

14 | *Epigonoï*

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The *Epigonoï* is the third poem of the Theban cycle centered on the family of Oedipus: it dealt with the generation of his grandsons. The title (Ἐπίγονοι = ‘The afterborn, the younger me’) and the opening line (PEG F 1 = D., W.: Νῦν αὖθ’ ὀπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα, Μοῦσαι ‘and now, Muses, let us begin with the younger ones/those born after’) point to a close connection with the preceding poem, the *Thebaid*, which dealt with the feud between Eteocles and Polynices and with the first war of Argos against Thebes. Consequently, the *Epigonoï* was centered on the second expedition against Thebes waged 10 years later by the sons of the Seven.¹ The continuity of the subject matter is matched by the equal length of the poems: according to the source which also quotes their beginnings, they both numbered 7,000 lines (*Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* § 15 Wilamowitz = *Epig. PEG T 1 = 2 D.*). The poem presents a number of unsolved problems regarding its origin, dating, arrangement, and relation to other epic poems now lost (the *Thebaid*, the *Alcmeonis*, the Trojan epics).

AUTHORSHIP

The strong narrative bond with the *Thebaid* may have facilitated the attribution of the *Epigonoï* to Homer, although some doubts regarding the Homeric authorship of the poem surface as early as the fifth century BC with Herodotus: after recalling that the Hyperboreans are mentioned by ‘Hesiod’ (cf. Hes. F 150.21M.-W. = F 63.21 Hirsch.), he continues ‘... and so does Homer in the *Epigonoï*, if Homer really composed this poem’ (Herod. 4.32 = *Epig. PEG F 2 = D., 5 W.*).² In a later period, after quoting the opening lines of the *Thebaid* and of the *Epigonoï* (see above), the compiler of the *Certamen* casts the same doubt on Homeric paternity by adding ‘some say that this

¹ The chronological detail is supplied by Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.2. The same span of time is used to scan the course of events in the Trojan epics. On the *Thebaid* see Torres-Guerra, above in this volume, p. 000.

² Herod. 4.32, discussed below, p. 000. Cf. Wilamowitz (1884: 352): ‘Bei Herodotus beginnt die Kritik ... subjective zweifel äußert er.’

too is the work of Homer' (*Cert.* § 15 φασὶ γὰρ τινες καὶ ταῦτα Ὀμήρου εἶναι).³

Herodotus' quotation of the poem proves that in the classical age there circulated one poem *Epigonoι* distinct from the *Thebaid*, which was believed to be Homeric. On the other hand, in the Hellenistic age the prose writer Dionysius the cyclograph still believed in the Homeric autorship of the poem(s) on the Theban wars (*FgrHist* 15 F 8); the same assumption can be drawn from the passage on the heroic past of Thebes where Pausanias, after recalling the final victory of the Epigonoι, claims that according to the poet Callinus of Ephesus (seventh century BC) and other authorities, Homer was the author of the *Thebaid* (Paus. 9.9.5 = *Theb. PEG T 2 = 1 D.*). Here Pausanias clearly considers the two Theban wars as being narrated in one single poem, which he identifies with the *Thebaid*.⁴ It follows that in antiquity this title was also used in a loose way to refer to one single poem narrating the two Theban wars; this is confirmed by a scholion to Apollonius Rhodius, where the statement 'those who wrote the *Thebaid* (οἱ δὲ τὴν Θηβαΐδα γεγραφότες) say that the daughter of Teiresias, Manto, was sent to Delphi by the Epigonoι' implies that at the time Thebes had been taken by the Argive leaders⁵: therefore, in spite of the title mentioned by the scholiast, the episode cannot but have been narrated in the poem *Epigonoι*.

To conclude, it can be assumed from the evidence at hand that because of the strong connection between the events narrated, in antiquity the epics relating the two expeditions against Thebes could either go under the title of the more ancient and authoritative one, the *Thebaid*, or else be identified as two distinct poems (*Thebaid*, *Epigonoι*), each of them dealing with one war.⁶ No evidence, however, can be found in the sources to buttress the opinion expressed by Bethe, that there existed an epic poem in two parts by a single author, encompassing the *Thebaid* and the *Epigonoι*.⁷

Additional evidence suggesting doubts relating to the sources in attributing the *Epigonoι* is provided by an Aristophanic scholiast who, commenting

³ As was noted by Wilamowitz (1916: 399 n.1), ταῦτα here could also include the *Thebaid*; in this case it should be translated as 'these two poems', and the doubts regarding Homeric autorship should be referred to both poems.

⁴ Paus. 9.9.5; for the text and a discussion, see Torres-Guerra, above in this volume, p. 000.

⁵ Σ Apoll. Rhod. 1.308b = *Epig.* F 3 *PEG* = D., 4 W. On the attribution of this fragment to the *Epigonoι* see the doubts of Welcker (1865: 194); Immisch (1889: 141 n. 1).

⁶ This point had already been made by Müller (1840: 71); Wecklein (1901: 677–8); Rzach (1922: 2374).

⁷ Bethe (1891a: 37–8) with interesting remarks, although it is nowhere attested in the ancient sources that the title *Epigonoι* could also comprehend the *Thebaid*; on this point see also Welcker (1882: 403–5); Legras (1905: 22).

the quotation by Aristophanes of the first verse of the poem (Aristoph. *Pac.* 1270 = *Epig.* PEG F 1 PEG = D., W., with a different ending: Νῦν αὖθ' – ἀρχώμεθα :: Παῦσαι / ὀπλοτέρους ἄιδων, 'Stop singing of the younger men'), names one Antimachus as the author.⁸ A poet bearing this name can be identified with Antimachus of Colophon, the late fifth-century poet who composed a *Thebaid* in no fewer than ten books⁹; another candidate is the shadowy Antimachus of Teos, an epic poet who allegedly lived in the eighth century BC (Plut. *Romul.* 12.2 = Antim. fr. 1 D.); elsewhere, he is credited with an epic fragment often attributed to the *Epigonoι* (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.12.7 = *Epig.* PEG F 4 = 2 W. = Antim. fr. 2 D.: see below).¹⁰ The attribution of the poem to Antimachus may result from confusion, and should be handled with care; what can be asserted, in spite of the paucity of fragments, is that the *Epigonoι* was undoubtedly circulating in fifth-century Athens as a self-standing poem, as is proved by Herodotus and Aristophanes.

