

THE DEATH OF OEDIPUS IN THE EPIC TRADITION

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NOTWITHSTANDING THE DISCOVERY, fifteen years ago, of a substantial papyrus fragment of Stesichorus describing the division of the estate of Oedipus (*PLille* 76 + 73 + 111), the material evidence for reconstructing the early versions of the myth of Oedipus remains scanty. Only a few epic fragments have survived, together with brief references in Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, and other lyric poets, and in the mythographers who in some cases were themselves reporting earlier traditions. A remarkable parade of conjectures and suggestions has therefore attempted to reconcile the very many discrepancies amongst the various versions, in order to provide an outline establishing a plausible and continuous narrative sequence for the myth. My analysis will deal with the death of Oedipus, a theme of considerable importance also for reconstructing the historical and mythological background of the wars between Thebes and Orchomenus. I will attempt to demonstrate that the account of the most ancient sources has often been misinterpreted in recent times.

The death of Oedipus is alluded to in a passage in the *Iliad* (23.677 ff.):

Εὐρύαλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἀνίστατο, ἰσόθεος φῶς,
Μηκιστῆος υἱὸς Ταλαϊονίδαο ἄνακτος,
ὅς ποτε Θήβασδ' ἦλθε δεδουπότης Οἰδιπόδαο
ἐς τάφον· ἔνθα δὲ πάντας ἐνίκᾳ Καδμείωνας.

Clearly, the *Iliad* version is in direct contrast to the version immortalised by Sophocles in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, in which the wretched Oedipus died in exile in Athens; according to epic tradition as reported in Homer and Hesiod (fr. 192 M.-W.), Oedipus, still king (*Od.* 11.271 ff.), died at Thebes and was commemorated by funeral games, a traditional honour accorded to epic heroes. The only problem with the *Iliad* verses is the meaning of the perfect participle *δεδουπότης*, which occurs only here in Homer and already in ancient times promoted discussion and close analysis. I will mention only briefly two more improbable interpretations, the one advanced by the

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The following works may be referred to by author's name alone: J. Paulson, "Anmerkungen zur Oidipus-Sage," *Eranos* 1 (1896) 11-27, 57-75; C. Robert, *Oidipus, Geschichte eines poetischen Stoffs im griechischen Altertum*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1915); A. Severyns, *Le Cycle épique dans l'école d'Aristarque* (Liège 1928, BibLiège 40); E. Valgiglio, "Edipo nella tradizione pre-attica," *RivStClass* 11 (1963) 18-43, 153-171; F. G. Welcker, *Der epische Cyclus oder die homerischen Dichter*² vols. 1 (Bonn 1865) and 2 (Bonn 1882).

scholiasts and suggesting that Oedipus committed suicide by throwing himself from some height (like the Sphinx) because of his misfortunes, the other suggested by Schneidewin, who interpreted δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο as "Oedipus who died crushed by his own misfortunes."¹ I shall focus instead on two more plausible proposals: the first made by the so-called glossographers, who interpreted the participle as meaning simply "dead," the second made by Aristarchus, who identified in the use of δεδουπότος a substantial difference from the later version by Sophocles.² Basing himself on the usual meaning of the verb δουπέω, which occurs in the *Iliad* mostly in the formula δούπησεν δὲ πεσών, "he fell with a thud," and expresses the heavy sound made by an armoured warrior as he falls dead to the ground, Aristarchus thought that in the epic version reflected by Homer Oedipus died in battle.³

The evident attraction of this interpretation, combined with the above-mentioned differences between the epic and the tragic version of the myth, brought C. Robert in his seminal book on Oedipus to accept Aristarchus' opinion.⁴ In his attempt to contextualise the *Iliad* passage within a more solid and broader mythological and literary framework, Robert brilliantly

¹For δεδουπότος as an allusion to Oedipus' suicide see *schol. Il.* 23.679a, 679e (5.471 f. Erbse); *schol. Il.* 13.426b (3.485 Erbse); Eust. *ad Il.* 23.679, 1323.42 ff. (4.811 f. van der Valk). This interpretation, defended by Valgiglio (24 ff.), has recently been refuted by A. Masaracchia, "La morte di Edipo in Omero," in B. Gentili and R. Pretagostini (eds.), *Edipo. Il teatro greco e la cultura europea* (Roma 1986) 531–534. The figurative meaning "who collapsed under the blows of his fate," suggested by F. W. Schneidewin ("Die Didaskalie der Sieben gegen Theben," *Philologus* 3 [1848] 348–371, at 357, n. 10; *idem*, *Die Sage vom Ödipus* [Göttingen 1852] 11), finds no support in any of the occurrences of δουπεῖν in the whole corpus of Greek literature. F. G. Welcker's interpretation of δεδουπότος ... ἐξ τάφου as "zusammengebrochen in das Grab" (2.339), rightly rejected long ago by O. Höfer (in Roscher 3.1 s.v. "Oidipus," 702.58 ff.) and by Paulson, is still maintained by R. D. Dawe, *Sophocles. Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge 1982) 1.

