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INHALT DES 120. BANDES, HEFT 4

JOHN HEATH, The Legacy of Peleus. Death and Divine Gifts in the Iliad 387
H. W. SINGOR, The Achaean Wall and the Seven Gates of Thebes 401
H. AKBAR KHAN, Text, Context and Interpretation in Euripides Hipp. 278-281 412
SHLOMO BERGER, Seven Cities in Sicily: Thuk. 6.20.2-3 421
JOHANNES ENGELS, Zur Entwicklung der attischen Demokratie in der Ära des Eubulos und des Lykurg (355-322 v. Chr.) und zu Auswirkungen der Binnenwanderung von Bürgern innerhalb Attikas 425
IAN MCDOUGALL, The Reputation of Appius Claudius Pulcher, Cos. 143 BC 452
BERNHARD TÖNNIES, Die Ausgrabungen in Kalkriese und Tac. ann. 1,60,3. Eine Lösung für die Varusschlachtfrage in Sicht? 461
D. WARDLE, Cluvius Rufus and Suetonius 466
JENS HOLZHAUSEN, Natur und Gottes Wille im hermetischen Traktat 'Poimandres' . . 483
KARLA POLLMANN, Der sogenannte Heptateuchdichter und die 'Alethia' des Claudius Marius Victorius 490

MISZELLEN

JOHN DAVIDSON, Sophocles, Antigone 1226-30 Revisited 502
DAVID A. TRAILL, Ovid, Tristia 2. 8, 296, and 507: Happier Solutions 504

THE ACHAEAN WALL AND THE SEVEN GATES OF THEBES*

In book H of the 'Iliad' Nestor advises the Greeks to raise a burial mound for the fallen and to build a defensive wall to protect both that mound and the Achaean ships (H 336–54). The wall should be provided with high towers (πύργοι ὑψηλοί, l. 338) and with gates (πύλαι, l. 339) therein of sufficient width to let chariots ride through (l. 340). In addition a moat should be dug on the outside of the wall. The Greeks gladly follow all this advise and thus in a short time the wall with gates and towers arises (H 436–41).

That this Achaean Wall, as it came to be known, should have been built not before the tenth year of the siege, is one of those strange features of the plot of our 'Iliad' which have called for comment ever since antiquity. A famous passage of Thucydides has even complicated the problem. The historian could be understood to say that the Greeks built a defensive wall around their camp immediately after landing in the Troad, thereby contradicting or quietly correcting the words of the Poet (I 11,1). But it is equally possible, and to my mind preferable, to read the text of Thucydides as saying that the Greeks immediately after landing must have won a great victory, since they did not care to build a defensive wall – that they did only much later¹. But whatever may have been Thucydides' opinion on this matter, in the 'Iliad' the wall is raised far into the war and precisely on the eve of the great Trojan offensive that will bring the Greeks, in accordance with the will of almighty Zeus, on the brink of utter destruction.

* This is a slightly revised version of a lecture held in honour of Professor C. J. RUIJGH for his 60th birthday, at Amsterdam University, June 21st 1991.

¹ See J. A. DAVISON, Thucydides, Homer and the »Achaean Wall«, Gr. Rom. Byz. Stud. 6 (1965) 5–28, esp. 13, following the reading ἀνετείχισαντο (instead of ἄν ἐτείχισαντο proposed by R. M. COOK, Thucydides I 11,1, Proc. C. Phil. Soc. 3 (1954/5) 3 in rejection of an older emendation οὐκ ἄν (ἔτει λ') ἐτείχισαντο by D. S. ROBERTSON, Thucydides and the Great Wall at Troy, Cl. Rev. 38 (1924) 7. For an exhausting discussion of the whole problem, ending in a solution more or less similar to the one proposed by COOK and DAVISON, see E. DOLIN, Thucydides on the Trojan War: a critique of the text of I 11,13, Harv. Stud. 87 (1983) 119–149. The drastic solution by D. L. PAGE, History and the Homeric Iliad (Berkeley 1959) 315 ff. to explain the building of the wall in Il. H as an Attic interpolation dating from the 4th century B. C. has rightly been refuted by M. L. WEST, The Achaean Wall, Cl. Rev. n.s. 19 (1969) 255–260, as well as (with different arguments) by O. TSAGARAKIS, The Achaean Wall and the Homeric Question, Hermes 97 (1969) 129–135.

