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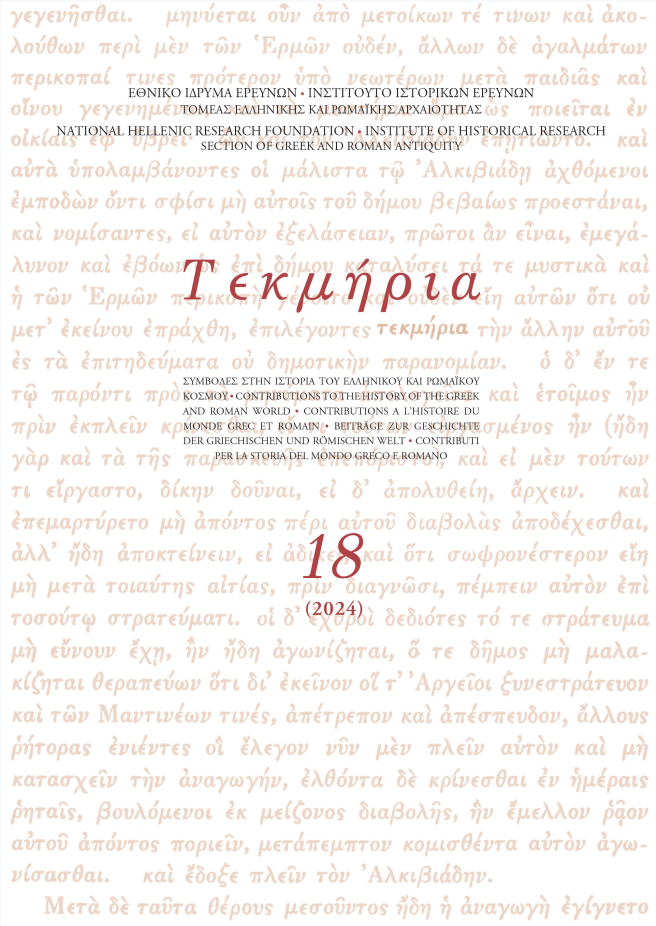

This Must be the Place: A Holistic Approach to the Development of Boiotian Religious Sites (700-300 BCE)

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This Must be the Place: A Holistic Approach to the Development of Boiotian Religious Sites (700-300 BCE)*

Sacred sites emerged from the natural surroundings, acted as shared sites of religious worship and helped shape local identities. Looking at southern Boiotia between ca. 700 and 300 and five cult sites in particular –the Apollo cult at Delion, the Apollo Ismenos temple, the Galaxion and the Kabeirion– can bring us closer to the inhabitants' experiences of this ancient landscape and explore the multitude of elements that influenced the creation of sacred sites in this area.[1] By focusing on four case studies and combining fundamental aspects of the Spatial and Sensorial Turn, I aim to illuminate how communities across southern and eastern Boiotia came together at sites with a rich sensory input. Such a phenomenological approach brings to the fore why these were the places where human and divine histories merged around a particular landmark, since each site was likely linked to a sacred story, even if the mythological narrative has not survived in written form.[2] Phenomenology alone, however, cannot answer the question why these sites developed. A more holistic approach to the ancient landscape integrates economic, cultural and political considerations in uncovering why these sites were elevated above other sites with similar natural features and sensory input.[3] Strategic and useful locations were often chosen because of their placement along axes of

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1. All dates will be BCE unless otherwise stated.

2. Dignas, Smith 2012; Cusumano et al. 2013.

3. Bintliff 2013 advocates a more holistic approach to the ancient landscape.

movement between communities, on herding routes, on roads between cities or their proximity to harbours. Incorporating these elements also offers an angle for interpretation that weighs the evidence of endemic internecine enmity (or warfare) among the Boiotian *poleis* and their resistance to the Theban plans to create a common polity under their aegis, built upon the foundations of shared religious worship, notions of kinship and economic collaboration.[4] Common sanctuaries could be used as a venue to stage temporary rapprochements, but that does not undermine their real value in allowing these frictions to be negotiated by binding together elites from across the region.

The first section of the article summarises the insights from the Spatial and Sensorial Turns in ancient history; this particular elaboration aims to clarify what "place" means, and how it differs from more generic terms like "space". What follows is an excursus into the examples of the sites mentioned above. The necessary source criticism considering the lateness of various parts of the evidence will be treated where appropriate, especially in the case of the often later literary references.

Place, the local, and sacred landscapes

The importance of place, and the local, in the cultic landscape has been recognised in the study of Boiotian religion since the late 1960s. Albert Schachter identified local and regional idiosyncrasies, focusing on what he called "cult types". For example, Apolline oracles linked to hydromancy clustered around the banks of Lake Kopais, whereas others that combine a pair of male founders or the dying boy in the mythological narrative, were found in specific parts of Boiotia, like its eastern confines (**figs. 1** and **2**).[5] Following in his footsteps is the recent work by Hans Beck.[6] In his *Localism and the Ancient Greek City-State*, Beck demonstrates how the "Lebenswelt" of ancient mainland Greece was anchored in their locality, or place, rather than an overarching, distant notion of Hellenic identity. However, these were not diametrically opposed points on the spectrum of identity but worked in lockstep. Following Irad Malkin's seminal work on connectivity and networks, the shared notion of Greekness

4. Mackil 2013. For the process of Boiotian ethnogenesis, see Kühr 2006; Larson 2007; Kowalzig 2007, 328-391.

5. Schachter 1967 and 1972.

6. Beck 2020.

proved fruitful to connect over long distances and forge smaller networks across the Mediterranean, for instance after the Greek colonisation.[7] It also helped to juxtapose themselves –as Greeks– from other inhabitants of these lands and create a shared, common identity which they could employ to remain attached to their roots. Hellenicity, as it were, thus provided the syntax and grammar for distinguishing themselves and finding common ground.[8]

Yet within that Greek community, the local was king. Each *polis* had its own *chora,* filled with landmarks and memories that mattered to its inhabitants and shaped their identity. People moved through this *chora* on a daily basis, a movement through a taskscape, a constructed space in which all (human) activities are interlocked.[9] These activities fostered place-based identities. The vitality brought by "place" is different from the mere epichoric identity.[10] It possesses meaning at different levels for engaging memories of a given landscape, people, experiences and spiritual encounters. "Place" allows people to develop notions of belonging through their engagement with the surroundings, landmarks or sensory experiences that inspire and generate histories.[11] These stories are brought about through their daily routines, such as herding their cattle, moving between cities or having to sow their fields.