²For the interpretation of the glossographers see *schol. Il.* 23.679a (5.471 Erbse) πρὸς τὸ δεδουπότος· οἱ Γλωσσογράφοι γὰρ ἔν ἐν ἀνθ' ἐνὸς τεθνηκότος ἐξεδέξαντο. See also *schol. Il.* 23.679e (5.472 Erbse); *schol. Il.* 13.426a (3.485 Erbse); *schol. Il.* 16.822a (4.305 Erbse). On the glossographers see K. Lehrs, *De Aristarchi studiis Homericis*³ (Leipzig 1882) 37 ff.; R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford 1968) 78 f., 90 ff.; A. R. Dyck, "The Glossographoi," *HSCP* 91 (1987) 119–160, at 119 ff.

³Apollon. *Soph. Lex. Hom.* 60.11: δουπήσαι· ψοφήσαι. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ παρακολουθοῦντος ἀποθανεῖν πεσόντα ἐν πολέμῳ· ἔθεν καὶ τὸ "δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο" ἀκούει ὁ Ἀρίσταρχος ἐν πολέμῳ ἀνηρημένον. See also *schol. Il.* 23.679a; *schol. Il.* 13.426ab; *schol. Il.* 16.822a; Eust. *ad Il.* 23.679, 1323.42 ff. The two different interpretations of δεδουπότος / δουπήσαι are also found in Hsch. δ 407; 408; 2260. For a detailed reconstruction of Aristarchus' interpretation see Lehrs (above, n. 2) 103 f.; Severyns 216.

⁴Robert 1.108–118 (esp. 115 f.); *idem*, *Die griechische Heldensage* 1⁴; 3.1⁴ (Berlin 1920–21) 132 f.; 900. A detailed argument in favour of Aristarchus' interpretation of δεδουπότος had already been advanced by Paulson 24 ff., 57 f. See also C. G. Heyne, *Homeri carmina* 8 (Leipzig and London 1802) 490; I. Seebeck, *De Homero Oedipodeae*

related the Homeric verses to two other passages, one from Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the other from the mythographer Pherecydes.

The passage in Hesiod refers to the annihilation of the age of Heroes and reads (*Works and Days* 161 ff.):

καὶ τοὺς μὲν πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνὴ
τοὺς μὲν ὑφ' ἑπταπύλῳι Θήβῃ, Καδμηίδι γαίῃ,
ᾧλεσε μαρναμένους μήλων ἕνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο,
τοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐν νήεσσιν ὑπὲρ μέγα λαῖτμα θαλάσσης
ἐς Τροίην ἀγαγὼν Ἑλένης ἕνεκ' ἡκυκόμοιο.

Concerning the expression "fighting for the sheep of Oedipus" at 163, Robert thought that it did not refer to the war between Argos and Thebes which had been caused by the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices over the succession to the throne of Oedipus. Instead, he thought that it referred to an episode occurring in a local war between Thebes and a neighbouring city, the cause of which was the typically epic motif of cattle-raiding, in which Oedipus himself was slain. Finally, in a fragment by Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 95) Robert found a possible mythological and historical framework for the death of Oedipus:

Οἰδίποδι (φῃσι [Φερεκύδης]) Κρέων δίδωσι τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα Λαίου, μητέρα δ' αὐτοῦ Ἰοκάστην, ἐξ ἧς γίνονται αὐτῷ Φράστωρ καὶ Λαόνυτος, οἱ θνήσκουσιν ὑπὸ Μινυῶν καὶ Ἑργίνου **. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐνιαυτὸς παρήλθε, γαμεῖ ὁ Οἰδίπους Εὐρυγάνειαν τὴν Περίφαντος, ἐξ ἧς γίνονται αὐτῷ Ἀντιγόνη καὶ [Ἰοκάστη] Ἰσμήνη, ἣν ἀναιρεῖ Τυδεὺς ἐπὶ κρήνης, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἡ κρήνη Ἰσμήνη καλεῖται. υἱοὶ δὲ αὐτῷ ἐξ αὐτῆς Ἑτεοκλῆς καὶ Πολυνεΐκης. ἐπεὶ δὲ Εὐρυγάνεια ἐτελεύτησε, γαμεῖ ὁ Οἰδίπους Ἀστυμέδουσιν τὴν Σθενέλου.