Already in book Θ but especially in books M, N and Ξ the besiegers have become themselves the besieged. It is a strange fact that the real *τειχομαχία* or fighting on and around the walls in the 'Iliad' does not take place at the walls of Troy but at those of the Achaean camp. The story of the war has changed its perspective and instead of the Trojans the Greeks have become the beleaguered party. In the picture of events presented by the 'Iliad' the Achaean Wall therefore looms large.

But there is more to it. Both the building of the Achaean Wall and its ultimate destruction have the air of myth about them. The gods, so the Poet tells us, were highly angered by the insolence of the Greeks to raise without due sacrifices for the immortals a monument that threatened to surpass in fame the walls of Troy that had been built by Poseidon and Apollo (H 443–63). Poseidon especially, otherwise a friend of the Greeks and a bitter enemy of the Trojans, is furious and worries about his future fame. Zeus has to reassure him and promises that after the fall of Troy he will have his way with the Achaean Wall, being free to destroy it totally and to let it disappear into the sea without a trace. That future catastrophe is described in a sort of preview of events after the war in book M (3–35). Poseidon and Apollo, the builders of the by then ruined walls of Troy, send rivers down the plain aided by Zeus who lets it rain for nine days on end: the combined waters sweep the Achaean bulwark forth and down into the sea. Unmistakable here the flavour of Near-Eastern mythology: the envy and anxiety of the gods in counsel, worried about the deeds of men; the theme of the proud and provocative building destined like the Tower of Babylon to bring ruin to its mortal makers; the theme of the Great Flood that was to wipe out the race of men².

But let us return for the moment to the Greek Wall while it still stood. It had gates wide enough for chariots, so it is said (H 339–40; 438–9). How many gates? Already the scholiasts asked that question – and answered it variously. A minority opinion stated that the gates must have been seven in number and that the epithet of the gates: *πύλας εὔ ἀραρυίας* (H 339; 439) actually should be read as *πύλας (. . .) ἔπτ' ἀραρυίας*³. But the opinion of Aristarchus prevailed. According to him and the majority of commentators the wall had only one *πύλη ἱππήλατος* in addition to an unknown number of smaller gates not suitable for chariots⁴. Yet the

² See esp. R. SCODEL, *The Achaean Wall and the myth of destruction*, *Harv. Stud.* 86 (1982) 33–50; for the general theme of Near-Eastern influence on Greek civilization and especially on myth and saga, see now also W. BURKERT, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*, S. B. Heidelberg Phil.-hist. Kl. 1984, 1.

³ Schol. A ad H 339 (ERBSE); Eustathius 689 ad II. 438 (VAN DER VALK).

⁴ Schol. bT ad H 339; schol. T ad M 175–181; schol. A ad M 340 (ERBSE); Eustathius 684 ad H 339; 689 ad H 438 (VAN DER VALK). Aristarchus seems to have argued from the lines in M 119–20 with the words *ἐκ πεδίου* athetized or in any case ignored, interpreting the passage as describing one gateway for chariots 'on the left side' of the ships (Schol. bT H 339). In fact the lines in question only suggest a gate for chariots 'on the left' that at the time of the Trojan attack was being

anonymous scholars who had deduced a total of seven gates were undoubtedly right – as can be demonstrated easily.

In book I of the 'Iliad' Agamemnon appoints commanders charged with guarding the gates in the Achaean Wall: seven names are mentioned, followed by the words: ἔπτ' ἔσαν ἡγεμόνες φυλάκων (I 80–8). Each of these seven commanded a hundred men. Later, in book K the guards are inspected during the night. They appear to be posted in front of the gates (K 55–9; 97–9; 126–7), in other words in the open space before the wall (K 180–189), and Nestor can speak to them before crossing the moat (K 190–4). The seven guard-posts correspond clearly with seven gates in the wall. Consequently the Achaean Wall should be imagined as a wall with seven gates.

It is this connection with the protecting wall that also explains why the guards can be called »holy«: φυλάκων ἱερὸν τέλος (K 56). It is not necessary to look for possible affiliations with »sacred« or »devoted« warriors, such as the famous ἱερὸς λόχος of classical Thebes. Instead, the epithet ἱερὸς can be sufficiently explained by the guardians' »sacred« duty of protecting the wall, i.e. of keeping intact the life-sustaining boundary between the city or the camp – the Achaean camp now has become a city of some sorts – and the hostile world outside. For the same reason the Trojan gatekeepers are called »holy« too: ἱεροὶ πυλαῶροί (Ω 681). Their sacred character stands in direct relation to the sacred nature of the wall itself and is, so to speak, derived from it. The citywall of Troy and the Achaean Wall of the camp are in themselves »holy« because on them depend the lives of the communities in their respective enclosures. Therefore the walls of Boiotian Thebes are called »holy« (Δ 378). Therefore also the city itself in its physical appearance as a fortified city, capable of protecting its people, is »holy«. That is the reason why so many places in the epic, and especially »well-walled Troy« itself, so often have the epithet ἱερὸς: by providing safety from the perils of the outside world they are the precondition of any communal life⁵.