THE STORY

The plot of the poem can no longer be reconstructed in detail, but its main outline can be sketched with the cautious help of Ps.-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (3.7.2–5), Diodorus Siculus (4.66–67.1), and Pausanias (9.5.13, 8.6, 33.1–3). The myth of the defeat of Thebes by the *Epigonoι* who set from Argos was known to Homer, as is made evident most of all by Sthenelus' boast in *Il.* 4.405–6 ἡμεῖς τοι πατέρων μέγ' ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι / ἡμεῖς καὶ Θήβης ἔδος εἶλομεν ἑπτὰπύλοιο ('we pride ourselves of being far braver than our fathers, since we are the ones who conquered seven-gated Thebes').¹¹ The *Epigonoι* can be labeled as the first instance ever of a serial in Western

⁸ Σ Aristoph. *Pac.* 1270 ἀρχή τῶν Ἐπιγόνων Ἀντιμάχου ('beginning of Antimachus' *Epigonoι*).

⁹ It should however be noted that, according to Matthews (1996: 20–1), we have no indication 'that Antimachus' *Thebaid* went beyond the story of the Seven against Thebes, i.e. it probably did not extend to include the campaign of the *Epigonoι*'; see also p. 22 on the length of Antimachus' *Thebaid*; see, however, Immisch (1889: 130–1 n. 1).

¹⁰ On Antimachus of Teos and the *Epigonoι* see Wilamowitz (1884: 345–6 n. 26); Bethe (1891a: 36–8); Robert (1915: 182–4), who advocate the identification with this poet. See, however, Legras (1905: 67 n. 1).

¹¹ The myth of the Theban wars was also known to Hesiod (cf. *WD* 161–4; *F* 193.1–8 M.-W. + P.Lit. Palau Rib. 21 = *F* 90.1–8 Hirschb., *F* 136.1–8 M.). I am using the word 'myth' in referring to the expeditions of the Seven and of the *Epigonoι*, since in my opinion no decisive historical or archaeological evidence can support the idea that the two wars against seven-gated Thebes reflected a historical event in Mycenaean times: see among others Dowden (1992: 68–70); Scheer (1993: 58–65); Cingano (2000: 142–3); Moggi and Osanna (2010: 263–73). For a survey of the problem see Schachter (1967), with bibliography.

literature: the story clearly presupposes to a large extent the plot of the *Thebaid*, and a number of details in its narrative point to a deliberate symmetrical arrangement in order to create doublets, parallelisms, and contrasts with the former poem. To mention one telling example, the hero and leader Adrastus was the sole survivor of the Seven in the first expedition; conversely, in the second expedition his son Aegialeus is the only leader among the Epigonoï to fall in battle, at the hands of the Theban king Laodamas, the son of Eteocles, who in turn was killed by Alcmaon, the leader of the Argives.¹² A further parallelism concerns the seminal role of Eriphyle, sister of Adrastus, in both poems: being the wife of Amphiaras and the mother of Alcmaon and Amphilocheus, Eriphyle played the pivotal role of persuading (in the *Thebaid*) her reluctant husband to go to war, having been bribed by Polynices with the necklace of Harmonia, daughter of Cadmus; years later (in the *Epigonoï*), she was bribed with the robe of Harmonia by the son of Polynices, Thersander, into convincing her sons to go to war (see Hom. *Od.* 11.326–7; 15.246–8; Σ Hom. *Od.* 11.326; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1–2; 3.7.2, 7.5; Diod. Sic. 4.66.3).¹³

In many ways, then, the *Epigonoï* stands out as a clear (and therefore later) remake of the *Thebaid*, heavily depending on it. As recalled by Ps.-Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.7.2) and Diodorus Siculus (4.66.1), the aim of the Epigonoï was ‘to avenge the death of their fathers’. The poem was created at some stage as a sequel to the *Thebaid*, perhaps with the intent to meet the expectations of an extended Argive audience and modify the gloomy outcome of the first expedition. In fact, albeit being centered on the traditional epic theme of the siege of a city which was bound to be captured and plundered and/or destroyed (as happens, for instance, with the *Iliupersis* and with the *Capture of Oechalia* by Creophylus of Samos), the *Thebaid* very peculiarly ended in a failure. In the sixth century BC (or even earlier) an Argive interest in the deeds of the heroes who fought against Thebes can be gathered from the famous passage in Herodotus, where the *Homēreia epea* performed at Sicyon at the time of Cleisthenes (Herod. 5.67.1) cannot but refer to the Theban epics;¹⁴ it is confirmed in the same period by the inscription recently found in the enclosure of the heroon in the agorà of

¹² The correspondence between the fate of Adrastus and Aegialeus had been noted by Hellanicus, *EGMF* 100.

¹³ For a survey of the relevant parallelisms and contrasts between the two poems see Welcker (1882: 399–403); Olivieri (2004: 79–91); Cingano (2011: 5–8); on Eriphyle see most recently Sineux (2007: 38–45).

¹⁴ On the identification of the Homeric epics with the Theban epics in the Herodotus passage see Cingano (1985), with bibliography; Introduction, above in this volume, p. 000; Torres-Guerra, above, p. 000.