The detail concerning the death of Oedipus' first two sons, Phrastor and Laonytus, in battle against the Minyans and Erginus induced Robert (1.114) to conclude that in the epic version of the myth Oedipus also died fighting against the Minyans, in one of the episodes of heavy fighting which characterized the relationship between Orchomenus and Thebes during the period prior to the Argive expeditions against Thebes narrated in the Theban epics. As is well known, the war between Thebes and Orchomenus, documented in many ancient sources, reflects an historical event confirmed by archaeological evidence.⁵ The sources tell us that it ended with the victory of the Thebans led by Heracles over the Minyans led by Erginus.⁶ According

fabulae auctore (diss., Bonn 1865) 7–11; R. Jebb, *Sophocles. Oedipus Tyrannus* (Cambridge 1883) xiv.

⁵See, most recently, R. J. Buck, *A History of Boeotia* (Edmonton 1979) 38 ff., 58 ff.; P. Salmon, *Étude sur la Confédération béotienne* (Brussels 1978) 15 f.; C. Brillante, "Le leggende tebane e l'archeologia," *StMicEgAnat* 21 (1980) 309–340, at 310 ff.

⁶See Pindar *Paeon* 8 (cf. Robert 2.39, n. 106) and Hellanicus *ap. schol.* Pindar *Paeon* 8 (p. 44 Maehler); Eur. *Heracles* 50, 220, 560; Theoc. 16.104 f.; *schol.* Theoc.

to Robert, therefore, Oedipus died at Thebes, slain by the Minyans who apparently intended to steal his sheep, as Hesiod seems to imply. Owing to his great skill in piecing together piecemeal and scattered evidence, and in situating it within a plausible historical context, Robert's reconstruction met with widespread acceptance among scholars and is still the most influential to date.⁷ However, a closer reading of the relevant passages in Homer, Hesiod, and Pherecydes reveals that they do not support Robert's hypothesis.

I will begin by analysing the meaning of *δεδουπότος* in the *Iliad* passage (23.679). In Homer, the verb *δουπεῖν* occurs 25 times out of 26 in the aorist tense; 22 times out of 26 it occurs in the context of a battle: 21 of these occurrences are in the formula *δούπησεν δὲ πεσών*, generally understood as "he fell and died" instead of the original meaning "he fell with a thud."⁸ In most cases this formula is followed either by the formula *ἀράβησε δὲ τεύχε' ἐπ' αὐτῷ*, "and his armour clattered about him," or by similar formulas. A careful reading of all the 21 formulaic occurrences makes it clear beyond all doubt that the verb *δουπεῖν* expresses *only* the thud of the body falling to the ground after being mortally wounded, whereas the fatal wounding of the warrior is always narrated in the preceding lines, and the clattering of

16.104/105b (p. 331 Wendel); *schol.* Pindar *Ol.* 14.2 (1.390 Drachmann); Diod. Sic. 4.10.3–5; Strabo 9.2.40; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.11; Paus. 9.25.4, 9.26.1, 9.37.1–5. Other sources are quoted by A. Schachter, "The Theban Wars," *Phoenix* 21 (1967) 1–10, at 6, n. 28; see also K. O. Müller, *Orchomenos und die Minyer*² (Breslau 1844) 200 ff.

⁷See for example M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (Berkeley 1932) 108 ff. (see below, n. 17); L. Deubner, "Oedipusprobleme," *AbhPreuss* (Philos.-hist. kl.) 4 (1942) 1–43, at 31 ff.; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) 36; H. J. Rose, "Chthonian Cattle," *Numen* 1 (1954) 213–227, at 224; F. Wehrli, "Oidipus," *MusHelv* 14 (1957) 108–117, at 111; E. L. de Kock, "The Sophoklean Oidipus and Its Antecedents," *Acta Classica* 4 (1961) 7–28, at 9; W. Pötscher, "Die Oidipus-Gestalt," *Eranos* 71 (1973) 12–44, at 23 ff.; Brillante (above, n. 5) 334 f.; C. Mueller-Goldingen, *Untersuchungen zu den Phönissen des Euripides* (Stuttgart 1985) 14 f.; W. J. Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod, Works and Days*, vv. 1–382 (Leiden 1985) 101; J. M. Bremer, in J. M. Bremer et al., *Some Recently Found Greek Poems* (Leiden 1987) 165 f.; J. March, *The Creative Poet* (London 1987) 122 (for the interpretation of *δεδουπότος* only). See also the *OCD* s.v. "Oedipus," 747, and Buck (above, n. 5) 62.