The seven gates of the Achaean Wall, placed in seven πύργοι or »towers«, may very well have influenced the shaping of that strange story, already referred to, of the wall's final destruction. When Poseidon and Apollo force the streams to wash away this monument of hybris we find a catalogue of eight rivernames (M 20–2). But the second in the list is called Ἑπτάπορος, i.e. »Seven-Stream«. The catalogue itself and the mention of ἡμίθεοι (M 23) remind us strongly of

used by the retreating Greeks to reach the shelter of their camps. There is no hint that this gate was the only one.

⁵ For the view, in my opinion erroneous, that Troy is called »holy« because it is doomed or already consecrated to death, see for example E. VERMEULE, Aspects of death in early Greek art and poetry (Berkeley etc. 1979) 115. An enumeration of »holy« places in the Iliad: P. WÜLFING-v. MARTITZ, Hieros bei Homer und in den ältesten griechischen Literatur, Glotta 38 (1960) 272–307, espec. 278–88. The most comprehensive treatment of the subject now in S. SCULLY, Homer and the sacred city (Ithaca-London 1990) 16–40 and 137–140: every city qua walled city is 'holy' since the protecting wall marks off and guards the enclosed community from an hostile world outside.

Hesiod. Some borrowing from the 'Theogony' is not at all improbable⁶. Since the Ἑπτάπορος is already included in Hesiod's catalogue of rivers (Theog. 337 ff.) a two-way borrowing could solve the problem. At first the Trojan epic told of the destruction of the Achaean Wall with its seven towers and seven gates by a mighty 'Seven-Stream'. This Ἑπτάπορος was then taken up together with other rivers mentioned elsewhere in the epic by Hesiod in his 'Theogony'. At a second stage, curiosity demanded to know which streams exactly did the ruinous work. So a small new catalogue was created: all rivernames taken from Hesiod's 'Theogony', except one: Κάρησος. Perhaps the reason for this was the fact that Hesiod did not provide enough names of rivers in western Anatolia. A further consequence was that the original Ἑπτάπορος instead of dividing its waters into seven separate streams – or, as the words of M 24 suggest, emerging from the confluence of seven such streams – now figured as one among eight(!) different rivers. The borrowing, if borrowing there was, had not been done aptly⁷. But whatever may have been the relation between Homer and Hesiod on this point, the seven-gated wall of the Greeks remains in the imagery of the 'Iliad' a fact which requires some further consideration.

The Achaean Wall with its seven gates has one obvious parallel: Seven-gated Thebes. This similarity can not be explained by calling it fortuitous. A large part of the 'Iliad' is devoted to the battle for the wall, the camp, and even the ships of the Greeks. The besiegers, as I said before, have then become a beleaguered »city« themselves. The epic parallel of a battle on and around the walls of a besieged city, described from the perspective of and with a certain sympathy for the besieged, is clearly the war against Boiotian Thebes. Parts of »Theban epic«, probably not from the 'Thebais' but from the oral epic that must have preceded it in the manner that oral epic on the Trojan War preceded our Iliad, could quite easily have been borrowed or »transposed« to yield some material for the siege of the Greeks in their camp before Troy⁸. Moreover, there are no other examples of a seven-gated

⁶ Strictly speaking, on the level of oral poetry, i.e. before the texts of both the Iliad and the 'Theogony' became fixed, it would be misleading to speak of 'borrowing', since the whole of epic poetry formed, so to say, one 'corpus' in a state of flux, cf. M.L. WEST, Hesiod: Theogony (Oxford 1966) 260. See also SCODEL, op. cit. (supra n. 2) 34 ff.