Nor were these activities perceived as separate or contrary to the spiritual and divine, as Hesiod's *Works and Days* demonstrates. He seamlessly joins observations on neighbours, ploughing your fields, advice on when to sow

7. Malkin 2011. For more on the "globalisation" of the Mediterranean, see Hodos 2020.

8. See the seminal studies by Jonathan Hall (1997 and 2002) on aspects of Hellenicity.

9. The term is taken from Ingold 1993.

10. Beck 2020, 4. The importance of place is not just a modern construct. The late 5th-cent. Archytas from Taras was acknowledged as the founder of studies on place and its ontological qualities, but little else is known of him; his works only survive in fragments. One ascribed quote (Archytas fr. 1 = D-K 47A24) captures the importance of movement for understanding place: "Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place, it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place, in which that which causes motion or is acted upon. Perhaps thus it is the first of all things, since all existing things are either in place or not without place". Sambursky 1982, 14 views the statement as "deriving from an unknown Neopythagorean philosopher", rather than Archytas.

11. Ingold 2022, 171. For place-based identity in antiquity, see Ulf 2009.

your seeds and pray to the gods into one holistic work. Two observations particularly fit into how people moved through their surroundings and combined these various activities:

εὔχεσθαι δὲ Διὶ χθονίῳ Δημήτερί θ' ἁγνῇ,
ἐκτελέα βρίθειν Δημήτερος ἱερὸν ἀκτὴν,
ἀρχόμενος τὰ πρῶτ' ἀρότου, ὅτ' ἂν ἄκρον ἐχέτλης
χειρὶ λαβὼν ὄρπηκι βοῶν ἐπὶ νῶτον ἵκηαι
ἔνδρυον ἑλκόντων μεσάβων.

"Pray to Zeus of the Earth and to pure Demeter to make Demeter's holy grain sound and heavy, when first you begin ploughing, when you hold in your hand the end of the plough-tail and bring down your stick on the backs of the oxen as they draw on the pole-bar by the yoke-straps."[12]

(μηδέ ποτ' αἰενάων ποταμῶν καλλίρροον ὕδωρ
ποσσὶ περᾶν, πρίν γ' εὔξῃ ἰδὼν ἐς καλὰ ῥέεθρα,
χεῖρας νιψάμενος πολυηράτῳ ὕδατι λευκῷ.
Ὃς ποταμὸν διαβῇ κακότητ' ἰδὲ χεῖρας ἄνιπτος,
τῷ δὲ θεοὶ νεμεσῶσι καὶ ἄλγεα δῶκαν ὀπίσσω.)

"Never cross the sweet-flowing water of ever-rolling rivers afoot until you have prayed, gazing into the soft flood, and washed your hands in the clear, lovely water. Whoever crosses a river with hands unwashed of wickedness, the gods are angry with him and bring trouble upon him afterwards."[13]

A natural feature –like the soil in which to plough or the river that one crosses– initially inspires a sense of divine presence, but it is deeply rooted in the activities that formed a permanent part of every-day life.

In similar fashion, the gods of the "Greek" pantheon were present in the majority of *poleis*. Each had specific qualities deemed to have arisen from natural features in the local environment like springs, rivers or mountains.

12. Hes. *Op.* 465-469. For the ancient text and its translation, see Evelyn-White 1914.

13. Hes. *Op.* 737-742. For the ancient text and its translation, see Evelyn-White 1914.

The relationship was often captured in the epithet. Localised pantheons were therefore lodged in the immediate surroundings of the communities to which they belonged, but at the same time formed part of a wider mosaic reflecting communal religious idea across Greek communities in the Mediterranean world. Hence several places claimed to be Zeus' birthplace, such as Arkadia and Crete.[14] The two perspectives were not mutually exclusive. Gods could reside high on Olympus in their anthropomorphic form, while also being embodied in natural elements on the ground.[15]

Sensory experiences prompted the initial phase for these loci of veneration. The recent interest in the phenomenological approaches to ancient life underlined aspects of human experience in antiquity –both pleasant and unpleasant– that previously went underappreciated. Experiences such as smell, sight, hearing, taste or touch have been put at the forefront of a social and cultural history of ancient Greece and Rome.[16] Scholars have analysed the experiences of one particular sense in temples or sacred sites, or conversely, a phenomenological investigation of ancient festivals and sanctuaries.[17] These insights explain why certain natural features invited conversations about divine presences in the environment.

An example thereof are springs. Fresh water sources are crucial to human life and therefore claimed more attention from people. As obvious places of refreshment for travellers, they prompted conversations between them, explaining why deities and nymphs were often associated with them.[18] Immemorial natural features like rivers or springs attracted people because of the stimuli they provided in the human senses, yet it was only when these stimuli merged with human imaginations of a divine presence that granted these loci a discourse on how the gods resided in these sites or near these landmarks

14. Romano 2019. See Cole 2004 on a "shared" Artemis sacred landscape along the Euboian Gulf.

15. Larson 2019.

16. See, for example, Bradley 2015; Squire 2016; Rudolph 2017; Butler, Nooter 2018; Purves 2018; Platt 2020; these works are heavily tilted toward literary evidence. Hamilakis 2013 focuses more on archaeological and anthropological approaches.

17. Mylonopoulos 2023, with an extensive bibliographical overview.

18. Larson 2019.

and often drew specific qualities from these surroundings.[19] The functional and phenomenological therefore combined to create sites of veneration and interaction.[20] Due to this overlap in functions and their placement outside of urban centres, springs often acted as the impetus for forming a cult site, but by itself cannot explain the success thereof; that was a mixture of various additional elements like strategic location, communal investment or their useful location along axes of transportations.

Places with abundant sensory input attracted more visitors who, drawn by natural features, would exchange their own experiences. The movement through the landscape and the human-natural-divine dialectic provided the soil from which a notion of "place" could develop.[21] A "place", therefore, is not simply stamped upon an empty geographically defined space, but rather emerges from the interaction between humans, deities and the environment; it is a highly localised affair that does not fit an overarching template.[22]

Its elevation to a sacred or religious site was often the result of human agency, especially through individuals with power, status or wealth, or through the articulation of attachment to the land by nearby communities.[23] Connecting these sites through ritualised action not just forged a bond between two places, but also allowed communities to engage in identity-shaping activities by dedicating at sites along the way, concatenating them into a network of localised importance.[24] Certain sites were chosen for their visibility, or "made sacred", so that influential individuals could demonstrate their power. In other cases, communities opted to embellish a sacred site to demonstrate

19. See, for example, Scheer 2019; Wiemer 2019.

20. Häussler, Chiai 2020, 1-3.

21. Ingold 2016, 3.

22. Häussler, Chiai 2020, 3.

23. This follows criticisms that Tilley and Ingold overlooked power structures or social relations in shaping place: Bender 2001; Bintliff 2013. Hicks 2016 argues that archaeology not just studies the past through a present prism but also the temporalities of change of the landscape. This fits with newer approaches to environmental history, possible changes in the landscape and human-nature interactions (cf. Crumley, Lennartson, Westin 2017).