⁸The occurrences of *δουπέω* in Homer are listed in B. Snell, H.-J. Mette, and H. Erbse, eds., *Lexikon des frühgriechische Epos* (Göttingen 1955), s.v. The verb is a denominative of *δοῦπος*, "any dead, heavy sound, thud" (LSJ), whence it derives its original meaning of "to sound heavy or dead" (LSJ), "dumpf tönen, tosen" (H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* 1 [Heidelberg 1960] s.v.), "dröhnen" (M. Leumann, *Homerische Wörter* [Basel 1950] 217), "dumpf aufschlagen" (*Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*), "faire du bruit en tombant, en frappant" (E. Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*³ [Heidelberg 1938] s.v.). P. Chantraine wrongly assumes that *δουπέω* "[est] dit du fracas de la chute d'un guerrier en armes" (*Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*² [Paris 1968] s.v. *δοῦπος*). For the shift of meaning which brought about the false interpretation of *δουπεῖν* = "to fall in battle" cf. Hsch. δ 2262; 2264 (*δοῦπον· νόφον. θάνατον*), and see below, n. 10.

his armour or further sounds are expressed by ἀραβεῖν or other verbs. In other words, contrary to what Aristarchus claimed, δουπεῖν is not connected with the sound of the arms,⁹ nor is it necessarily connected with the scene of a battle, as three other Homeric occurrences demonstrate: in *Il.* 11.45, unaccompanied by the verb πίπτειν, ἐγδούπησαν refers to the thundering of Athena and Hera; in *Od.* 12.443 the compound ἐνδούπησα unaccompanied by πίπτειν indicates the loud noise made by Odysseus in a fall which does not prove fatal; in *Od.* 15.479 ἐνδούπησε refers to the noise made by a woman as she falls (πεσοῦσα) after being hit by Artemis.

It can therefore be inferred that it is primarily the context that specifies the meaning of δουπεῖν in every Homeric occurrence. In *Il.* 13.426, where the form δουπήσαι occurs unaccompanied by πίπτειν, the meaning "to fall in battle" is implied *only* because the very context of the battle provides the additional connotation of a violent death; but this does not happen to be the case with the context of our *Iliad* passage (23.677–680), where δεδουπότος does not occur in any description of battle or fight, but in a generic reference to a hero, Oedipus, who died in distant times. Finally, the participle δεδουπότος—the only occurrence of the verb δουπεῖν in the perfect tense in Homer—has been convincingly interpreted in recent times not as an early form, but as a more recent derivation of an original form **geddoupa*;¹⁰ in this regard, it should also be noted that *Iliad* 23, where the form δεδουπότος occurs, is now considered to be a late book.¹¹ The most sensible explanation seems therefore to be that, following the breaking of the formulaic *iunctura* with πίπτειν and the disappearance of the context of battle which had brought about the misleading interpretation of δούπησεν

⁹The same view on this point is expressed by Valgiglio 24 f., who, however, accepts the interpretation of δεδουπότος as referring to Oedipus' suicide. Further evidence for the absence of any link between the thud of a falling body and the clattering of the arms is provided by two Homeric passages. In *Il.* 16.822 Patroclus is already stripped of his armour (cf. γυμνόν, 815) when he falls dead, and δούπησεν cannot therefore but refer to the thud made by the body itself, as the scholiast remarks (*schol.* *Il.* 16.822b). The same applies to *Od.* 22.94, where the suitor Amphinomus, who is armed only with a dagger, falls dead to the ground (δούπησεν) after being hit by Telemachus' spear. See also H. J. Krapp, *Die akustischen Phänomene in der Ilias* (Munich 1964) 189.

¹⁰See the detailed arguments of Leumann (above, n. 8) 215 ff., 331 f., who rejects K. Meister's suggestion (*Die Homerische Kunstsprache* [Leipzig 1921] 125) that δεδουπότος is an old adaptation—for metrical reasons—of the form δεδουπηκός. Besides Leumann's (217 f.), a convincing explanation of the way the Wortumdeutung "to die in battle" arose (from a "falsche Interpretation" of such formulaic lines as *Il.* 13.187) is offered by E. Risch, in his review of P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* Paris 1942) at *Gnomon* 21 (1949) 40–44, at 42 (contra P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* 1 [Paris 1948] 426), and by V. Pisani, "Storia della lingua greca," in *Enciclopedia classica* II, vol. 5 (Turin 1960) 46. For a different view see C. J. Ruijgh, *L'Élément achéen dans la langue épique* (Assen 1957) 147 f.

¹¹See P. von der Mühl, *Kritisches Hypomnema zur Ilias* (Basel 1952) 358 ff.; P. Chantraine and H. Goube, *Iliade. Chant XXIII* (Paris 1964) 21 ff.

δὲ πεσών as "he fell and died (in battle)," the verb δουπεῖν was subsequently destined to lose both its etymological link with δοῦπος (see above, note 8) and its former connotation of a violent death, and to acquire in our passage the more generic meaning of "to die."¹²

The transition from the erroneous meaning of "to die in battle" to a more generic (if still misleading) meaning is confirmed by the occurrence of the form δεδουπότος in the pre-Aristarchean poet Apollonius Rhodius who, in obvious imitation of Homer, refers it to Pelias in the context of funeral games held to commemorate him (1.1304, Πελῖας δεδουπότος). In the fourth book, Apollonius also uses the same word of the death of Apsyrtos, Medea's brother (4.557). It is to be stressed that, although both Pelias and Apsyrtos met a violent death, neither of them was slain in battle; a possible alternative meaning of "who died a violent death" or "who was assassinated" might then be inferred from Apollonius Rhodius for δεδουπότος in the *Iliad* passage, but this meaning is irrelevant to Robert's hypothesis that Oedipus died in battle. Furthermore, it finds no support in any of the sources concerning the Oedipus myth.¹³

Aristarchus' interpretation of δεδουπότος as "fallen in battle" in *Il.* 23.679, accepted by Robert and by many other scholars, seems therefore unfounded: it can be explained in the light of Aristarchus' constant effort to distinguish Homer's use of language and treatment of myths from those of the *Neoteroi* (Hesiod, the Cyclic poets, lyric poetry, the tragedians).¹⁴ As a final support to the simple and sensible meaning of δεδουπότος = τεθνηκότος, ἀποθανόντος,

¹²Cf. *schol. Il.* 23.679e: ἡ καταχρηστικῶς ἀποθανόντος, ὡς τὸ "ὁ δ' Ἀτρεΐδην ἐναρίζει" (*A* 191), κυρίως δὲ τὸ σκυλεύει. The generic meaning of "dead" for δεδουπότος in *Il.* 23.679 is defended by J. G. E. Sterk, *Disputatio . . . de Labdacidarum historia a tragicis in scena proposita* (Leiden 1829) 94, by Welcker 2.339, n. 39 (who, however, misconstrues δεδουπότος with ἐς τάφον), by L. Legras (*Les Légendes thébaines* [Paris 1905] 30, n. 3), by Leumann (above, n. 8) 218, and by Masaracchia (above, n. 1) 529 ff.

¹³See Chantraine and Goube (above, n. 11) 96 f. on 679. According to H. Erbse, "Homerscholien und hellenistische Glossare bei Apollonios Rhodios," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 163–196, at 170, Apollonios uses δεδουπότος "in der Bedeutung 'sterben' . . . , also ohne Rücksicht auf die Auffassung der gelehrten Scholien." Another pre-Aristarchean poet, Lycophron, applies the same term to Hector, to Philoctetes, and to the Calydonian boar (*Alex.* 285, 919, 491 f.). Even if it is indisputable that both Hector and Philoctetes died in battle, the reference to a distant heroic past in Lycophron may in my opinion justify the generic meaning of "dead" for these two occurrences of δεδουπότος. In Euphorion fr. 40.2 Powell (= 67.2 de Cuenca), δεδουπότος refers to Achilles, who died at the hands of Paris, although it is questionable whether he actually died in battle: cf. *schol. Lycophron Alex.* 269, 2.116 Scheer.

¹⁴On Aristarchus' philological method and his procedure of emphasizing the difference between Homer and the *Neoteroi* see, besides Lehrs (above, n. 2), P. Cauer, *Grundfragen der Homerkritik*³ (Leipzig 1921) 51 ff.; A. Roemer, *Die Homerexegese Aristarchs in ihren Grundzügen* (Paderborn 1924) 101 ff. (esp. 104); Severyns 31 ff., 49–51, 213 ff.; M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* 2 (Leiden 1964) 84 ff., 224 ff.; Pfeiffer (above, n. 2) 225 ff.

defended in antiquity by the glossographers, it should be noted that the Hesiodic fragments (frs. 192–193 M.-W.) which concur with the *Iliad* in situating the death of Oedipus at Thebes as king make no allusion to his having died in battle; neither does the passage in the *Odyssey* (11.271 ff.) which provides an account of the main events in Oedipus' life. Likewise Pausanias, who refers twice to the death of Oedipus, basing himself once on the *Iliad* passage (1.28.7), once probably on an epic tradition (9.5.12), makes no allusion to a death in battle.

As far as the Hesiod passage is concerned, if we read it uninfluenced by Robert's hypothesis, its real meaning is evident. The expression μαρναμένους μῆλων ἔνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο (163), which in Robert's opinion was indicative of a local skirmish between neighbours, can in this context only indicate the wars of succession between the sons and the grandsons of Oedipus. Indeed the ancient commentary to these verses had already understood that here Hesiod "through the word 'sheep' indicates the whole estate, which caused the sons of Oedipus to fight and kill each other" and it also identified the τοὺς μὲν at 162 with the Argive leaders Tydeus, Capaneus, and the rest (*schol.* Hes. *Op.* 162, 163 Pertusi); another *scholion* (at 163a) noted that the ancients considered their main property to lie in livestock. The Byzantine erudite Tzetzes, commenting on the similar expression ἀμφὶ μῆλων in Lycophron, referred back to this very passage in Hesiod, observing that there μῆλα stood for the wealth and the throne of Oedipus (Tzetzes *ad Lycophron Alex.* 933, 2.302 Scheer). In fact the word μῆλα should here be interpreted not in the restrictive sense of "sheep and goats" but in the wider one of "livestock"; this precise significance in Hesiod is confirmed by a Homeric scholiast, who observed that in Homer μῆλα denotes sheep and goats, whereas in Hesiod the term indicates τὰ τετράποδα, that is all kinds of livestock.¹⁵ That in archaic times livestock was the emblem of kingship is borne out by other myths concerning the succession to (or the division of) a king's property: for example, in ps.-Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 2.4.6 the sons of Pterelaus, having been refused the kingdom of Mestor by Electryon, drive away his cattle and a mutual slaughter ensues. Another good case in point, and a closer one to the feud between Eteocles and Polynices, occurs in Pindar's *Pythian* 4 (148 ff.), in which Jason proposes to Pelias that a division of the kingdom be made whereby Jason keeps the sceptre and leaves to Pelias the sheep, the herds of oxen, and the fields. Furthermore, as W. Burkert

¹⁵ *Schol. Il.* 4.476 (1.529 Erbse), where I accept the reading Ἡσίοδος ('Ἡσίοδος δὲ τὰ τετράποδα πάντα) proposed by Wilamowitz (*apud* Erbse), accepted by Caier (above, n. 14) 68, and defended with cogent arguments by M. Schmidt ("Hom. μῆλα und die antiken Erklärungen," *Glotta* 57 [1979] 174–182, at 178, n. 17), who rightly rejects the reading Ἡρόδοτος printed in Erbse's edition of the *scholia*. See also *schol. Il.* 10.485b (3.102 Erbse) and, on the meaning of μῆλα in general, the excellent survey of Schmidt, with further quotations and bibliography (174 ff.).

pointed out, the word *μήλα* also appears in Stesichorus *PLille* 76.241, here referring to the division of the property of Oedipus.¹⁶

In the light of this evidence, the expression *μαρναμένους μήλων ἔνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο* should therefore be understood and translated as "fighting for the possessions, i.e., the kingdom, of Oedipus," and the local skirmish aroused by cattle-raiding becomes an outright war of succession to a throne waged by a distant city state, Argos, against another, Thebes. Its conciseness perfectly parallels that of the expression which, in the following line (165), indicates in Helen the cause of the war of Troy: *Ἑλένης ἔνεκ' ἡυκόμοιο*, "for the sake of lovely-haired Helen." It will be noted that just as Helen is the reason for the war of Troy, so Oedipus too (i.e., his kingdom) is not—contrary to what Robert thought—one of the contenders, but the reason for which the war of Thebes was fought. It is precisely the close correspondence between those who fought at Thebes and those who fought at Troy which also prevents us from accepting Robert's conclusions since, as M. Nilsson pointed out, "... if the war because of Oedipus' sheep was one of the many casual wars which myths attribute to Thebes, how was it possible that Hesiod puts it on the same footing as the most famous war of mythology, that against Troy, and counts it as the second in which the generation of heroes perished"?¹⁷ Neither can Deubner's attempt to refute Nilsson's argument be accepted: Deubner observed that since Hesiod was himself a Boeotian, he would have been inclined to place greater emphasis on the local tradition concerning wars between Thebes and Orchomenus (Deubner [above, note 7] 32 f.). But it is easy to reply with the argument that the entire Greek historical tradition dealing with Mycenaean times associated on the same level the two expeditions of the Argives against Thebes and the one of the Greeks against Troy, as is reflected also in the poems of the epic cycle. In the brief and sketchy allusion to the Heroes or Half-Gods which he inserted

¹⁶W. Burkert, "Seven against Thebes," in C. Brillante, M. Cantilena, C. O. Pavese, eds., *I poemi epici rapsodici non omerici e la tradizione orale* (Padua 1981) 32 f.; see also Welcker 2.323. For the text of Stesichorus I follow the recent edition of Bremer (above, note 7) 133; on vv. 239 ff. see W. Beck, "The Cause of the War in the 'Lille Stesichorus'," *ZPE* 73 (1988) 8–12, at 12. Another case is offered by Dictys Cretensis *Ephemeridos belli Troiani libri* I 1, p. 3 Eisenhut, on the division of Atreus' property: *quicquid auri atque argenti, pecorum etiam fuit, nepotibus dividendum reliquerat*. On the motif of cattle raiding in archaic times see P. Walcot, "Cattle Raiding, Heroic Tradition, and Ritual: The Greek Evidence," *History of Religions* 18 (1979) 326–351, at 326 ff. Some of my arguments against Robert's hypothesis on the Hesiod passage have already been put forward by Valgiglio 23 f.

¹⁷Nilsson (above, n. 7) 109 = *GGA* (1922) 42 f. It should be noted, however, that in spite of this convincing remark Nilsson accepted (108 ff.) Robert's interpretation of both *δεδοπότης* and the Hesiod passage as referring to Oedipus' death, his main disagreement with Robert being that he rather confusingly posited the death of Oedipus not in battle against the Minyans, but "in the One Great War of Thebes."

in his description of the four metallic races, Hesiod can therefore only be referring to the devastating wars between the sons and the grandsons of Oedipus, which along with the war of Troy accounted for the annihilation of a whole age of heroes.¹⁸

I hope that the points which I have thus put forward are sufficient to indicate that the two passages by Homer and Hesiod do not provide the information that Robert sought to demonstrate, and also that they are not interconnected. The passage by Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 95) which I will now consider provided the essential mythological and historical background to the hypothesis that Oedipus died in battle against the Minyans. This fragment is of the utmost importance because it contains valuable information on a number of points concerning the myth of Oedipus:¹⁹ 1) it is the only source to mention the otherwise unknown Phrastor and Laonytus, and their death at the hands of the Minyans led by Erginus; 2) it is the only source to list three different marriages for Oedipus, whereas the other sources mention either one or two wives;²⁰ 3) it also contradicts the version given by Sophocles' *Antigone* in which Ismene is still alive after the death of Eteocles and Polynices; in this regard Pherecydes agrees with the archaic version narrated in the seventh-century B.C. by the poet Mimnermus, a version also represented on a Corinthian vase of about 560 B.C. where Tydeus is about to kill Ismene.²¹ This detail shows that Pherecydes was relying on early sources, and this in my opinion can be applied also to

¹⁸Cf. *schol.* Hes. *Op.* 164 Pertusi: κατ' ἐξοχὴν λέγει τοὺς δύο πολέμους, τὸν Θηβαϊκὸν καὶ τὸν Ἰλιακόν. Besides Welcker, Valgiglio, and Burkert (above, n. 16), U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf also held the view that *Op.* 162 f. refers to the wars between the sons and the grandsons of Oedipus (*Hesiodos: Erga* [Berlin 1928] 60); see also M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) 192; March (above, n. 7) 134.

¹⁹Pherecydes' fragment has raised in the past two problems of interpretation: 1) the suggestion by Sterk (above, n. 12) 70 and by Welcker (1.241, n. 421; 2.315, n. 5) that the puzzling sons Phrastor and Laonytus be eliminated by referring αὐτῶν (line 18 of Jacoby's text) to Laius has been rightly rejected by C. F. Hermann (*Quaestionum Oedipodarum capita tria* [Marburg 1837] 115, n. 155), by Schneidewin, *Die Sage . . .* (above, n. 1) 9, and by Paulson 69, n. 1; 2) at line 19 Jacoby rightly posits a lacuna after Ἐργίνου, since it is unclear what the following expression "after one year elapsed" refers to: probably to the death of Jocasta, as conjectured by Schneidewin (9), and by H. Geist, *De fabula Oedipodea* 1 (Büdingen 1879) 15.

²⁰Two wives, Epikaste and Euryganeia, are referred to by *Oedipodea* fr. 2 Bernabé = 2 Davies; Pisander *FGrHist* 16 F 10.11 f.; *schol.* Eur. *Phoen.* 13 (1.249 Schwartz); ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8; Paus. 9.5.11. *Schol.* D II. 4.376 Dindorf and Eust. *ad* II. 4.376-381 (1.767.24 f. van der Valk), on the other hand, mention the names of Jocasta and Astymedousa. See also *Etym. Magn.* s.v. Ἰοκάστη (E. Miller, *Mélanges de littérature grecque* [Paris 1868] 169).