⁷ For Ἑπτάπορος cf. L.-Sc.-J. s.v.; the 'seven-stream' could point to a river dividing itself into seven different arms at its delta like the Nile; the words in II. M 24 seem to envisage just the opposite, for there Apollo leads seven streams into one mouth. Of the rivers in M 22–4 Rhesos, Rhodios, and Karesos (apart from Heptaporos itself) are only mentioned here; all of them, except Karesos, figure in Hesiod's catalogue. The phenomenon of a typical number, here seven, requiring at some stage in the development of the epic an »explanation« in the form of a list of names and thus contributing to the epic's store of catalogues can be illustrated also at numerous catalogues of warriors (mostly numbering nine names), as I have tried to show, see H. W. SINGOR, Nine against Troy. On epic φάλαγγες, πρόμαχοι, and an old structure in the story of the Iliad, Mnemosyne 44 (1991) 17–62.

⁸ The idea of a reworking of Theban material into the epic of the Trojan War found some favour among adherents of the German analytical school in the first decennia of this century, see esp. D. MÜLDER, Die Ilias und ihre Quellen, Berlin 1910. One certainly does not have to agree with all or even most of the often fanciful »reconstructions« of the development of the epics produced by this line of thinking in order to accept the basic idea that such transposition of material was not only possible but even very likely, considering what we now know of the workings

wall or city in the Greek world, neither historical nor legendary. It may be assumed therefore that there must have been some connection between the epic images of Thebes and of the Achaean Wall.

The historical city of Thebes in Boiotia never had seven gates. Admittedly already in the Homeric epic it is called ἑπτάπυλος (Δ 406; λ 263), but that epithet only proves that the saga of the Seven against Thebes was known to the Poet (as appears from Δ 378; 406; E 804; Z 223; K 286), although not yet explicitly in the form of an expedition of seven (!) heroes against the city. It was the saga that created the image of a seven-gated city: ἑπτάπυλοι Θῆβαι, as in Pindaros and the tragedians. Aischylos and Euripides, Apollodoros and Statius even enumerate the seven gates by name. Pausanias goes one step further and claims to have seen them (9, 8, 4-7). However, since 290 B. C. Thebes had lost its citywall and the local guides some 400 years later can at the most have shown visitors the places where in their opinion the famous gates must have once stood⁹. The classical city that was destroyed by Alexander in 335 B.C. had in all probability three or four gates – the normal arrangement for Greek cities of the period. The Kadmeia, Thebes' acropolis, that in Mycenaean times and even later till far into the archaic age had been the only fortified part of the city, could never have had seven gates, but had probably one or two, in any case certainly not more than three entrances¹⁰. The seven gates of Thebes then are poetry instead of history. And so, of course, was the seven-gated wall of the Greeks.

What can have been the connection between these two images? That there must have been some borrowing from »Theban epic« at an early stage is in itself plausible. Yet the epithet ἑπτάπυλος is so exclusively Theban (already so in the 'Iliad') that a conscious adaptation of the image of the Boiotian city to that of the Achaean Wall seems hardly credible. Besides, it was not the beleaguered city itself, i. e. Troy, that was pictured as ἑπτάπυλος. The reason that not Troy but the Achaean camp was to some extent modeled after the image of a seven-gated city was in my opinion the fact that the whole episode of the battle around the Greek camp was

of oral poetry (cf. also n. 6 above). To point out exactly where such transpositions or transformations did occur is, of course, another matter.

⁹ For the literary sources on the legendary seven gates of Thebes the by now over a hundred years old article of U. v. WILAMOWITZ-MÖLLENDORFF, Die sieben Thore Thebens, *Hermes* 26 (1891) 191-242, is still highly useful. Against the naive interpretation of J. Brandis, Die Bedeutung der sieben Thore Thebens, *Hermes* 2 (1867) 259-284, according to whom historical Thebes, originating in a Phoenician foundation (Kadmos!), really had seven gates as symbols of the seven planets, v. WILAMOWITZ argued from the literary evidence and from the first archaeological surveys that the city could never have had that number of gates.

¹⁰ See A. SCHACHTER, The Theban wars, *Phoenix* 21 (1967) 1-10; F. H. STUBBINGS, The expansion of Mycenaean civilization, in: C. A. H. II, 2 (1975) 165-9; S. SYMEONOGLOU, Kadmeia I. Mycenaean finds from Thebes, Göteborg 1973; C. BRILLANTE, La leggenda tebane e l'archeologia, *Studi mic.* 52 (1980) 309-340.