Argos, bearing the words ΕΡΩΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΕΝ ΘΕΒΑΙΣ, meaning ‘the heroon of those in Thebes’, or ‘of the heroes (who fell) at Thebes’ (ἡρώων τῶν ἐν Θήβαις), and referring to the Seven and the Epigonoι. The inscription, and its location in the heroon, show the intention of Argos to firmly root the Theban epics in cult.¹⁵

The expedition of the Seven was ill-fated from the start and ended with the death of all the Argive heroes but Adrastus;¹⁶ on the contrary, the expedition of the *Epigonoι* was favored by the gods and by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and ended in success (cf. *Il.* 4.406–8; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.2). It is impossible to ascertain at which point of the story the poem started: perhaps with the death of the Seven and the pledge by their sons to avenge them, or else 10 years after the first expedition, when the sons had grown up and were determined to act.¹⁷ According to the fullest account of the story by Ps.-Apollodorus (3.7.2–5) and Diodorus Siculus (4.66.1–67.1, with a few differences), the oracle of Apollo at Delphi predicted that the expedition against Thebes could only be successful if the leader was Alcmaon; the hero accepted reluctantly, his main urge at the time being to kill his mother Eriphyle and avenge the double betrayal of her husband and her sons (see above).¹⁸

The fact that the leadership of the expedition was not conferred upon Aegialeus, whose father Adrastus had led the first one, but upon Alcmaon, reflects both the prominence acquired by the *genos* of the seer Amphiaras, the Melampodidai, and the growing importance of the oracle of Delphi,

¹⁵ On the inscription, dating from the mid sixth century BC, see Pariente (1992); Hall (1999: 5); Boehringer (2001: 142–4). The cult of the Seven and the Epigonoι at Argos continues well into the fifth century BC: see Paus. 2.20.5; 10.10.3–4; Cingano (2002: 36–42). Pariente (1992: 218) remarks that no fewer than eight of the twenty-five heroic monuments noted by Pausanias (2.21.2; 2.23.2) at Argos are related to the Theban wars.

¹⁶ The Seven had acted against the will of the gods: see *Il.* 4.380–1; 409; Hes. *F.* 193.6–8 M.-W. = *F.* 90.6–8 Hirsch.; cf. Pind. *Nem.* 9.18–20.

¹⁷ For an attempted reconstruction of the plot of the poem see Robert (1921: 949–59); Severyns (1928: 224–8); Gantz (1993: 522–5).

¹⁸ Conversely, Ps.-Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.7.5) also relates a story with a different timing of events, whereby Alcmaon found out *only after the capture of Thebes* that he (and his brother Amphilocheus) had been betrayed by his mother: he killed her in accordance with the oracle of Apollo. According to another version (Asclepiades of Tragilos, *FgrHist* 12 F 29 = *Σ D Od.* 11.326–7), which is at variance with the story told by the *Epigonoι*, Alcmaon killed Eriphyle before setting off to war, and was affected by folly and persecuted by the Erinyes (cf. also Ps.-Apollodorus 3.7.5); on the different versions of the myth see Gantz (1993: 525); Debiasi, below in this volume, p. 000. The murder of Eriphyle is only attributed to her elder son, Alcmaon, by most sources, although Amphilocheus is also occasionally involved (cf. Ps.-Apollod. quoted hereabove). The fate of Alcmaon in the Theban epics evokes a close parallelism with the story of Orestes in the aftermath of the Trojan War.

which proves central also in other episodes in the poem and in the vicissitudes of Alcmaon.¹⁹ In keeping with the Delphic influence, the choice of Alcmaon as the leader of the expedition can be accounted for by his mantic skill, inherited from his father Amphiaraus and his ancestor Melampus; his oracular status was already well attested at the time of Pindar (see *Pyth.* 8.56–60).

Various lists with the names of the Epigonoι are preserved, including the ones from the groups of statues commissioned by Argos and described by Pausanias, one at Delphi, the other at Argos, both dating from the second quarter of the fifth century BC.²⁰ As happens with the lists of the Seven, the number and also some names of the heroes may differ for various reasons (local, historical, political, etc.); moreover, the inclusion of two heroes (Amphilochus and Alcmaon) replacing their father Amphiaraus cannot but prove disruptive for the traditional number of the list of the Seven.²¹ The Homeric poems are the earliest source for the presence in the list of the Epigonoι of Diomedes (son of Tydeus), Sthenelus (son of Capaneus), Euryalus (son of Mecisteus), Alcmaon, and Amphilochus.²² To these names, representing the offspring of the (presumably) original list of the *Thebaid*, Thersander, the son of Polynices, can safely be added. The other heroes fluctuate between Promachus (son of Parthenopaeus), Polydorus (son of Hippomedon), Medon (son of Eteoclus), and two more sons of Polyneices, Adrastus and Timeas.²³ Two more names – unrecorded elsewhere – of heroes who ‘took Thebes with the Epigonoι’ (and afterwards

¹⁹ Interestingly, according to Herodotus 5.61.1, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was also connected with the Theban king Laodamas, son of Polynices, who in the final battle against the Argives dies at the hands of Alcmaon.

²⁰ Paus. 2.20.5; 10.10.4; the other main lists are found in Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.2; Σ *Il.* 4.406a. I am not taking into account here the lists found in the Attic tragedians, since they are demonstrably influenced by other (later) circumstances. For a detailed discussion of the lists of the Epigonoι and their relation to the lists of the Seven see Cingano (2002); see also Bethe (1891a: 110–13); Robert (1921: 950–2); Kullmann (1960: 148–54); Prinz (1979: 168–74); Gantz (1993: 523–4).

²¹ This explains the occasional dropping of the younger brother Amphilochus from the list of the Epigonoι, noted by Pausanias (10.10.4) in the group of statues at Delphi. Conversely, Pausanias (2.20.5) counts eleven statues of the Epigonoι at Argos, including two more sons of Polynices (see also 9.33.1); Σ *Il.* 4.406a names nine heroes, adding Medon, the son of Eteoclus, and replacing Promachus with Stratolaos as the son of Parthenopeus, whose double genealogy, debated by the ancient sources (Arcadian vs. Argive), contributes to the variations in the list.

²² For Diomedes, Euryalus and Sthenelus as leaders of the Argive contingent at Troy see *Il.* 2.559–67, 4.365–410; 6.20–8 (Euryalus); 9.48; 23.511 (Sthenelus); only Diomedes is a steady presence in many books of the poem. *Od.* 15.244–8 implies the presence of the sons of Amphiaraus; see also Hes. F 193.1 M.-W. = 90.1 Hirsch.; 197.6 M.-W. = 105.6 Hirsch. Alcmaon’s matricide is represented on a Tyrrhenian amphora from Orvieto dating from 570/560 BC (Berlin PM VI 4841); see Gantz (1993: 526); Schefold (1993: 282–3, pl. 301).