24. Casey (1996, 30) views movement between places as forging a wider network that creates the notion of a region.

their prowess vis-à-vis their neighbours, or for other reasons.[25] The construction of a shrine also served as a further pointer that people were dealing with a sacred site.

We catch a glimpse of these peculiar elements of place-bound identity and the shaping of sacred sites through the *Hiera Odos* (Sacred Way). Some Sacred Ways have been documented during the Classical period. The one between Athens and Eleusis is particularly striking in its connection to the places it passed by. Participants in the Mysteries would make dedications at roadside shrines and offer a lock of hair to the river Kephisos when crossing it.[26] The sides of the road were strewn with cemeteries and graves. Travelling along the road in a procession forged an intimate link with the ancestors, the natural surroundings and features in a ritualised action. This meant to identify the people participating in it as belonging to the sacred community of Mystery-rite initiates. It also acted as a communal bonding event for residents of Athens.[27] In other cases, like the Sacred Way between Miletus and Didyma, the route was more focused on the local community and its cohesion.[28] It did pass by local landmarks such as an altar to Hermes Kelados, but the cult itself had a much more limited clientele than the (later) Mysteries.[29] While uncertainty abounds about the extent and date of most later Sacred Ways, Martin Mohr suggested that these roads connected local hereditary groups and brought them together in a communal fashion through ritualised action and sacralisation of the landscape.[30] This view seems plausible in light of the routes these processions traversed, which were not always the quickest road between the city and the sanctuary. This peculiarity suggests that routes were chosen with a unifying purpose in mind: by taking in landmarks and local stories along the way. The procession became an elaboration of local phenomenology and history through a ritualised action.[31] The physical

25. For example, Onchestos in Boiotia (Beck 2023). For more on the notion of central, shared places, see McInerney 2006; de Polignac 2011 and 2017. De Polignac 1984 already touched upon some of these concepts.

26. Paus. 1.37.3. *I. Eleusis* 638 details the procession.

27. Mohr 2013, 65-69.

28. Mohr 2013, 59-64; Beck 2023, 38-40.

29. See *LSCG* 50, ll. 25-31.

30. Mohr 2013, 75-92.

31. Beck 2023, 38-40.

embellishment of the sanctuaries at the end of the procession, as at Eleusis and Didyma for instance, was the result of societal investments and communities aiming to amplify the prominence of their sanctuary, in addition to accommodating an influx of visitors and other practical needs.[32]

This brings us closer to Häussler and Chiai's "thick description" of sacred landscapes and sanctuaries.[33] Other scholars have looked at monumental shrines in sacred landscapes to uncover their history and role within the ancient experience.[34] These provide a heuristic tool to investigate the southern Boiotian sacred landscape of between 700 and 300 BCE to see how movement and sensory experiences along its plains, hills and seasides helped to forge religious sites, which in turn developed into important (local) shared sanctuaries.

An obstacle in retrieving the ancient sensorial experiences is whether we can reconstruct the ancient environment and whether we can use the current environment as a blueprint. Robert Salleres warns against equating the contemporary Greek countryside with that of the Classical and Hellenistic period.[35] However, part of his analysis rests on the sort of wheat used in the Classical world and its yields as opposed to modern practices and species; this perspective certainly has merit, but is more an example of man-made imprints on the environment than of the natural surroundings that triggered sensory experiences. Alfred Grove and Oliver Rackham, on the other hand, are less sceptical.[36] They see a lot of similarities between the modern and ancient landscape and therefore apply insights from the current day onto the past.

32. Rönnberg 2021, 240-245.

33. Häussler, Chiai 2020. The term stems from Clifford Geertz. At p. 3 Häussler and Chiai state the following: "For each case, we need to ask what environmental and topographical factors dominate the local society and therefore the local creation account (e.g. general climatic conditions; topographical features such as mountains, rocks, rivers, marshes, springs, the sea, etc.), what animals play which role in local society, what are the myth's main concerns, who are the main protagonists in the myths and then subsequently in cult activities and re-enactments of myths?".

34. Käppel, Pothou 2015; Häussler,Chiai 2020; Papantoniou, Morris, Vionis 2019; Collar, Kristenson 2020.

35. Sallares 1991, 390-393.

36. Grove, Rackham 2001, 141-142.

The interceding periods witnessed significant changes in the man-made landscape, hinging on decisions taken by the populace on which products to cultivate, like the olive.[37] Therefore, modern observations of the landscape can provide possible connections to the past, but a cautious approach is the best way forward.

Moreover, even if we have sources describing the ancient environment, ancient authors equally viewed their surrounding through their subjective scopes, just as modern interpreters. This has consequences for the treatment of literary sources. For example, topoi like sacred groves or ornamental qualities mentioned in sources like the *Homeric Hymns* contained elements of poetic embellishment, especially when poets wished to emphasise the divine input in cultivating the wild character of the region. That poetic license was not free of some rootedness in real life and the areas described in the *Homeric Hymns*, for instance, would have been rooted in the real landscape through which people moved themselves on a daily basis.[38] Therefore, these descriptions contain a kernel of truth, even if the authors follow literary conventions in mentioning sacred woody areas, for example. In the eye of the modern visitor and traveller, the broad plains near Onchestos are accurately described in the *Homeric Hymns to Apollo* and *Hermes*, but this was second-guessed by Strabo upon visiting the site:

> "Onchestus... is situated on a height, is bare of trees, and has a sacred Precinct of Poseidon, which is also bare of trees. But the poets embellish things, calling all sacred precincts 'sacred groves', even if they are bare of trees."[39]

His remark demonstrates how even within antiquity, landscapes could change through man-made interventions –either through economic necessity

37. Rackham 1983 argues that olive cultivation had been low in recent centuries and then was revived after its cultivation in antiquity. See also the insights into the changes in the Classical landscape for economic considerations, with olive cultivation transplanting cereals in various regions of the Greek world, in Izdebski et al. 2020. For a recent overview of human-environment interactions in ancient Greece, see Post 2022.

38. Bonnechere 2007. For the Homeric Hymns, see, for example, Richardson 2010; McInerney 2015.

39. Str. 9.2.33. For the translation, see Jones 1924.

or other considerations– and underlines the caution needed in treating descriptions of these landscapes as reflecting contemporary observations, rather than perennial portrayals.

With these caveats in mind, it is now possible to look at the quartet of examples from southern Boiotia and analyse which sensory inputs lay at the root of the sanctuary and which subsequent factors, like those mentioned above, influenced the development of these sites into communal sites of worship and importance.

Apollo's seaboard pasture: Delion

Delion, or modern-day Dilesi, is located on the eastern seaboard of Boiotia. This good natural harbour could have acted as the primary harbour for fifth-century Tanagra before their take-over of Aulis, a larger harbour, in the fourth century.[40] Delion seems to have belonged to a network of Euboian Gulf harbours in the Archaic and Classical period.[41] Aulis remained the main Boiotian harbour on the Euboian Gulf, but Delion served as a secondary military embarkment point.[42] If armies could depart from this harbour, the same applies for smaller groups of travellers voyaging across the Euboian Gulf or towards the Aegean. As a natural harbour, the development of a sanctuary and a small settlement in its vicinity is then intrinsically linked to its origin as a harbour, its natural surroundings and its function in connecting various communities as a hub of transportation.

The toponym is also known from the battle fought there between the Athenians and Boiotians in 424. Thucydides describes how the Athenians desecrated a temple dedicated to Delian Apollo by turning it into a fortification. Within that landscape of war, he describes natural features within or near the *temenos*. One is a fresh-water source, which may have been a sacred spring. The Boiotians accuse the Athenians of having sacrilegiously used water in the

40. For the good harbour, see Farinetti 2011, 214-215. During the Late Roman period, Delion was a main hub of trade: Peeters 2023, 266-298.

41. Gehrke 1992; Knodell 2017; Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 80-112]; Marchand 2011, for informed explorations of the topic of connectivity in the Euboian Gulf.

42. For Aulis as the main harbour, see Buckler 1985 [= 2008, 180-199]. Livy 35.50 offers an example where Aulis was the preferred choice for departure, after which Delion was chosen. App. *Syr*. 3.12 mentions a general of Antiochus III attacking the Romans near Delion after having captured Euboia.

sanctuary's premise.[43] In various locations across Asia Minor and mainland Greece, Apollo's cults originated near a fresh-water source.[44] Similar processes may have been at work here. Travellers arriving on the coast before their departure benefitted from the refreshment it brought, while having the opportunity to exchange stories, and ponder about divine presences in the spring or journeys that resembled theirs. In his eponymous *Homeric Hymn*, Apollo is portrayed as crossing (διαβάς) the Euboian Gulf.[45] This movement can be viewed as resembling the experience of travellers in the Gulf.

Apollo's seat at Delion was surrounded by woodlands and vine plants following Thucydides' description. The Athenians fortified the site with wooden towers, implying there were enough trees in the vicinity to construct these without additional supplies being brought in. Vines appear to have been in abundance too, since these were cut and used to fill the ditch.[46] This description paints a scene of lush greenery in the vicinity of the temple. These natural features imbued the site with a pleasant olfactory experience and offered a reprieve from the burning sun through the shade the trees provided. Livy, when writing about events in the early second century, states that the god's temple at Delion contained a grove (*lucus*).[47] In the intermittent period between Thucydides and Livy, an inviolate grove could have been established, but whether we can reproject its existence onto an earlier period is harder to gauge. At most, we can assume that the greenery and water source attracted travellers to this spot before their embarkment, thereby transforming it into a communal space along the coast.

The sanctuary was located directly on the coast. Thucydides mentions that "Apollo's sanctuary at Delion looks out towards Euboia".[48] Pseudo-Skylax in

43. Thuc. 4.97: ὕδωρ τε ὃ ἦν ἄψαυστον σφίσι πλὴν πρὸς τὰ ἱερὰ χέρνιβι χρῆσθαι, ἀνασπάσαντας ὑδρεύεσθαι.

44. E.g. Delphi (Pind. *Pyth*. 4.163); Didyma (Arr. *Anab*. 1.18.3); Apollo Thyrxeus in Lykia (Paus. 7.21.3); Klazomenai in Lydia (Str. 14.1.36); Klaros (Gunderson 2021); Pharai in Messenia (Paus. 4.31.1); Tilphossa in Boiotia (Str. 9.2.27; Beck 2023, 66-68); and Thebes (Paus. 9.10.5; see also the next section).

45. *Hymn. Hom.* 3.223.

46. Thuc. 4.90.2: ἄμπελον κόπτοντες τὴν περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν ἐσέβαλλον… πύργους τε ξυλίνους κατέστησαν.

47. Livy 35.51.2: *ubi et in fano lucoque ea religione et eo iure sancto, quo sunt templa*.

48. Thuc. 4.76.4: Δήλιον καταλαβεῖν τὸ ἐν τῇ Ταναγραίᾳ πρὸς Εὔβοιαν τετραμμένον Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερόν.

the *Periplous* records the distance of the "coastal voyage along the Boiotian *chora* from Delion".[49] Pausanias refers to the sanctuary as "Delion on Sea".[50] In Livy's historical narrative Delion is "a temple of Apollo overlooking the sea".[51] Its vicinity to the seaboard in combination with fresh water and greenery, makes it well-suited as a landing spot for people moving across the Euboian Gulf.[52]

Such a space certainly fits in with Apollo's preference for shaded and well-watered areas.[53] The author of the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* envisions Apollo to be among those travellers crossing its dangerous waters:[54]

Κηναίου τ' ἐπέβης ναυσικλειτῆς Εὐβοίης.
στῆς δ' ἐπὶ Ληλάντῳ πεδίῳ, τό τοι οὐχ ἅδε θυμῷ
τεύξασθαι νηόν τε καὶ ἄλσεα δενδρήεντα.
Ἔνθεν δ' Εὔριπον διαβάς, ἑκατηβόλ' Ἄπολλον,
βῆς ἄν' ὄρος ζάθεον, χλωρόν· τάχα δ' ἶξες ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
ἐς Μυκαλησσὸν ἰὼν καὶ Τευμησσὸν λεχεποίην.
Θήβης δ' εἰσαφίκανες ἕδος καταειμένον ὕλῃ·[55]

"(he = Apollo) set foot then on Kenaíon in galley-renowned Euboía,
stood on the Lélantine plain—but it did not please you in spirit
there to erect your temple and found your forested woodland.
Over the Eúripos thence you crossed, far-shooting Apollo,
then climbed up the divine green mountain; and swiftly from there you
journeyed, and reached Mykaléssos and then Teuméssos the grassy.
Next you arrived in Thebè's abode, all covered in forests... "

49. Ps. Skylax 59: Παράπλους δὲ τῆς Βοιωτίας χώρας ἀπὸ Δηλίου μέχρι.

50. Paus. 9.20.1: ἔστι δὲ τῆς Ταναγραίας ἐπὶ θαλάσσῃ καλούμενον Δήλιον.

51. Livy 35.51.1*: templum est Apollinis Delium, imminens mari.*

52. Livy 35.51.2-3: *alii in litore inermes uagarentur*.

53. Bonnechere 2007, with older bibliography.

54. The poem is increasingly dated to the 7th cen., perhaps its second half; see West 2012. McInerney 2015 dates the poem to the 6th cent.. The blend of Delian and Pythian themes suggest a date in the second half of the 6th cent. and would fit a performance on Delos. That also avoids wishing to read the historical allusions, which are dubious, as reflecting its date of writing.

55. *Hymn. Hom.* 3.219-225. For the translation, see Merrill 2011.

Note that Delion is conspicuously absent from the list of Boiotian places. Nor do contemporary prominent Apolline cults such as Thebes or Eretria receive a mention, which has to do with the primacy of the Delphic cult in this particular poem, meant to downgrade other important centres.[56] More troublesome is Delion's omission from the *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo*, considering the Delion cult was an off-shoot of that famous Cycladic cult.[57] The closest the god –via his pregnant mother Leto– gets, is Euboia.[58] In this early stage Delion appears to have been of minor importance for the author(s) of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. In light of their efforts to interweave local cults into a panhellenic skein of Apollo mythology and ritual, that omission is all the more apparent.[59]

Whether it is the lack of an existent cult site or poetic licence is more difficult to establish. Albert Schachter has shown there were early commonalities between Delos and Boiotia, like the timing of the Thesmophoria's celebration, the start of the year at the winter solstice and names of months.[60] Delos' early

56. McInerney 2015 argues that integrating the god's famous itinerary into an epichoric cult and its etymology was an attempt to negotiate between local and pan-hellenic cults. Therefore, this does not necessarily reflect the locals' desire to link themselves with the pan-hellenic cults at Delos or Delphi but these hymns were written to reflect the centrality of these wider cults and vindicate their rightful claims to prominence.

57. Hdt. 6.118 is the earliest reference to this connection. Str. 9.2.7 clearly states that Delion was "a reproduction of that of Delos" (εἶτα Δήλιον τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος ἐκ Δήλου ἀφιδρυμένον). Another earlier possible reference comes from Thucydides, following Schachter's careful suggestion (Schachter 1981, 46) that Thuc. 4.97.4 and his "*daimones* concerned, and Apollo" (τοὺς ὁμωχέτας δαίμονας καὶ τὸν Ἀπόλλω) might refer to the other deities in the Delian triad, like Artemis and Leto. The 2nd-cent. Megarian inscription *IG* VII 20 (l. 12: τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι τῶι Δηλίωι) and Paus. 9.20.1 attest to the "Delian" connection at Delion.

58. *Hymn. Hom.* 3.31. The Delian triad was venerated at Eretria: Brélaz, Schmid 2004; *SEG* 51.1112; *IG* XII 9, 266. At Zarax, in the southern half of Euboia, there is another Apollo Delios-cult (*SEG* 51.1128; 56.1042; 58.962).

59. McInerney (2015, 104) views the *Homeric Hymns to Apollo* as a reflection of the "negotiation between the local and panhellenic cults during the sixth century".

60. Schachter 1999.

significance as a religious centre from which the cult emanated, as well as its role as a key economic hub, could have brought other harbour sites like Delion into contact with this shared mythology. The spread of the cult in the Cyclades –which are closer to Delos– can be traced to the eighth century, like in Paros.[61] We cannot ascertain a similar transposition of the cult to Delion in this early phase, but the early connections and spread of the Delian Apollo cult provide some indication that an early cult at Delion is not beyond the realm of possibility.

The earliest attestation of the cult site related to Apollo comes from the second quarter of the fifth century. Herodotus mentions the sanctuary in his narrative surrounding the Battle of Marathon in 490. The Persians had taken the gilded image of Apollo aboard one of their ships, before the commander Datis found out and retrieved it from the hull. He then set it up at the Apollo temple in Delos with the specific instruction to return the statue to Boiotia. However, this did not materialise until 20 years later, when the Thebans obtained the backing of an oracle to retrieve the statue to "Delion in the territory of the Thebans", as Herodotus terms it.[62]

What the sanctuary consisted of at this time cannot be identified accurately. The gilded image's presence did not require an extensive temple to be placed. An open-air sanctuary or perhaps earlier temples made from mud-brick or adobe, would have sufficed, but these have not been attested –lack of evidence which can be attributed to the difficult lay-out of the site and its remains.[63] The twenty year interval can perhaps be viewed as allowing for the

61. Bosnakes 2012. On the neighbouring island of Despotiko there was possibly a Delion too; see Angliker 2022.

62. Hdt. 6.118: ὁ δέ, ὡς ἡμέρη τάχιστα ἐπέλαμψε, ζήτησιν ἐποιέετο τῶν νεῶν, εὑρὼν δὲ ἐν νηὶ Φοινίσσῃ ἄγαλμα Ἀπόλλωνος κεχρυσωμένον ἐπυνθάνετο ὁκόθεν σεσυλημένον εἴη, πυθόμενος δὲ ἐξ οὗ ἦν ἱροῦ, ἔπλεε τῇ ἐωυτοῦ νηὶ ἐς Δῆλον· καὶ ἀπίκατο γὰρ τηνικαῦτα οἱ Δήλιοι ὀπίσω ἐς τὴν νῆσον, κατατίθεταί τε ἐς τὸ ἱρὸν τὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ ἐντέλλεται τοῖσι Δηλίοισι ἀπαγαγεῖν τὸ ἄγαλμα ἐς Δήλιον τὸ Θηβαίων· τὸ δ' ἔστι ἐπὶ θαλάσσῃ Χαλκίδος καταντίον. Δᾶτις μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ἐντειλάμενος ἀπέπλεε, τὸν δὲ ἀνδριάντα τοῦτον Δήλιοι οὐκ ἀπήγαγον, ἀλλά μιν δι' ἐτέων εἴκοσι Θηβαῖοι αὐτοὶ ἐκ θεοπροπίου ἐκομίσαντο ἐπὶ Δήλιον.