probably a later development in the growth of the epic, when the image of Troy itself had already become more or less fixed. But also the idea that this wall was a work of hybris that was to be utterly destroyed by the gods afterwards can have played a part. This idea was certainly Near Eastern in origin – and so was, to my mind, the image of the seven-gated city itself. The myth of a huge seven-fold or seven-gated building destroyed by divine wrath traveled to Greece and influenced the local saga of the siege of Kadmeian Thebes. But the mythical element of the gods destroying the work of men became lost in the Theban saga, while the original provocative tower changed its physical aspect and became a citywall with seven gates. Thebes became seven-gated par excellence, but the same image was taken up by the 'Iliad' in its picture of the Achaean Wall together with an echo of the original myth of destruction by the gods. So the connection between Thebes and the Greek Wall in the 'Iliad' is a complicated one: the shape of the Greek building as a wall with seven gates owes much to the image of the city of Thebes, but the myth of its divine destruction together with the very idea of a provocative seven-fold building are ultimately derived from the Near East.

Before we try to trace this idea any further, already some preliminary conclusions should be drawn regarding the origins of the Theban legend. One of the main questions asked by scholars for a long time was whether the number of seven gates could have been derived from the number of seven heroes attacking the city, or, alternatively, whether that number of seven heroes might have owed its existence to the number of seven gates. Since neither historical records nor archaeological research could demonstrate the existence at some time of seven gates at Thebes, opinion has tended to favour the first of the two alternatives mentioned and to presume that in origin the band of seven heroes was the primary motive and the image of the seven gates the secondary one¹¹. This assumption can now be laid aside. The existence of seven gates in the Achaean Wall before Troy and, as we shall presently see in more detail, the derivation of the image of a seven-fold or seven-gated building from the Near East, have solved the question of priority. There can be no doubt that the notion of a seven-gated citywall came first; in the beginning there was *ἐπτάπυλοι Θῆβαι* and only at a further stage there entered the seven heroes, destined, in Aischylos' ver-

¹¹ V. WILAMOWITZ, *op. cit.* (above, n. 9) was in this respect 'neutral', holding that 'beide Zahlen gleich zu beurteilen sind. Ein und derselbe Willküract einer dichterischen Phantasie hat diese Zahlen geschaffen' (p. 228). But the primacy of the seven heroes above the seven gates is maintained by, e. g. E. BETHE, *Thebanische Heldenlieder* (Leipzig 1891) 63; E. HOWALD, *Die Sieben gegen Theben*, Zürich 1939; P. J. REIMER, *Zeven tegen Thebe. Prachelleense elementen in de Helleense traditie* (diss. Amsterdam 1953) 12–18; W. BURKERT, *Seven against Thebes: an oral tradition between Babylonian magic and Greek literature*, in: C. BRILLANTE *e. a.* (eds.), *I poemi epici rapsodici non omerici e la tradizione orale* (Padova 1981) 29–51, esp. 44 and 49; *idem*, *op. cit.* (above n. 2) 99–106.

sion, to attack one gate each. This means that all explanations of the saga that start from the seven attackers are no longer tenable. Of these I mention two.

In 1939 E. HOWALD in a lecture at the University of Zürich expounded the theory according to which the core of the saga of the Seven against Thebes originated in Mycenaean times. That core consisted of a mythical tale about the onslaught on the place by seven infernal demons serving Adrastus, who as *der Unentrinnbare* was essentially a god of the underworld. Only in post-Mycenaean times and in Ionia the epic singers had those seven demons transformed into human heroes, albeit heroes with some uncivilised and even savage traits¹². It goes without saying that all this was highly hypothetical. In the light of the now established priority of the seven gates over the seven attackers it should no longer be seriously considered.

More recently Professor W. BURKERT took up E. Howald's theory and combined it with material from the Near East¹³. In his view the origin of the saga could be ascribed to the arrival in late eighth-century Boiotia of a traveling priest or magician from Assyria or Babylonia. Assisting at the rebuilding of the city of Thebes or Ἐποθήβαι at the foot of the Kadmeia he pronounced his Akkadian incantations. These could have contained the Akkadian epic of Erra, known in five tablets from the period of the 9th to the 7th century B.C. and describing the actions of Erra, god of war and pestilence, and his seven demonic helpers who together nearly exterminated the whole of mankind. Or, better still, the anonymous Mesopotamian priest in Boiotian Thebes could have sung texts of the same contents as those known as Bit meseri, magical texts from Assyria dealing with a house protected by seven benevolent ghosts and attacked by seven malignant demons and mentioning also fighting twins, although their role is far from clear. In any case, according to Professor Burkert's theory, a Mesopotamian magical poem, recited to ensure the future safety of the new city, must on Greek soil have very soon been transformed into a saga of seven human foes attacking in vain a city defended in its turn by seven human heroes.