²³ See the sources mentioned above, n. 00.

also went to Troy) are supplied by Pherecydes (*EGM F* 115): drawing on an early tradition, he names Euchenor and Cleitus, the sons of the Corinthian seer Polyidus who, like Amphiaraus, descended from Melampus.²⁴ The suggestion that Euchenor and Cleitus may have belonged in the epic version of the story is corroborated by the information that Alcmaon gathered allies from the neighbouring cities, including Corinth (see Paus. 9.9.4; Diod. Sic. 4.66.3–4).²⁵

Laodamas too was helped by allies, but no information is left regarding the Theban side: even more drastically than with the *Thebaid*, one cannot but notice the total lack of information on the Theban defenders in the poetic, local, and antiquarian sources.²⁶ The only Theban opponent to stand out is the king Laodamas, who falls in battle at the hands of his peer, the commander of the Argives Alcmaon, after fighting off bravely the enemies and killing Aegialeus.²⁷

The march of the Argive army towards Thebes must have been part of the poem: it was punctuated by the plunder and destruction of the surrounding villages, a theme attested also in the Trojan epics.²⁸ In the *Epigonoï* the private feud between the descendants of Oedipus over the throne of Thebes seems to have become a more collective issue motivated by pride and revenge (see above). Significantly (and differently from the *Thebaid*), no final clash takes place between the sons of Polynices and Eteocles, Thersander and Laodamas. Moreover, in the second expedition, no siege of the city was involved, and the seven gates play no role in the confrontation between the two armies. The Thebans advanced out of the walls and the battle with the Argives was fought at a place called Glisas, not far from Teumessos, where the graves of the Argives were still shown down to the time of Pausanias (see Hellan. *EGM F* 100; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.3; Paus. 9.5.13, 8.6, 9.4, 19.2). Although according to the mainstream tradition which can plausibly be traced back to the Theban epics, Aegialeus was the only one of

²⁴ For a tentative genealogy of Polyidus see Bernert (1952: 1647–50): he descended from Mantios, son of Melampus, whereas Amphiaraus descended from another son of Melampus, Antiphatus. It remains uncertain whether Polyidus can be identified with one Polypheides mentioned in *Od.* 15.225–55 (line 249), in a very similar genealogical context.

²⁵ Pherecydes adds that (like other *Epigonoï*) Euchenor and Cleitus also went to Troy; cf. *Il.* 13.660–5; Hes. *F* 136.3–7 M.-W. = *F* *6 Hirsch.

²⁶ It is noticeable that even Pindar and Pausanias are peculiarly reticent in mentioning names and stories concerning the Theban opponents in the two wars. On this matter see Cingano (2000: 145–6, 152–5).

²⁷ See Ps.-Apollod. 3.7.5; Paus. 9.5.13. It appears from Herod. 5.61.1 that Laodamas was a fully fledged character in the archaic tradition (see above, n. 18).

²⁸ Cf. Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.3; for the plunder of cities in the cyclic epics see *Cypria*, arg. lines 155–6 Severyns.

the Epigonoι to fall, Pausanias (9.19.2) reports that Promachus also died in the fight with other Argives of high rank.

Since the fate of his daughter Manto after the fall of Thebes was narrated in the *Epigonoι* (cf. F 3 PEG = D., 4 W.: see below), another episode very likely to have been featured in the poem after the battle is the death of the seer Teiresias at the spring Tilphussa; Teiresias seems also to have played a role in advising the Thebans to flee from their city before the arrival of the Argive army (Diod. Sic. 4.66.4–5, 67.1; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.3; Paus. 9.33.1). Finally, the death of Eriphyle must have been a major episode, rounding off the poem and contributing to the interplay between the texture of the *Thebaid* and the *Epigonoι*: by killing his mother, Alcmaon fulfilled the command imparted by his father Amphiaraus in the initial part of *Thebaid*, before reluctantly departing from Argos.

THE EPIGONOΙ AT THE JUNCTION BETWEEN THE THEBAN AND THE TROJAN EPICS

The ancient reports on the fate of Thebes, its inhabitants, and its conquerors after the victory of the Argives diverge to an extent that prevents any attempt at imagining how the poem ended. A scrutiny of the sources reveals ambiguities and inconsistencies: according to some, Thebes was sacked and destroyed to such an extent that – one would assume – it was abandoned by its inhabitants for a long period.²⁹ On the other hand, Diodorus seems to modify his earlier account by recalling (4.67.1) that some of the Thebans returned to live in the city when Creon was king (i.e. after the death of Thersander), thus implying that it had not been entirely destroyed; Ps.-Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.7.4) adds one more detail to the picture, by specifying that the Argives *only* ‘pull down the walls’ of Thebes (καθαίρουσι τὰ τείχη), and this can only imply that the city was left more or less undamaged; Pausanias is more explicit, reporting in two passages that after capturing Thebes the Argives settled Thersander on the throne, and he welcomed back to their city the Thebans who had initially fled to Illyria (9.5.14; 9.8.7).³⁰

This twofold tradition on Thebes is likely to reflect (a) the early stage of the Theban epics, and (b) the later phase when they were connected to the

²⁹ See *Il.* 4.406; Σ *Il.* 2.505 and 4.406a; Diod. Sic. 4.66.5; Strab. 9.2.32.

³⁰ Pausanias must be drawing on a Theban source here, since according to this version Laodamas was not killed by Alcmaon, but withdrew to Illyria with any Theban willing to follow him.

Trojan epics. When the *Epigonoï* was a self-standing poem unconnected to the Trojan cycle, the standard theme of destruction of a city by a foreign army prevailed over the original cause of the expedition – the settling of Thersander, son of Polynices, on the throne of Thebes. This version explains the absence of Thebes in the Homeric Catalogue of Ships and its replacement with the obscure and fictitious Hypothebai (*Il.* 2.505), a name unattested elsewhere: the *hapax* shows that the Homeric bard complied with the version of the destruction of the city conveyed by the Theban epics.³¹ The omission of Thebes also explains the absence of Thersander from the earlier Homeric Catalogue of Ships where, given his status as the king of Thebes, one would expect to find him as the commander of the Boeotian contingent (*Il.* 2.494–510).

