In ancient art, whether literary or iconographical, the past is usually not presented in a way that is in accord with a situation at a specific historic time but in a way that the intended audience perceived as reflecting some period of the past. Greek tragedy stages characters of the mythic past, yet the world that is created on stage is a universe in itself: a mixture of elements that belong to the heroic world of epic, to a more recent past, and even to practices of contemporary classical Athens. Berman's (B.) study sheds light on this historical-cultural mixture in Aeschylus' tragedy Septem contra Thebas from various angles.

The book, an adaptation of the author's 2001 dissertation, consists of a series of essays that focus on aspects of cultural representation in the drama. B. does not aim at an entirely new interpretation of the play as a whole, but by taking a new and specific approach he contributes to current views about the play. He maintains that the play's meaning lies in its mediation between heroic and contemporary institutions and practices. B. focuses on the imagery in the play from an interdisciplinary point of view and deals with literary, iconographical and archaeological (realia) sources. Such a book runs the risk of failing to get beyond a superficial interpretation of the play at hand or the other sources, but B. has avoided this problem by restricting himself to a profound discussion of several motifs in the play. For me the archaeological and iconographical analyses in chapter 2 and 3 were particularly thorough and illuminating.

The book contains six chapters. The first chapter, "Introduction: Realia and Cultural Discourse" (15-31), states the book's approach. B. intends to offer "a new perspective to some ways a mythic story engages in the process of representing contemporary culture" (p. 17). On the one hand, the Septem dramatizes a traditional story, while on the other hand the representation of this story reflects the time of its expression. B. contends that the play gains meaning through the interaction of mythic tradition and the representation of realia of contemporary Greek culture. Reproducing in brief the scholarly discussion about the definition of 'myth', B. distinguishes the traditional material (the who and what) from the cultural representation (the how). The Septem stages the traditional story of the conflict between the two sons of Oedipus over their inheritance and the Theban kingship. Polynices attacks the city, the brothers kill each other, but the city is saved from the Argive attack. The play contains some elements that are not part of the myth, but are essential to Aeschylus' representation of culture. To account for the cultural representation, B. introduces the term 'heroic patina', which refers to what others have called 'anachronism': the play represents certain cultural features in an artificial way. The play suggests an old heroic past, but the artistic means by which this is achieved often belong to current times or to the near-distant
past rather than the heroic past. In the four following chapters, B. examines four physical and social aspects of the Greek world and their representation in the Septem.

In the second chapter, "Decorating the Heroes: The Shield Blazons of the Seven" (33-86), B. offers a context for the famous 'Shield-Scene' in the second episode of the play. The blazons on the shields described in the Seven differ from their literary predecessors in several respects: B. argues that whereas blazons in early Greek literature stand relatively independent of their narratives and usually do not have a personal meaning to their carrier, the blazons in the Seven are apotropaic or bear a direct and subordinate relevance to the drama's narrative. Therefore the presence and function of the shield blazons are a nontraditional element, which may render them suitable for an interpretation that focuses on realia contemporary to or near the time of the play's first performance. B. examines actual practices of shield decoration in Greece from the early Mycenaean period to early classical times, relying on various sources. Shield decorations probably appeared in the eighth century on the Argive round shields and were popular during the late archaic and classical period.

In the Septem the shield of Hippomedon bears the closest resemblance to shield decorations in the realia. It depicts a Typhon, which also occurs on an archaic shield from Olympia. It is a good example of representation of the heroic world by means of near contemporary reality and supports B.'s idea that representations do not need to be considered as purely 'mythical' or 'literary' but can be considered both extraliterarily and intratextually. Some other blazons show a general affinity with authentic ones from the recent past. B. pays special attention to vase-paintings figuring depictions of the story of the Seven with visible blazonry, including a detailed account of how he selected the vases. The shield blazons found on vase paintings of the Seven are characteristic of many other heroic depictions on vases. B.'s conclusion that the vases show a heroic mold corresponds to the presentation of the past in tragedy. Unlike the shields in earlier Greek literature that are merely described artifacts, the shields in the Septem function as symbols in the dramatic narrative and are explicitly interpreted. The shields show more resemblances to 'real' shields from a particular past and to shields on vase paintings than do other depictions of shields in ancient literature. They differ from contemporary ones, whose emblems denoted their city or alliance, but may have reminded older members of the audience of the more individualized blazons they had carried themselves in the past: "The result is a patina of the heroic world, created through interaction with representations of blazons in other media as well as actual blazons themselves" (p. 74).