With all due respect I believe that this theory too can no longer be upheld. The seven gates of the Achaean wall point to the priority of the idea of the seven-gated city¹⁴. In the Theban saga the seven gates must have come first, and the attackers (and defenders) must have owed their number to them and not *vice versa*. This means that alternative theories aimed at explaining the saga from the seven-gated city as its starting point acquire more credibility. As already stated, the notion of a seven-gated or seven-fold building or city is otherwise not found in the Greek

¹² HOWALD, op. cit. (above n. 11).

¹³ BURKERT, *Seven against Thebes* (above n. 11) and *Die orientalisierende Epoche* (above n. 2) loc. cit.

¹⁴ BURKERT (1981) 49 wrongly maintains that the image of seven-gated Thebes has no parallel in the 'Iliad'; the Achaean Wall provides precisely such a parallel.

world, but originated in the Near East. It is there that we have to turn for some attempt at an explanation¹⁵.

Citywalls with seven gates are, as far as I know, hardly or not at all attested in the history of the Near-East¹⁶. But in Herodotus' description (I 98) Ecbatana has seven walls in concentric circles ascending in height from the outer to the innermost circle, and decked out in seven different colours. From afar Ecbatana must have resembled a huge ziggurat with seven platforms. In fact, what Herodotus described was a sort of ziggurat, for the houses of the inhabitants lay outside this building that was reserved for the king himself and probably for the gods¹⁷. Similarly, the big ziggurat at Borsippa near Babylon did have seven platforms in so many colours, traces of which have been detected by its excavator Henry Rawlinson. Possibly Herodotus' description of the temple of 'Bel' (Hdt I 181,3) at Babylon actually refers to this temple¹⁸. Likewise the famous sanctuary of Marduk at Babylon, Esagilla, enclosed a temple-tower of seven platforms called E-temen-an-ki, i.e. 'House of the foundations of Heaven and Earth'¹⁹. The ziggurat at Dûr-Sharrukin (Chorsabad) built by Sargon II also showed traces of at least three

¹⁵ As had been done already, albeit very naively, by BRANDIS, op. cit. (above n. 9); also P. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Kritische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Heldensage*, Rh. Mus. 69 (1914) 299-341, esp. 218-29, maintained the primacy of the idea of seven gates above that of seven heroes. A derivation of that idea from Mesopotamia was taken for granted by W. P. JACKSON KNIGHT, *Vergil. Epic and anthropology* (London 1967) 221. Also W. B. KRISTENSEN, 'Kringloop en totaliteit', *Mededelingen v. d. Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, 1938, posited the origin of the image of the seven gates in the Near East.

¹⁶ Neo-Assyrian Dûr-Sharrukin had seven highly fortified gates, according to G. ROUX, *Ancient Iraq* (Harmondsworth 1964) 285, but the town was built in a square, so the possibility of an as yet undetected eighth gate should not altogether be ruled out. Eight or four gates were at least normal in Near Eastern cities that had been laid out more or less circularly with eight or four main streets radiating from the centre: Parthian Darab, Sassanian Gur, or Bagdad - cf. J. RYKWEST and M. MILOJEVIĆ, *Cities*, in: M. ELIADE (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 3 (1987) 515-524, esp. 518.

¹⁷ Cf. RYKWEST-MILOJEVIĆ, op. cit. (above n. 16) 518; SCULLY, op. cit. (above n. 5) 156; According to Polybius (10, 27,6) the city of Ecbatana never had had any walls. Perhaps this should be taken to mean that the inhabited area around the ziggurat or citadel had never been enclosed.

¹⁸ Herodotus speaks of eight (!) πύργοι, on the highest of which stood the temple itself. But it is quite conceivable that either the eighth πύργος and the νηός had been confused in his account, or that Herodotus, observing the building from a certain distance, wrongly surmised that the lowest and biggest πύργος, hidden from his view by the wall around the sanctuary, consisted of two terraces. In any case, it is inherently likely that the ziggurat did not exceed the number of seven terraces. Since the temple of 'Bel' Marduk (*Esagila*) had been destroyed by Xerxes, it is most probable that Herodotus described the temple of 'Bel' Nebo in Borsippa on the other side of the river - see also W. W. HOW and J. WELLS, *A commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford 1928) ad loc.; further: K.-H. GOLZIO, *Der Tempel im alten Mesopotamien und seine Parallelen in Indien. Eine religionshistorische Studie* (Ztschr. Religions- u. Geistesgesch., Beiheft 25) (1983) 57.