When at a later stage the tradition on the Theban wars and the fate of Thersander at Thebes were brought into relation with the Trojan epics, the version relating the utter destruction of the city was mitigated and reconciled with the one about his reign; somehow, ‘The reign of Thersander may reflect the belief that life went on at Thebes after the war of the Epigonoï. . . .’³² Yet, in spite of his being a prominent character in the *Epigonoï*, his absence in the *Iliad* shows that Thersander could not be harmonized with the former established list of the five Boeotian leaders in Catalogue of Ships. Consequently, to avoid any conflict with the canonical tradition of the *Iliad*, he was inserted in the preliminaries of the Trojan expedition, in the *Cypria*, and had to undergo an early exit from the scene by dying in Mysia before he could get to Troy. The bravery in battle shown by Thersander before being killed by Telephus confirms that in the *Cypria* he had a relevant role and status (cf. *Cypria*, arg. § 7 W.???SEVER.???; Paus. 9.5.14), conforming to his kingship at Thebes and to his place among the *Epigonoï*.³³

A similar approach can help explain the absence at Troy of two illustrious Epigonoï, the Argives Alcmaon and Amphiloehus, whose popularity is well attested in early Greek poetry.³⁴ Although their fate after the war with Thebes

³¹ On Hypothebai and the twofold tradition on Thebes see the discussion in Cingano (2000: 128–35). For an interpretation of the sources see, most recently, Sakellariou (1990: 210–22, to be handled with care); Vannicelli (1995: 21–4).

³² Schachter (1967: 4).

³³ By inserting Thersander in the *Cypria*, ‘The house of Cadmus . . . and Thebes, ill-represented by *Hypothēbai* B 505, made their way into the sacred ring’ of the most important event in the mythical past of the Greeks, the Trojan war (Allen (1921: 28)). Still, the double status of Thersander may have contributed to hinder his entrance in the Homeric list of the Boeotian leaders at Troy: formerly living in Argos and being himself half-Argive through the marriage of the exiled Polynices with a daughter of Adrastus, after the war of the Epigonoï he was reinstalled in his Theban roots and made the king of Thebes.

³⁴ See *Od.* 15.248; Hes. F 193.1 M.-W. = F 90.1 Hirsch.; F 196.7 M.-W. = F 104.7 Hirsch.; 278–9 M.-W.; Stesich. *PMGF* 193.28–31; S 148 D. (from the poem *Eriphyle*).

is differentiated in the sources, clearly the killing of their mother Eriphyle, and the ensuing madness of Alcmaon chased by the Furies, triggered a different fate of wander and adventures which took both far from the main epic track of the *Iliad*, and prevented their presence in the Catalogue of Ships. Various explanations are given to account for their absence at Troy: still, their presence amongst the suitors of Helen in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (F 197.6–9M.-W. = 105H., 154b M.; cf. Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.8) shows that – like Thersander – at some stage they were given recognition in a significant stream of the epic tradition.³⁵ Interestingly, regarding Amphilocheus, the importance of the *genos* of Amphiaraus, the Melampodidai, and his mantic status, probably contributed to place him, at the end of the Trojan war, somehow on the route *from* Troy, in Asia Minor and farther East; this as is attested by the mantic poem *Melampodia* (Hes. F 278–9 M.-W.) and by prose sources relating the returns of the Greek heroes from Troy (Herod. 3.91.1; 7.91; Thuc. 2.68.3; Ps.-Apollod. *Epit.* 6.2, 19).³⁶

On the other hand, if for these reasons the above mentioned heroes were missing in the *Iliad*, when the Theban epics and the Trojan epics were brought together in a broader narrative string encompassing nearly the entire heroic age (cf. Hes. *WD* 156–65; Σ Hom. *Il.* 1.5; Σ Eur. *Or.* 1641; *Anecd. Oxon.* IV 405.6 Cramer), the Homeric Catalogue of Ships easily accommodated an adequate number of victorious Epigonoι of illustrious descent as the straightforward representatives of Argos at Troy: Diomedes, Sthenelus, and Euryalus are the natural leaders of the Argive contingent (*Il.* 2.559–68). In this way, the Epigonoι were to play a seminal role in the chronological and thematic sequel of events of the epic cycle, serving as the main junction between two traditions which were originally independent and accounted for the two major events of the mythical age.

Yet, if some heroes of the *Epigonoι* became pivotal in both traditions and shared the unique privilege of contributing to the two victorious wars, it is all the more striking to remark that they turn out undisputably unimpressive and ordinary, if contrasted not only with the traits of their fathers, the Seven (cf. Amphiaraus, Capaneus, Tydeus, Parthenopeus, Polynices, Adrastus), but also – with the exception of Diomedes in some books – with many heroes in the *Iliad*, on either side of the armies. From what we can gather, not a single Epigonos can match the prominence and fully sketched features of the Seven heroes who failed. The drabness of the plot, the lack of strength,

³⁵ On this point see Cingano (2005b: 140–3).

³⁶ On the wanderings of Amphilocheus see Herod. 3.91.1; 7.91; Thuc. 2.68.3; Ps.-Apollod. *Epit.* 6.2, 19; see Gantz (1993: 527–8); Scheer (1993: 163–71, 222–34). On the wanderings of Alcmaon see below. On Alcmaon in the *Alcmeonid* see Debiasi, below in this volume, p. 000.

originality, and coherence in motivating episodes which were effectively rooted and harmonized in the *Thebaid*, did not pass unnoticed by German scholarship of the nineteenth century:³⁷ still, the remark by Wilamowitz (1891: 240) that ‘... the renown of the Epigonoï lay in the *Iliad* of Homer’ can only be accepted with respect to Diomedes: it proves untenable for Sthenelus and most of all Euryalus.