The third chapter, "Seven-Gated Thebes and the Walls of Thebes" (87-115), deals with the historicity of the tradition that Thebes had seven gates: "do the names preserve the memory of actual fortifications, or are they purely the material of traditional poetry?" (p. 91). The question suits B.'s approach very well as it is both a philological and an archaeological issue. Literature prior to Aeschylus already calls Thebes 'seven-gated', but Aeschylus may have been the first to provide a list of the gates' names. Literary testimonies after Aeschylus have some names in common but do not display unanimous agreement on the exact names of the seven gates, which justifies questioning the relationship of these names with the actual Theban gates. Unfortunately, archaeological fieldwork has been hampered by the presence of modern Thebes on top of the ancient city. Exact topographical localization of many of the gates in the play is difficult. B.'s analysis distinguishes three types of gates according to their connections with the 'real' topography of Thebes: (1) the most concretely identifiable locations: Elektrai, Proitides, and Neistai. (2) Those with cultic or religious associations: Homoloideis and Onkaia, which maintain some connection to actual places in Thebes while at the same time belonging to the cultic and religious world of mythic Thebes. (3) Those with a
predominantly narrative significance: Borraiai and Hebdomai. The last two gates are unique to the *Septem* and do not occur in other traditions. The name 'Hebdomai', 'Seventh gate' refers to the place of the confrontation between Eteocles and Polynices. The examination of the Theban gates results in a conclusion similar to the chapter about shields: some gates bear evidence of actual locations, others suggest localities in actual Thebes or refer to mythic traditions, and others again are merely imaginary places with a mainly narrative function.

Chapter 4, "Motivating Mythic Material on Stage: The Problem of Succession" (117-48) treats the representation of a social issue in the play: how to divide an inheritance fairly if it concerns not only movable goods but also an indivisible kingdom? B. argues that the motivation for the strife between the brothers was not a fixed element of the play's plot and Aeschylus could choose from many possibilities, such as the curse(s) of Laius and/or Oedipus. The tradition that the brothers had decided to rule over Thebes alternately and that Eteocles refused to delegate his power to his sibling was probably a Euripidean invention and is not present in the Aeschylean version. In Aeschylus' play the brothers are in conflict over their inheritance. As often in Aeschylus' dramas, multiple motivations are at work at the same time (not only human struggle but also divine motivation by means of the Erinys and Apollo's oracle). In this chapter, B. shows how the familial interaction concerning inheritance must have been partly recognizable for the audience.

In Athens and elsewhere in the fifth century and probably earlier, the norm was equal division of property among male heirs, with no advantage for the eldest son, sometimes accomplished through lots. With two or more heirs, problems could arise when the inheritance was indivisible or too small for partition. There are some literary indications for a system of indivisibility of land, combined with primogeniture (the eldest son would inherit the land or kingship as a whole), but it remains unclear whether this ever was a reality in Greece or merely belonged to collective and creative memory. Compared to other versions of Eteocles' and Polynices' conflict, the *Septem* is remarkable in that it is hard to determine "which brother is meant to bear a greater share of the individual blame" (p. 137). Though we do not know how the brothers and their conflict were portrayed in the two preceding tragedies of the trilogy, B. argues convincingly that in this play both brothers have equal rights to the inheritance of Oedipus' goods and kingship. In contrast to Euripides' *Phoenissae* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* the relative ages of the brothers are left undetermined; this makes it impossible to decide by means of primogeniture who should inherit the Theban kingship. The *Septem* "can examine and interrogate more directly the interaction between substance (kingship or goods) and method (primogeniture or equal division) of devolvement" (p. 144).