¹⁹ GOLZIO, op. cit. (above n. 18) 56.

different colours²⁰. Yet one cannot say that the ziggurat in Mesopotamia had as a rule seven platforms. It is in fact not attested before the beginning of the first millennium B. C. and probably was always more or less exceptional, three or four platforms being the rule. But one could say that the seven-fold temple-tower represented *in optima forma* the ideal temple as an image of the cosmos. For the symbolism of these ziggurats is beyond reasonable doubt: it is the seven planets that are referred to, so that these buildings were meant to be images of the universe itself²¹. Through seven gates one ascended to the highest platform of the ziggurat or to the citadel of Ecbatana. Through seven gates the goddess Ishtar descended into the netherworld. For the realm of the dead could also be pictured as an image of the cosmos with its seven planets and 'gates'. Such ideas would live on tenaciously: one has only to mention here the representation of the seven-gated heavenly stairway of the soul in the 'klimax heptapylos' of the Mithraists, or the notions of the seven gates of hell in Jewish and Islamic traditions²².

One could even go further and knot a whole string of associations around the sevenfold wall, the realm of the dead and the cosmos – and this has, of course, been done²³. The associations flow easily: the netherworld both in Mesopotamia and in Egypt could be represented with seven gates; so seven-gated Thebes 'is' also a city of the dead (where in later traditions the Elysium could be located); as a seven-fold building it is again related to the labyrinth, which in its turn suggests the city of Troy; the ritual walk of the pharaoh around his city of the dead at Memphis evokes Theseus' walk with two times seven children in the labyrinth and also the seven-fold march of the Israelites around the walls of Jericho, that again as city of the moon must have had its association with the underworld, etc., etc. Here too the connection between the Achaean Wall and seven-gated Thebes can provide some elucidation. For whatever one may think of all the associations concerning labyrinthine walls and the underworld, the Greek camp before Troy certainly was no 'city of the dead'²⁴. The representation of the Achaean Wall with seven gates is closely

²⁰ GOLZIO, *op. cit.* 57; ROUX, *op. cit.* (above, n. 16) 285, speaks of a temple-tower with seven platforms.

²¹ GOLZIO, 53 ff.; for the sacredness of the Near Eastern city in general also SCULLY, 141–157.

²² For the magico-religious significance of the number seven in the Near East, see J. HEHN, *Siebenzahl und Sabbat bei den Babyloniern und im alten Testament. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Leipzig 1907; also S. A. KAPELRUD, *The number seven in Ugaritic texts*, *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968) 494–499. Cf. BURKERT (1981) 44 and 49. BETHE, *op. cit.* (above n. 11) 63 and REIMER, *op. cit.* (above n. 11) adduce instances of the number seven in a Boiotian sacred or legendary context and infer from these a Boiotian origin for the 'Seven' against Thebes; these instances are, however, far from numerous, while the priority of the seven gates clearly points to the Near East.

²³ Cf. KRISTENSEN, *op. cit.* (above n. 15); JACKSON KNIGHT, *op. cit.* (above n. 15) 291–303.

²⁴ However, the Achaean Wall was also meant to protect the burial mound of the Greeks! The Greek »city« in the Troad would have its dead interred inside the walls, an abnormal arrangement for a polis (only classical Sparta could be compared, albeit without citywalls). Still, the Greek

related to the image of seven-gated Thebes. That image is primarily military and profane and not at all, or only in a far-off way, magical or sacred²⁵. There certainly were similarities and overlappings in the legendary representations of Thebes or Troy or the Greek camp, and possibly of Rome also (one could think of the twins or the pair of gods as builders of the citywalls, and of the seven gates, πύργοι or *montes*) but the image of the Thebes of the saga and a fortiori that of the Achaean camp reflects above all eighth-century ideas of heroized siege warfare – ideas that in themselves were derived from contemporary conditions on the Greek islands and the Ionian coast, from »heroic« traditions, and from ill-digested stories that came to Greece from the Near East.