63. Elements thereof have been found for other Geometric or early Archaic temples; see Mazarakis-Ainian 1997. In Boiotia, it appears to have been the case at the Apollo Ismenios temple in Thebes too; see from p. 340 onward.

construction of the temple, but any remnants of the Doric temple are dated to the later fifth century.[64] Pitteros does not vehemently oppose a possible connection with Herodotus' testimony, but prefers a date in the second half of that century. A more likely possibility is that the re-dedication of the statue provided the starting point for the temple's construction, which then took decades to finish. Thwarting any firmer conclusions is the manner in which the remnants were discovered from the 1980s onward. Scattered along the coastline, archaeologists found several Doric drums and a limestone plinth bearing a double T connection, roughly 0.7 x 0.5 x 0.4 m. These were found not too far from the Hellenistic stoa, of which foundations have been unearthed.[65] The dimensions of the architectural remains –one drum is 1.3 m by 0.6 for instance– suggests a monumental construction, akin to a temple.

Of course, scattered remains are not conclusive evidence. But the sanctuary's seaside location, and the tempestuous natura of the local coastline with fluctuating shorelines as can be gathered from geoarchaeological coring operations, means the temple may have collapsed.[66] We know from Thucydides' narrative that a temple, in disuse at the time, existed at Delion.[67] Not a lack of religious fervour, but a great earthquake in the Maliac Gulf and a subsequent tsunami in 426 was likely be to blame for washing away part of the temple at that time.[68] Stylistically, the drums found at Delion match those of the temple of the Delians at Delos that was started around 475-450 but never finished.[69] That provides a plausible timeframe for the construction of the temple between 475 and 430.

The people responsible for the construction consist of several possible candidates. Delion's inhabitants are an unlikely candidate.[70] Thucydides mentions

64. Pitteros 2000.

65. Pitteros 2000, 592-602.

66. Kambourouglou, Maroukian, Sampson 1988, for Chalkis; Ghilardi et al. 2013, for nearby Aulis.

67. Thuc. 4.90.2: "... and where there was no sanctuary structure standing, as on the side where the stoa once existing had fallen in" (καὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ οἰκοδόμημα οὐδὲν ὑπῆρχεν· ἥπερ γὰρ ἦν στοὰ κατεπεπτώκει).

68. Thuc. 3.87.4, with Freitag, Reicherter 2019.

69. Bruneau, Ducat 1983, 130-131.

70. Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 107] suggests the Delion sanctuary might have been a Theban foundation, before falling into disuse after the Tanagraian take-over. That

houses nearby, but nothing has been attested archaeologically. Some smaller plots of classical graves have been found, as well as burial plots from the Archaic period.[71] In the first century, Strabo describes Delion as a small town (πολίχνιον). Judging from the minor archaeological evidence, it is possible that Delion was also a small town during the Archaic and Classical periods.[72] The limited size, and likely their resources, disqualify Delion's inhabitants from the substantial investments made at Delion in the fifth century. That leaves us with three choices: the Thebans, the Tanagraians or the Boiotoi in their political guise, the *koinon*.[73]

Earlier scholars dismissed the Thebans' involvement.[74] The harbour is closer to Tanagra than to Thebes (**fig. 2**) and Theban control in the early fifth century would be an idiosyncratic intermezzo, considering Delion was in Tanagraian hands from the second half of the fifth century until the end of antiquity.[75] That does not prohibit Theban control at the time, especially considering much of Boiotia's early internal political history remains shrouded in mystery.[76] Herodotus does not seem to have visited the Tanagraike because of his vague localisation of Delion, but he did stay in Thebes and had Theban informants for this history.[77] Moreover, Herodotus often conflates the Thebans and the Boiotians, meaning he could have meant the *koinon* in this case.[78] Another possibility is that the Thebans embellished their role to justify their leadership, akin to what they did after the Battle of Koroneia in 446.[79] Pausanias,

seems doubtful, and the disuse is probably related to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War and natural disasters, as alluded to above.

71. Thuc. 4.90.2. For classical graves, see Farinetti 2011, 393. For archaic burial plots, see Chamilaki 2010.

72. Str. 9.2.7.

73. Paus. 10.28.6 says the statue was returned to the Tanagraians at Delion. Thuc. 4.76.4 describes Delion as Tanagraian in 424.

74. Salmon (1956, 62 n.1) flat-out rejects it as a Herodotean mistake.

75. Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 84-85].

76. Schachter 1981, 46.

77. Schachter 1981, 46-47.

78. Moggi 2011.

79. During the Plataian Debate of 427, the Thebans claim to have liberated Boiotia from Athenian domination in 447 (Thuc. 3.62.4-5), despite the leaders of the revolt

however, states Datis ordered the statue to be returned to the Tanagraians in Delion.[80] This might reflect the later situation, when control over the coastal plain had reverted to Tanagra for certain, but does not attribute an active role in its retrieval to the Tanagraians.[81]

A supra-local coalition may have been involved in retrieving the statue; its return was an attempt to link the Delion cult with its famous namesake, the center of the Delian League. By inserting Delion into the narrative of Persian plunder in the wake of Marathon, the Boiotians could have wished to place themselves in the same category as victims of Persian aggression rather than medizers. Because there may have been Boiotian members of the Delian League, a collaboration between the *koinon* and the Athenians, leaders of the Delian League, becomes more plausible.[82] In that case, the *koinon* was behind the retrieval –and possibly the start– of the temple's construction.