Chapter 5, "Drawing of Lots: A Ghost in the Machine?" (149-77), shows interesting connections within the play between several motifs involving sortition. First of all, the Argives draw lots to decide which attacker will be stationed at which gate. Drawing lots for martial purposes occurs in Homeric poetry but was also in accordance with contemporary Athenian practice. Secondly, allotment functions in a more figurative way in the imagery of division by lot, and in the sacred sphere. The drawing of lots offers the opportunity for divine interference. Since sortition can be used in different contexts, it is debated to what extent this sacred aspect of supposed divine interference is present in each context. B. argues that this sacred aspect can never be completely absent from sortition. This enables him to relate the 'secular' sortition of the Argives to the religious forces in the play, especially Apollo's oracle and Oedipus' curse in the second stasimon. Oedipus' curse is expressly connected with the matter of division of property. The fratricide is not only the result of an inheritance conflict
but can also be seen as the fulfillment of Oedipus’ curse and the will of Apollo (cf. Septem 800-802).

Given the evidence an exact reconstruction of the practice is impossible, but it is clear that prophecy by lots and dice was a custom throughout the Greek world over an extended period of time, for example at Apollo’s oracle at Delphi. Terminology of allotment shows traces of sortition, e.g. the verb λαγχάνω, ‘to obtain by lot’, and λάχος, ‘an allotted portion’, which is often translated as ‘share’ or ‘portion’. Division of estate in archaic and classical Greece often took place by lot. In the play, the Argive sortition allows for divine interference, and as the plot moves forward Apollo’s influence becomes explicit. B. concludes that Apollo, whom the scout calls Hebdomagetas (‘Leader of the Seventh’, 800), a pseudo-cult title, is present at the sortition that results in the encounter of Eteocles and Polynices at the Seventh gate. The fratricide yields each brother his part of Theban earth, for which Aeschylus exploits the double meaning of ‘moira’ (indicating both ‘share’ of the earth and ‘death’). B. ends by connecting heroic practices and those in democratic Athens where sortition was used for the assignment of several political, judicial and religious functions. B.’s argument relates different contexts for the use of lots: they form an ambiguous continuum, which contributes to the meaning and unity of the play.

The final chapter, “Conclusion: Hippomedon's Typhon and Baudolino's Imagination” (179-85) summarizes the patterns of how Greek realia are represented on stage in Aeschylus’ Septem in order to pursue the play’s cultural meaning. Cultural ‘relevance’ and cultural ‘modification’ appear in representations that are neither truly traditional nor contemporary.

B.’s study makes a solid contribution to our understanding of Aeschylus’ Septem by looking closely at specific aspects of cultural representation from an interdisciplinary angle. The book is of interest for philologists, historians and archaeologists who are open to an interdisciplinary approach to classical tragedy and especially to the Septem. I have some minor points of disagreement. First of all, I missed a motivation as to why B. has chosen the four aspects he discusses. Certainly, his examinations of these aspects demonstrate his thesis very well, but one may wonder why he did not include for example the cultural representations of praying and lamenting, which seem essential to the play as well. Secondly, in B.’s discussion of the shields the choice of a more ‘extraliterary’ approach results in an interesting comparison of archaeological evidence and passages in the Septem, yet it also means that a reader will be disappointed if he expects a detailed analysis about the relation of the shield scene to the play as a whole or to other plays of Aeschylus. When B. considers Hippomedon’s shield as fitting Aeschylus’ technique, he refers to "the tapestry of Clytaemestra" (p. 63); though it is a well-known example, I would have preferred some comment on this point (B. adds some references on p. 181). B. would also have strengthened his argument about Aeschylus’ technique by adding more examples. Lastly, I was not convinced by B.’s conclusion in chapter 4 that the play validates equal division, because I am not so convinced of the positive outcome for the city. Whether one takes the third stasimon and the extant exodos touch upon impending problems for the city of Thebes, although the city is rescued from the Seven.

The book is perspicuously written and structured. It contains several black-and-white pictures of vase paintings, maps, an index locorum and a general index. All Greek texts are accompanied by translations. I have a few minor issues with the book’s editing, the most
important of which is that several bibliographical references in the footnotes are lacking in the bibliography at the end of the book.²

Notes: