

Aarhus Seminars in Classical Antiquity

KLASSISKE STUDIERS SEMINARRÆKKE E2020

Vayos Liapis, Open University of Cyprus

Oedipus Babylonius: Mesopotamian Origins of Theban Myth?

Theban legend is informed by Near-Eastern myth and ritual complexes. The 'seven-gated Thebes' cliché reflects the Sumerian and Akkadian image of the Underworld as a seven-gated 'city'. And the seven generals who attack Thebes, and who are associated with non- or super-human qualities in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (e.g., dragons, fire, lightning), have striking precedents in sets of seven demons that crop up time and again in Mesopotamian literature and ritual. Indeed, one of those seven-demon groups, the Sebitti, are central to Babylonian purificatory rituals, which Burkert saw as the prototype for the myth of 'Seven against Thebes'.

This lecture will explore these and other Near-Eastern parallels to Theban myth, in an attempt to elucidate aspects of the latter that have resisted interpretation. It will be argued, among other things, that details surrounding the conflicted relationships between Oedipus and his sons, and between the sons themselves, may originate in aspects of the Babylonian New Year Festival, in which the incumbent king's status was symbolically contested (if only to be reaffirmed). Such rituals may have been celebrated by early Anatolian settlers in Thebes.



Friday 6 November 15.01-16

Zoom (Register with Troels Myrup Kristensen for full information)

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