It looks as if, leaving the Attic tragedians aside and with the plausible exception of the city of Argos which nurtured a primary interest in modifying the outcome of the myth, the first disastrous expedition of the Seven captured to a much greater extent the Greek archaic imagination, and left a far deeper mark than the success achieved by the Epigonoï. The same holds true with the iconography of the myth: differently from the Seven, the Epigonoï are poorly attested on vases, if at all.³⁸ These considerations – together with the analysis of F 1 (see below) – may help to elucidate the function performed by the *Epigonoï* and gauge the lateness and the artificiality of the poem, in spite of the familiarity of few books of the *Iliad* with its subject matter: from the evidence at hand, it seems to have been created primarily as a duplication of the *Thebaid*, with the intent to reshape the outcome of the first expedition against Thebes and to graft the tradition of the Theban wars on the Homeric tradition of the war at Troy.³⁹

THE FRAGMENTS

Like the beginning of the *Thebaid*, the opening of the poem reveals that it was centered on Argos and on the deeds of the sons of the Seven: Νῦν αὖθ’ ὀπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα (‘And now, Muses, let us begin with those born after’ (*Epig. PEG F 1 = D., W.*). Davies (2001: 31) has plausibly suggested that the second verse may have continued with a relative and a sentence anticipating the outcome of the poem, ‘(the younger men) who succeeded in capturing Thebes’. The combination *nyn aute* (‘and now’) marks a strong transition from the time of the Seven to the time and generation of their sons, which actually proved to be ‘more capable of bearing arms’, as one

³⁷ See Nitzsch (1862: 449); Welcker (1882: 400–1); Wilamowitz (1891: 239–40); see also Friedländer (1914: 328); Robert (1915: 251); Robert (1921: 949–50); Finster-Hotz (1986: 806): ‘The Epigonoï stood in the shade of the generation of their fathers.’

³⁸ Finster-Hotz (1986: 805) lists only three vases likely to refer to the Epigonoï, against fifty-eight vases representing the Seven against Thebes. See also Cingano (2002: 32–5).

³⁹ On the relation between the subject matter and the written form of the cyclic poems see, most recently, West (2013: 17).

etymology of *hoploteros* would suggest.⁴⁰ The same procedure, with the adverb *nyn* at the beginning of the first verse of the poem, is attested in the Hesiodic corpus in order to effectively connect the subject matter of two poems, the *Theogony* and the *Catalogue of Women*, which originally were independent. Some manuscripts of the *Theogony* and a papyrus fragment (POxy. 2354, second century AD) present two lines with an invocation to the Muses connecting the couplet at the end of the *Theogony* (1019–20) to the very beginning of the *Catalogue*: αὐται μὲν θνητοῖσι παρ' ἀνδράσιν εὐνηθεῖσαι / ἄθάναται γείναντο θεοῖς ἐπιείκελα τέκνα. / νῦν δὲ γυναικῶν φύλον ἀείσατε, ἡδυέπειαι / Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο 'These are the immortal goddesses who lay with mortal men and bare them children like unto gods. But now, sweet-voiced Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis, sing of the company of women' ([*Th.* 1021–2] = Hes. F 1.1–2 M.-W. = Hirsch.).

The comparison with the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* also opens the possibility that the first verse of the *Epigonoι* as we have it is not the original one, but reflects a later stage in the elaboration of the epic cycle when the need was felt to present it as a natural sequel of the *Thebaid*. A similar editorial practice can be noticed in the Trojan epics: the last verse of the *Iliad* dealing with the funeral of Hector was modified in order to accommodate the mention of the Amazon Penthesileia, who was to play a key role in the following poem of the Trojan epic cycle, the *Aethiopsis*.⁴¹ The aim was probably to facilitate the insertion of the *Iliad* in the epic cycle, by creating a tighter connection with the *Aethiopsis*.

F 2 PEG (= F 2 D. = F 5 W.), from Herodot. 4.32

Ἄλλ' Ἡσιόδῳ (F 150.21 M.-W. = 63H. = 98 M.) μὲν ἔστι περὶ Ὑπερβορέων εἰρημένα, ἔστι δὲ καὶ Ὀμήρῳ ἐν Ἐπιγόνουσι, εἰ δὴ τῶι ἔδοντι γε Ὀμηρος ταῦτα τὰ ἔπεα ἐποίησε.

But Hesiod has mention of the Hyperboreans, and so does Homer in the *Epigonoι*, if Homer really composed this poem.

The conciseness of the information provided by Herodotus prevents any guess as to the context where the Hyperboreans, a legendary race favourite

⁴⁰ On the meaning of ὀπλότερος, see S. West (1988: 189–90) and Janko (1992: 193), with bibliography; *Lfgre* s.v.; Del Freo (1994).

⁴¹ *Aeth.* PEG 1 = W., fr. spur. D. = Σ *Il.* 24.804b; PLitLond 6 (= P.Lond. 1873), col. XXII 43. See Rengakos, below in this volume, p. 000. In all the other manuscripts of the *Iliad* the poem ends at v. 804 with one epithet replacing the expansion, ὡς οἱ γ' ἀμφίεπον τάφον Ἐκτορος ἵπποδάμοιο.

of Apollo and blessed with immortality, located in different places in the Far North, may have been mentioned. Their special relationship with Apollo (and in some way with Delphi) in Greek archaic poetry suggests that it may also have been mentioned in the *Epigonoí*.⁴²

F 3 PEG = 3 D. = 4 W., from Σ Ap. Rhod. 1.308b

οί δὲ τὴν Θηβαΐδα γεγραφότες φασίν, ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν Ἐπιγόνων ἀκροθίνιον ἀνετέθη Μαντῶ ἢ Τειρεσίου θυγάτηρ εἰς Δελφοὺς πεμφθεῖσα, καὶ κατὰ χρησμὸν Ἀπόλλωνος ἐξερχομένη περιέπεσε Ῥακίῳ τῷ Λέβητος υἱῷ Μυκηναίῳ τὸ γένος. καὶ γημαμένη αὐτῷ – τοῦτο γὰρ περιεῖχε τὸ λόγιον, γαμεῖσθαι ὧι ἄν συναντήσῃ – ἔλθοῦσα εἰς Κολοφῶνα καὶ ἐκεῖ δυσθυμήσασα ἐδάκρυσε διὰ τὴν τῆς πατρίδος πόρθησιν. διόπερ ὠνομάσθη Κλάρος ἀπὸ τῶν δακρύων. ἐποίησεν δὲ Ἀπόλλωνι ἱερόν.