This conclusion may in some respects affect our assessment of the nature of that orientalizing influence in Greece, the importance of which has been so rightly stressed by Professor Burkert among others²⁶. That influence is in many fields unmistakable. But perhaps those Near Eastern ideas were more often than not to some extent »demythologized« and, so to say, reduced to human proportions before they could enter the Greek mind. The myths of the Flood and of the wrath of the gods provoked by human insolence traveled to the Greek world but left their traces there in the minor corners of epic and saga: Deukalion c.s. and the introduction to the Kypria²⁷. The Greek picture of the world of the dead, which owes a lot to Mesopotamian ideas, is nevertheless simplified: Hades and Tartaros have only one gate and not the »cosmic« number of seven. The myth of the great seven-fold tower that was to reach into the heavens left only faint traces in a more modest and earthly phantasy of a citywall with seven gates, attached in the first place to the story of a city that would ultimately be destroyed because of the sins of its dynasty²⁸. In my opinion Near Eastern influence did not create the legend of the Theban

camp had no further affiliations with the realm of the dead and as a »city« (somewhat in the way the Athenians before Syracuse constituted a »city« according to Nicias: Thuc. 7,77,4) it surely belonged to that of the living.

²⁵ For some possible connotations of Thebes with the underworld see F. VIAN, *Les origines de Thèbes. Cadmos et les Spartes* (Paris 1963) 122–4.

²⁶ BURKERT, *op. cit.* (above n. 2).

²⁷ Cf. Scodel, *op. cit.* (above n. 2) 36 ff. For the motive of the Flood in Near Eastern and Greek mythology see also G. S. KIRK, *The nature of Greek myths* (Harmondsworth 1974) 261–272; for the theme of the overpopulousness of the earth that has to be »cured« by a massive killing of mankind (in the Kypria and in the Ehoiai, fr. 204 M.-W.), see also BURKERT, *Die orientalisierende Epoche* (above n. 2), 95–99, and for the ἡμίθεοι (cf. Il. M 23) also G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans. Concepts of the hero in archaic Greek poetry* (Baltimore 1979) 159–161.

²⁸ For the myth of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11, 1–9) see C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 1–11* (Darmstadt 1989) 95–104; the Biblical story combines at least two motives: the building of the tower that would reach into heaven (and thus threaten the gods themselves) and the confusion of mankind by the generating of the various languages. Behind the story in Genesis lay an older version telling of the direct destruction of the tower by the god(s) of heaven (WESTERMANN, 103). The prototype of the Biblical tower was certainly the ziggurat of Babylon: E-temen-an-ki.

wars; that legend was already there, possibly since Mycenaean times – at least in the form of an epic theme: the siege and final capture of a strong citadel by a band of heroes, a theme that would have as its two main offshoots the Theban and the Trojan epics. But the myths from the east did influence the form of the Theban legend, foremost as regards the outward appearance of the beleaguered city and possibly also in the sense of doom hanging over it. The image of a seven-gated wall could strike roots the more easily since in the Dark and early Archaic ages walled cities were practically unknown in European Greece²⁹. So Thebes could become the awesome *ἑπτάπυλος πόλις*. But the same idea was used in a parallel development to provide an image of the Greek armed »city« before Troy, and this time together with an echo of its original sequel. The destruction of the building by the gods in yet another version of the Flood found its way into the 'Iliad' because it was part of the same strand of oral poetry and legend that had provided the seven-gated wall itself. The ultimate source of it lay in Mesopotamia.

Where and when this borrowing from Near Eastern myth and these contacts between the developing Theban and Trojan epics could have taken place we cannot know for certain. But Euboia in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. is a very likely candidate. Here more than in contemporary Ionia the lines of communication between the Greek world and the civilizations of the Near East came together. The legends of the Theban Wars were known here, as well as the Trojan Saga in its pre-Homeric stage. Heroic traditions and oriental tales could in certain ways be combined here. And here too Hesiod would participate in epic contests and draw on all traditions to weave his catalogues together³⁰.

Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, Netherlands

H. W. SINGOR

²⁹ See F. E. WINTER, *Greek fortifications* (London 1971) 61–4; 289–99; A. W. Lawrence, *Greek aims in fortification* (Oxford 1979) 30–8; for the citywalls at Old Smyrna and on the Aegean islands, also J. M. COOK, *Old Smyrna 1948–1951*, *BSA* 53/54 (1958/59) 1–34; A. M. Snodgrass, *Archaeology and the rise of the Greek state* (Cambridge 1977) 21–4; further: C. G. STARR, *The economic and social growth of early Greece, 800–500 B.C.* (New York–Oxford 1977) 98–103; Scully, *op. cit.* above n. 5) 85–7.

³⁰ For the idea that Euboia played a major role in the formation of Greek epic, cf. M. L. West, *The rise of the Greek epic*, *J. H. Stud.* 108 (1988) 151–172, esp. 165 ff.