²¹Mimnermus fr. 19 Gentili-Prato = 21 West. For the Corinthian vase and its relationship to Mimnermus and Pherecydes see Robert 1.121-126; K. Schefold, *Frühgriechische Sagenbilder* (Munich 1964) 77; 79 (plate v); R. Hampe, "Tydeus und Ismene," *Antike Kunst* 18 (1975) 10-16, at 10 ff.; A. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: the Age of Experiment*

the information he provides regarding the death of Phrastor and Laonytus. His account is exceedingly important because, by placing a fight between Minyans and Thebans at the time of Oedipus and his first sons, Pherecydes seems either to ignore or to contradict the version agreed upon by all extant sources, according to which the war between Thebes and Orchomenus was definitively settled with the victory of Heracles over Erginus and with the latter's death in the period prior to Oedipus' reign at Thebes.²² Since from the other sources one infers that Erginus died before Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta, Pherecydes' version also implies a different chronology for these events, whereby Erginus is neither slain nor compelled by Heracles to make peace with the Thebans, but is still alive and at war with Thebes at the time of Oedipus' reign.

Pherecydes is then the one and only source for a battle between Thebes and Orchomenus in which members of Oedipus' family were involved. The suggestion made by R. Buck that the mythographer may here perhaps reflect an Orchomenian tradition less favourable to Thebes is very tempting;²³ we know that Pherecydes dealt at great length with the founding of Thebes and with the wars between Thebans and Phlegians (*FGrHist* 3 FF 22a, 41, 124), although we should not overlook that in one case (F 41e) he reports a tradition completely hostile to the Phlegians.²⁴

I have so far endeavoured to establish the extreme relevance of Pherecydes' passage to the history and myths of Mycenaean Thebes. I do not think, however, that it confirms Robert's hypothesis that Oedipus died in

(London 1980) 192. Robert 123 (plates 33 b, c), and Hampe (plates I 2; I 6) also provide further iconographic evidence for Ismene's killing at the hands of Tydeus.

²²The sources on the war between Thebes and Orchomenus are listed above, n. 6. A slightly different version is told by Pausanias (9.37.2-5), according to whom Erginus was not killed by Heracles, but compelled to make peace with the Thebans, thereafter neglecting every further action against Thebes in the effort to restore his former wealth and in the desire to have children. This version had presumably been narrated by Pindar in the eighth *Paeon*: cf. *schol.* Pindar *Paeon* 8 (p. 44 Maehler) and see Robert (above, n. 4) 2.2, 625 f.; A. Schachter, "Boiotia in the Sixth Century B.C.," in *Boiotika* (Munich 1989, Vorträge vom 5. internationalen Böotien-Kolloquium zu Ehren von Professor Dr. Siegfried Lauffer) 73-86, at 80, n. 31.

²³Buck (above, n. 5) 60. See also Paulson 70, who believes that Pherecydes' information on Phrastor and Laonytus is "das Resultat der Verschmelzung einer Minyer-Sage mit der Oidipus-Sage." According to Welcker (1.238 ff.), and Severyns (183), Orchomenus and its war with Thebes may have been the subject-matter of the epic *Minyas*.

²⁴On Pherecydes F 41 see M. Sordi, "Mitologia e propaganda nella Beozia arcaica," *Atene e Roma* NS 11 (1966) 15-24, at 18; L. Prandi, "I Flegiei di Orcomeno e Delfi," in M. Sordi (ed.), *Religione e politica nel mondo antico* (Milan 1981) 51-63, at 54 ff. Pherecydes seems to have dealt with the entire story of Oedipus' family, since we know from FF 96-97 that he also related the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices and the war of the Seven against Thebes. Furthermore, in F 115 he mentions two heroes, Euchenor and Clitus, who went to Thebes with the Epigoni.

battle, together with his sons, against the Minyans led by Erginus: on the contrary, this passage completely contradicts it. The death in battle in fact refers *only* to the sons of Oedipus, Phrastor and Laonytus: in Pherecydes, just as in Homer and Hesiod, there is no mention of the time of Oedipus' death, nor about the way he died. Indeed, we are informed that he considerably outlived his sons by Jocasta, since after their deaths he married again twice. With his second marriage to Euryganeia, which lasted long enough for him to have four children, we come to the time of the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices and to the first Theban war; even if Eteocles and Polynices died after Oedipus' third marriage to Astymedousa had taken place, there seems to be no time or possibility left for Oedipus to have died in a previous battle against the Minyans.

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