The writers of the *Thebaid* say that Teiresias' daughter Manto was sent to Delphi by the Epigonoí and dedicated as a tithe; and she went out in obedience to an oracle of Apollo and encountered Rhacius the son of Lebes, a Mycenaean by blood. She married him – this was part of the oracle, that she should marry the first man she met – and went to Colophon, and there, overcome by sorrow, she wept for the sack of her native city. Hence the place was named Claros, from her tears. And she established a shrine for Apollo.

Of the few fragments left, this one allows an interesting insight in the subject matter of the last section of the poem. A scholion to Apollonius Rhodius (already discussed above⁴³) reports that the daughter of Teiresias, Manto (a telling name for the daughter of a *mantis*), was an eminent *geras* (prize of honor) in the large booty collected by the Epigonoí at Thebes (cf. Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.4); they dedicated her as a tithe to Delphi, from where she got married to one Rhacios, a Mycenaean by blood; they moved out to Colophon in Ionia, and later she established a shrine of Apollo at Claros and became a priestess in the sanctuary. This picture can be integrated with other sources which differ in a few details, some adding that from their union a renown seer, Mopsus, was born, the winner of a mantic contest with Chalcas.⁴⁴ Although the details provided seem to aim at a paretymology

⁴² Cf. *HHom.* 7.29; Alcae. F 307c; Aristeeas PEG F 3 = 3 D.; Pind. *Ol.* 3.16 (Heracles); *Pyth.* 10.29–44; *Isthm.* 6.23; *Pae.* 8.63 (F 52 i) M.; Bacchyl. 3.58–9; Herod. 4.13; 4.33–4; see Page (1955: 249–52).

⁴³ p. 000.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hes. *Melampod.* F 278 M.-W. = 214 M.; Diod. Sic. 4.66.5; Paus. 7.3.1–2; 9.33.2; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.4. Diodorus differs in giving a different name for the daughter of

whereby the tears (from the verb κλαίειν, 'to weep') of the exiled Manto account for the foundation and the name of Claros, this part of the poem shows the same antiquarian flavor found in other cyclic and minor epics and in the Hesiodic corpus: apparently the poem combined a straightforward narrative of the main event – the expedition against Thebes – with themes which are typical of mantic poetry as the Hesiodic *Melampodeia*, and with stories of traveling heroes ending in the foundation of cities and oracles, often originated from Delphi as in this fragment.⁴⁵

Alcmaon, Amphilochus, Teiresias, Manto, Mopsus, Chalcas, all are mantic characters connected to mantic contests and/or oracles in various parts of the Greek world; they represent different areas and epic traditions and, as was the case with the *Melampodia* (F 263–79 M.-W. = 202–15 M.), their contests, marriages and journeys sketch out a broad map of the sacred places and mantic genealogies of the Greek world, connecting East and West, Acarnania and Anatolia. If one looks at the fragments and at the title, centered on the name of the protagonist, the same considerations of antiquarian and mythological lore combined with the theme of the traveling hero in a colonial world apply to the poem *Alcmeonis*, which has been identified by some with the *Epigonoι*. Notwithstanding the effort displayed mainly by Welcker and by Prinz to advocate this hypothesis, it must be stressed that not a single fragment of the poem can be brought to support the view that the *Alcmeonis* also dealt with the expedition of the Epigonoι.⁴⁶

The subject matter of this poem can perhaps better be identified with parts of the account in Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.7.5–7: after telling of the fall of Thebes and the killing of Eriphyle, it starts afresh with the vicissitudes and the wanderings of Alcmaon.⁴⁷ Notably, it was cited as an independent poem in relation to an episode related to the Trojan epics by a Hellenistic expert

Teiresias (Daphne, not Manto), and expands on her poetic skill in composing oracular responses. On this fragment see Torres-Guerra (1995a: 72–4).

⁴⁵ The account of Immisch (1889) on Claros is still unsurpassed; the mention of Claros in the *Epigonoι* also points to a later period for the poem (Robert (1921: 950)). On the *Melampodia*, mantic poetry and traveling seers in general see Huxley (1969: 51–9); Schwartz (1960: 210–28); most recently, Burkert (1983b); Dillery (2005: 173–8); Lane Fox (2008: 224–3); López-Ruiz (2009).

⁴⁶ See Welcker (1865: 195–6); (1882: 380–2); Prinz (1979: 166–87; in particular 177–80), both suggesting that the *Alcmeonis* was the alternative title of the *Epigonoι*. For the opposite view see Wilamowitz (1884: 73 n. 2); Immisch (1889: 140, 154–5, 188–9); Bethe (1891a: 109–40); Friedländer (1914: 329–35); Robert (1921: 950); Rzach (1922: 2377); Severyns (1928: 224); Sakellariou (1958: 158–9).

⁴⁷ Alcmaon in Arcadia, Psophis, Thesprotia, Aetolia, and Acarnania: Thuc. 2.102.5; Ephorus, *FgrHist* 70 F 123 a, b = Strabo, 7.7.7; 10.2.25; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.5; 3.6.2, 7.2, 7.5–7. See Robert (1921: 957–67); Gantz (1993: 525–8).

in cyclic matters, Dionysius the cyclograph (*FgrHist* 15 F 7 = Σ Eur. *Or.* 995 = *Alcmeon.* PEG F 6 = W., 5 D.), and this may imply that Dionysius considered it a self-contained cyclic poem, although its placing in the epic cycle remains unknown. From what has been exposed here, it would appear that the best transition from the Theban to the Trojan epics could be effected by the *Epigonoι*, whose subject matter was more in tune with the theme of the war at Troy which started in the *Cypria*.⁴⁸

The more interesting among the few fragments of uncertain attribution is PEG F dub. °6 = F 1 inc. loci D. = F*3 W., from Phot. *Lex.*, *Etym. gen.*, and *Suda* s. v. Τευμησία.⁴⁹ It tells the story of a ferocious Teumessian fox, located in Boeotia, which was ravaging the Theban territory and was impossible to catch:

περὶ τῆς Τευμησίας ἀλώπεκος οἱ τὰ Θηβαϊκὰ γεγραφότες ἰκανῶς ἱστορήκασι, καθάπερ Ἀριστόδημος ἐπιπεμφθῆναι μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ θεῶν τὸ θηρίον τοῦτο τοῖς Καδμείοις, διότι τῆς βασιλείας ἐξέκλειον τοὺς ἀπὸ Κάδμου γεγονότας. Κέφαλον δὲ φασὶ, τὸν Δηϊόνος, Ἀθηναῖον ὄντα καὶ κύνα κεκτημένον, ὃν οὐδὲν διέφευγε τῶν θηρίων (ὃς ἀπέκτεινεν ἄκων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναικᾶ Πρόκριν, καθηράντων αὐτὸν τῶν Καδμείων), διώκειν τὴν ἀλώπεκα μετὰ τοῦ κυνός· καταλαμβανόμενους δὲ περὶ τὸν Τευμησὸν λίθους γενέσθαι τὸν τε κύνα καὶ τὴν ἀλώπεκα. εἰλήφασι δ' οὗτοι τὸν μῦθον ἐκ τοῦ ἐπικοῦ κύκλου.

Concerning the 'Teumesian fox' the writers of Theban history have given a sufficient account, for example Aristodemus. They say that the animal was sent upon the Thebans by the gods because they were excluding the descendants of Cadmus from the kingship. They say that Cephalus the son of Deion, an Athenian who had a hunting dog that no animal could escape, after accidentally killing his wife Procris and being purified by the Cadmeans, hunted the fox with his dog; and that just as it was catching it near Teumesos, both the dog and the fox were turned to stone. These writers have taken the myth from the Epic Cycle.

The connection with Thebes and with Cadmus indicates that the story was told in one of the Theban epics, either the *Thebaid* or the *Epigonoι*. Preference is given to the latter on the ground that the exclusion from the kingship of the descendants of Cadmus is likely to have taken place after the death of Eteocles, in order to prevent further family feuds. Two motifs

⁴⁸ For the different opinion that the ideal link with the Trojan epics would have been better provided by the *Alcmeonis* see Debiasi, below in this volume, p. 000.

⁴⁹ Following Davies, I am not considering here *Epig.* PEG F 4 = F 2 W., attributed by Clem. Alex. (*Strom.* 6.12.7) to Antimachus of Teos (= Antim. F 2 D.).

found elsewhere in epic poetry and in folklore are originally combined here: (a) the motif of a wild beast or monster (e.g. the Calydonian boar in *Il.* 9) sent by a god/the gods against a city or region in order to ravage the land and kill the inhabitants, as a punishment for a variety of reasons (wrongful acting, lack of respects towards a god, etc.); (b) the motif of an animal endowed with the magical power of swiftness, which makes it unique and out of reach. Interestingly, apart from the story of the Teumessian fox, both motifs are found elsewhere in the Theban epics. The fox appears to duplicate the story of the Sphinx in the *Oedipodea*,⁵⁰ whereas the *Thebaid* told the story of the divine horse Arion, whose unmatched swiftness granted to his master Adrastus a safe escape from battle and made him the only survivor amongst the Seven.⁵¹

The gist of the story, which might have an aetiological origin connected to the Theban territory, lies in the creation – by way of standard motifs – of a puzzling dilemma, through the juxtaposition of two animals with incompatible powers: ‘the fox could outrun all pursuit, the hound could overtake all fugitives.’⁵² Only the intervention of Zeus could solve the logical impasse by turning both animals into stone. The myth of Cephalus and his hound was well known in Greece, as is shown by a large number of sources giving approximately the same version, with a number of variants concerning several additional events and characters, a connection with Amphitryon, the name of the angry god (Artemis, Dionysus) and of the god who put an end to the unending pursuit (Zeus).⁵³ It also attracted local interest: apart from the Theban writer Aristodemus (*FgrHist* 383 F 2), the story of the Teumessian fox was narrated in a most peculiar way by Corinna, *PMG* 672,⁵⁴ who credited Oedipus both with the killing of the sphinx and of the fox, apparently portraying him as a valiant fighter and monster-killer, rather than as a clever solver of riddles.

According to Welcker,⁵⁵ the version told by Corinna was the earliest one.⁵⁶ In spite of its redundancy, since in fact Oedipus only needed to kill

⁵⁰ See above in this volume, p. 000.

⁵¹ See *Il.* 23.346–7; *Theb.* *PEG* F 8 = F 6 b + 6 c D., F 11 W.; Torres-Guerra, above in this volume, p. 000; on Arion see Cingano (2005b: 141–51). Like the sphinx, the Teumessian fox destroyed the lives of the (young) Theban citizens: cf. *Ps.-Apollod. Bibl.* 2.4.7; *Anton. Lib.* 41.8.

⁵² Page (1953: 39).

⁵³ See *Istr. Callim. FgrHist* 334 F 65; *Ps.-Apollod. Bibl.* 2.4.6–7; *Paus.* 9.19.1; *Ps.-Eratosth. Cat.* 33; *Anton. Lib.* 41; *Ov. Met.* 7.672–862. On Cephalus and Procris see also *Hellan. EGMF* 169; *Pherec. EGMF* 34; *Ps.-Apollod. Bibl.* 3.15.10; *Hyg. fab.* 189.

⁵⁴ See above in this volume, p. 000. ⁵⁵ Welcker (1882: 393–6, esp. 394).

⁵⁶ Welcker (1882: 393–6, esp. 394); on the Teumessian fox see also Schultz (1916–24); Gantz (1993: 245–7).

one monster (the sphinx) in order to be awarded the kingdom of Thebes, Corinna's version is surely more focused on the Theban myth than the cyclic version attributed to the *Epigoni*. Here, the transfer from Oedipus to the Athenian hero Cephalus generates a different ending via his dog, and his intrusion in Theban territory is (more loosely) accounted for by his need of purification by the Cadmeans, after the accidental killing of his wife Procris.

PROOF