A wider participation also fits with the apparent fanfare that accompanied the retrieval of the statue. According to a scholiast to Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Pindar wrote a poem that described Apollo's journey from his birthplace on Delos to Delphi:

> τὸ Φοίβης δ' ὄνομ' ἔχει παρώνυμον. Λιπὼν δὲ λίμνην Δηλίαν τε χοιράδα, κέλσας ἐπ' ἀκτὰς ναυπόρους τὰς Παλλάδος ἐς τήνδε γαῖαν ἦλθε Παρνησοῦ θ' ἕδρας.[83]
>
> "When Phoebus left behind the sea and the rocks of Delos and landed on Pallas' ship-frequented shores, he came to this land and the dwelling places on Parnassos."
>
> … χαριζόμενος Ἀθηναίοις καταχθῆναί φησι ἐκεῖσε Ἀπόλλωνα κἀκεῖθεν τὴν παραπομπὴν αὐτῶι εἶναι · ὁ δὲ Πίνδ(αρος) ἐκ Τανάγρας τῆς Βοιωτίας.[84]

being called "Orchomenisers" (Hellanikos *FGrHist* 4 F81; Theopompos *FGrHist* 115 F 407; Aristophanes *FGrHist* 379 F3). Beck (2020, 169) suggests Herodotus may have visited Thebes shortly after that battle.

80. Paus. 10.28.6: αὖθις Ταναγραίοις ἐς Δήλιον.

81. Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 80-112] for Tanagraian control over the plain.

82. Schachter 2004b [= 2016, 70] suggests a Delian League link. See also Thuc. 1.111; van Wijk 2024, 28 and 164-170.

83. Aesch. *Eum*. 8-11.

84. Schol. Aesch. *Eum*. 11.

"in this citation it is said Apollo came ashore in Attica; Pindar says it was in Tanagra in Boiotia."

The poem is lost, but D'Alessio brought together various fragments that he believes formed part of that hymn. This hymn could have been performed during the re-dedication of the statue at Delion.[85] In these fragments, Pindar narrates Herakles' attack on Kos, where he founds a cult to Apollo (fr. 33a-d), as well as Apollo's birth on Delos (fr. 33 c-d); a Herakleian attack on Paros and his foundation of an Apolline cult on the island (fr. 140a Maehler) and, finally, a catalogue of Theban deities and heroes like Ismenos, Kadmos, Harmonia and Dionysos (fr. 29). Mackil rightly points out that the local version of Apollo's journey deviates from the more northernly route in the *Homeric Hymn*.[86] The re-dedication of the statue would have been a perfect opportunity to celebrate Apollo's visit to Boiotia, especially if the political context of a rapprochement between the *koinon* and the Delian League is correct.[87] This can also explain the prominence of Theban mythology in what was essentially a Tanagraian affair, as Herakles was worshipped at Tanagra as well.[88] Moreover, the relations between the two Boiotian *poleis* had been intimate and friendly from the mid-sixth century onward.[89]

According to the scholiast, Pindar thus clearly put Tanagra on the "Apolline map". But was Pindar talking about the Apollo Delios cult here? Although an Apollo Karykeios cult existed in Tanagra, there is no evidence of this cult after the mid-sixth century.[90] The epithet refers to a topographical landmark, the mountain on which Tanagra was built, but the lack of later evidence makes

85. D'Alessio 2009.

86. Mackil 2013, 190-192.

87. This differs from Mackil 2013, 190-192, who sees it as an antagonistic move by the Thebans against the Athenians.

88. Andreiomenou 2007, 31-44; Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 105].

89. The Tanagraians and Thebans enjoyed close relationships from the mid-6th cent. onwards; Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 104]. Unlike other Boiotian neighbours, like Thespiai and Plataia, Tanagra never was in conflict with Thebes. The earliest *boiotarch* inscription ca. 475-450 (Aravantinos 2014) involves a Theban *boiotarch* and a likely Tanagraian origin for the award granted in the decree.

90. Schachter 2004a [= 2016, 102-103].

it unlikely Pindar referred to this cult with the word "Tanagra'". The context of Apollo's birth on Delos and his travel to Delphi makes Delion a more plausible option. From Pausanias' later testimony, we know that the Tanagraians had a temple dedicated to the Delian triad.[91] Therefore, a ritual link between the two towns certainly existed.

A similar collaborative approach towards the sanctuary can be gleaned in Diodorus. He describes the establishment of a communal, pan-Boiotian *Delia* festival at the site after the Boiotians' victory there over the Athenians in 424.[92] In light of the archaeological remains and the reference to the retrieval of Apollo's statue, it would be strange to view the sanctuary as a *tabula rasa* at the time. That it continued as a pan-Boiotian festival, or was revived as one in the second century, attests to its legacy.[93] The retrieval in 470 could then be seen as the catalyst for the construction of a temple, only finished in the second half of the fifth century due to possible interruptions like the First Peloponnesian War and the Athenian domination of Boiotia (457-446). The festival would then have boosted the sanctuary's fortunes after a short period of neglect.

Speaking in favour of a possible Tanagraian / local origin to the cult is the –admittedly later– evidence from the second century of a ritual linking Tanagra to Delion, treating the latter like an extra-urban sanctuary of the former. In the ritual, the altar of the Tanagraian cult was (temporarily) moved from Tanagra to the seaside sanctuary at Delion for celebrations in the *Delia*.[94] Moving through the Tanagraian landscape, it forged a ritual space between the two settlements and confirmed Delion's role as a "place" in the Tanagraian (and Boiotian) mental, religious landscape. If Pindar pinpointed Tanagra as the place where Apollo landed, could we perhaps conjecture that Tanagra was the original locus of an Apollo Delios cult which was then

91. Paus. 9.22.1 and 9.20.3. Moggi, Osanna 2010, 338 argue this may have been a result of the Tanagraian incorporation of Delion sometime in the 4th cent.

92. Diod. Sic. 12.70.5. Tufano 2021 argues to accept Diodorus' testimony on the foundation of the *Delia* festival. Diodorus here refers to the Thebans, but he often uses the Thebans as a homonym for the *koinon* by retrojecting the 4th-cent. domination of the Thebans onto the 5th cent., following Ephoros (see Momigliano 1935).

93. Brélaz et al. 2007 [= *SEG* 57, 542].

94. *SEG* 57, 542, ll. 23 (τραπέζης καταφορᾶς ἐπὶ Δήλιον καὶ ἀναφορᾶ[ς]| [εἰ]ς Τανάγραν).

transplanted to Delion? Or was its presence in Tanagra the result of the incorporation of Delion into the Tanagraian *polis*?[95] Both options are feasible.

