gates by Aeschylus and the location of the city gates.



Fig. 1.

Seven against Thebes or the Trojan War,  
Red-Figure Kylix, about 500 B.C.

*Source:* <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/10886/apollodoros-red-figure-kylix-greek-attic-about-500-bc/> (August, 2020). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Object Number: 84.AE.38. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.



Fig. 2.

Shield of Achilles: Reproduction in gold by Philip Rundell.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flaxman\\_shield\\_of\\_achilles\\_cc0\\_pub\\_dom\\_photo\\_by\\_Thad\\_Zajdowicz\\_flickr\\_thadz\\_31680177383\\_a12794660a\\_o.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flaxman_shield_of_achilles_cc0_pub_dom_photo_by_Thad_Zajdowicz_flickr_thadz_31680177383_a12794660a_o.jpg) (August, 2020). Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. Wikimedia Commons / Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.



Fig. 3.

Argeia and Deïpyle watching the duel of Polyneices and Tydeus (presumably), amphora, 460–440, ID: 2538.

Source: <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/080e-73c769f41df6a-8> (August, 2020). Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. © Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel.

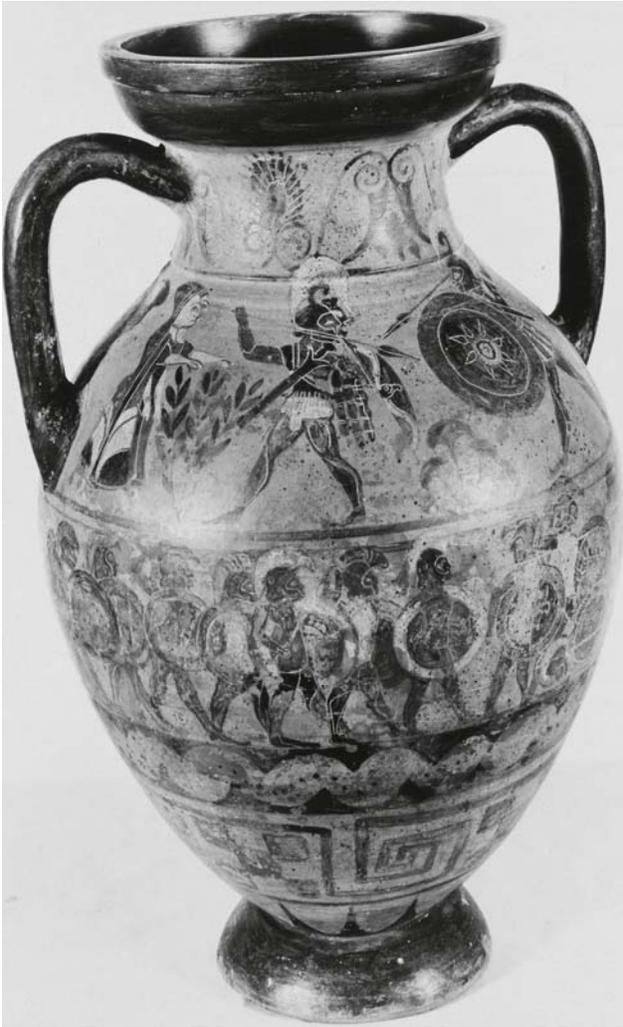


Fig. 4.

Tydeus, Hippomedon, Parthenopeus.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tydeus,\\_Hippomedon,\\_Parthenopeus.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tydeus,_Hippomedon,_Parthenopeus.JPG) (August, 2020). Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. Wikimedia Commons / Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.



Fig. 5.

Scene from *The Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus: Capaneus scales the city walls to overthrow King Creon who looks down from the battlements. Campanian red-figure neck-amphora, ca. 340-330 BC. The J. Paul Getty Museum. Object number: 92.AE.86.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seven\\_against\\_Thebes\\_Getty\\_Villa\\_92.AE.86.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seven_against_Thebes_Getty_Villa_92.AE.86.jpg) (August, 2020). Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. Wikimedia Commons /Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported, 2.5 Generic, 2.0 Generic and 1.0 Generic license.



Fig. 6.

Five of the seven against Thebes during a meeting: in front are Parthenopaios, Amphiaros and Polyneices, behind them are Adrastus and Tydeus, gem, 500–475, ID: 2539.

*Source:* <http://ark.dasch.swiss/ark:/72163/080e-73c76d9d0e52f-7> (August, 2020). Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung.



Fig. 7.

Scene of the combat of Eteocles and Polyneices,  
Terracotta sarcophagus, 1stC.

*Source:* [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details/collection\\_image\\_gallery.aspx?assetId=681425001&objectId=673012&partId=1](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=681425001&objectId=673012&partId=1) (August, 2020) British Museum Collection Database. “1856,1226.542”. — [www.britishmuseum.org/collection](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection), British Museum, last modified 11/03/2020. Online. Accessed 11/03/2020. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.



Fig. 8.

Illustrations to the Russian translation of Aeschylus's tragedy  
"Seven against Thebes".

*Source:* scan of the author from the publication: Эсхил. Трагедии.  
М.: Искусство, 1978 (Jeshil. Tragedii. M.: Iskusstvo, 1978).

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