In sum, the presence of a spring, so vital for travel and a key component in establishing sanctuaries, provided the possible impetus for stories related to Apollo's presence at Delion. The shrine's earliest foundations cannot be traced and only from the fifth century onward do the contours become clearer when Delion's aetiological link to Delos was used and propagated in a Pindaric hymn, possibly at the instigation of the *koinon*. The retrieval of a gilded statue of Apollo on the ordnance of an oracle was perhaps the reason for the construction of a temple. The temple would be visible for visitors coming to the site, but arguably also for people sailing across the Euboian Gulf on account of its size and location by the seaside. The success of the shrine can be connected to its entwinement with the Delos-cult and the investments made by the regional polity or the nearest large settlements. It was propelled to further heights due to unforeseen circumstances –the victory at Delion in 424– which inaugurated pan-Boiotian celebrations at the shrine. These were continued or re-established in the second century, remained in the festival calendar of the region for some time and were again revived in a later period.[96] As a functional hub in the transport network across the Euboian Gulf, it seems that the site originated as a place for refreshment before embarking. It continued to fulfil a function as a strategic harbour, ensuring a steady stream of visitors. The subsequent embellishments under the aegis of nearby wealthier communities maintained that success.

The Apollo-Ismenios cult in Thebes

In the Archaic period Thebes developed into one of the main political and religious centres of the Greek mainland. Sanctuaries such as the Herakleion and the Ismenion attracted larger crowds from further afield and influenced other sanctuaries through the style of dedications and artwork, for instance.[97]

95. Eleusis and Athens offer a parallel. In the procession across the Sacred Way, the Athenians took a leading role though the destination was Eleusis, which was the origin of the Mysteries. Cf. Rönnberg 2021, 68-71 and 239245.

96. There is no evidence for the *Delia* between the mid-1st cent. CE and the 3rd cent. CE (*SEG* 59, 492, l. 15).

97. Aravantinos 2017; Bonnano-Aravantinos 2012. For the importance of the Ismenion, see Kowalzig 2007, 371-389.

Stephanie Larson views seventh-century Thebes as at the forefront of Greek artistic developments, constantly in conversation with the wider world around it, receiving input from other important centres while emanating its own artistic radiance across Central Greece.[98]

That connectivity is reflected in the role occupied by Thebes in the Greek imaginary. In the mythological spheres Thebes was a palimpsest that could be rewritten and re-used for different audiences, while epics like the *Thebaid* anchored it within the communal lexicon of the Greek mainland (and beyond).[99] Its conspicuous absence in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, was the result of intense rivalry among the Central Greek Apolline oracles.[100] Yet its omission amplified its reputation. Listeners, especially those from Central Greece, would undoubtedly have been aware of its lack of representation in the *Hymn*.[101]

The surroundings of Apollo's temple –the Ismenion– on the Ismenion hill were deeply lodged in Theban lore as several landmarks central to Theban mythology surrounding it.[102] The first was the river flowing by the hill, a stream named Ismenios.[103] The naming of the stream is contested; either it was derived from Ismenos, the son of Niobe and Amphion, who was shot down by an arrow from Apollo's bow; or Ismenos was a son of Apollo by the nymph

98. Larson 2018.

99. Kühr 2006; Berman 2015.

100. Pind. *Pyth.* 11. 6-7: "the Ismenion, true seat of prophecy" (Ἰσμήνιον δ' ὀνύμαξεν, ἀλαθέα μαντίων θῶκον), with Kühr 2006, 182-186. She views the Hesiodic *Aspis* as a possible "propagandistic" counter to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and its emphasis on Delphi. She notes that the 5th cent. saw Delphi's prominence accepted by the Thebans via their consultation in 505 and the sanctuary's role in guiding Kadmos to Thebes' eventual location. Cf. Schachter 1981, 80; Kühr 2006, 235-237.

101. *Hymn. Hom.* 3.225-228: Θήβης δ' εἰσαφίκανες ἔδος καταειμένον ὕλῃ· | οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἔναιε βροτῶν ἱερῇ ἐνὶ Θήβῃ, | οὐδ' ἄρα πω τότε γ' ἦσαν ἀταρπιτοὶ οὐδὲ κέλευθοι | Θήβης ἂμ πεδίον πυρηφόρον, ἀλλ' ἔχεν ὕλη. ("Next you arrived in Thebè's abode, all covered in forests, since no one among men yet dwelt in Thebè the holy, nor at the time were as yet any footpaths nor any roadways there across Thebè's wheat-bearing plain—it was covered in forest"; Merill 2011).

102. Kühr 2006, 236-237.

103. Paus. 9.10.2. Kowalzig 2007, 376 dismisses a connection between the river and the precinct from a ritual point of view ("... the river Ismenos does not form part of the precinct in any meaningful way").

Melia and his name replaced the river's original name, Ladon.[104] Other topographical features anchored in the epichoric lore include the spring sacred to Ares that was guarded by a dragon later slain by Kadmos. Its teeth were used to sow the legendary *Spartoi* to act as foundational figures for the city.[105] In sum, the river gave a name to three mainstays in the Theban landscape: the hill, the sanctuary for Apollo and the epithet for that god.[106]

The name of the river was perhaps even passed down to a village in Boiotia. Named Ismene, the town's name suggests it was located in the environs of what later became Thebes, especially because a local spring bore the same name.[107] Archaeological work bears out the possibility that such a village could have been integrated into the Theban *polis*. The town's burial grounds were moved twice between 750 and 600 to accommodate the rapidly growing and amalgamating settlements.[108] The initial settlement pattern in Thebes consisted of scattered households, with the Kadmeia only used as a burial ground. What emerges after 600 is an increasingly structured and centralised, communal urban environment in contrast to the dispersed settlement patterns of the mid-eighth century. Around 600 small satellite settlements emerged along the periphery of Thebes to exploit the fertile plains to the north, south and southwest of the Kadmeia.

The changes at the Ismenion sanctuary appear to have been part of this development according to Kontouri, as it fit into a wider phenomenon in which older cults were reinforced or new cults established.[109] There appears initially to have been a Geometric building at the site made from wood and

104. Son of Amphion and Niobe: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.6; [Plut.] *de Fluv*. 2. Apollo's son: Paus. 9.10.6.

105. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.1; place of the spring: Paus. 9.10.5. See also Kühr 2006, 202. Kowalzig 2007, 376 is of a different opinion: "no spring has been found in connection with it (the Ismenion)".

106. Kühr 2006, 205; Schachter 1981, 80, with sources.

107. Stephanus of Byzantium refers to Ismene as a village in Boiotia (Ἰσμήνη, ἡρωὶς καὶ κώμη Βοιωτίας. ὁ κωμήτης Ἰσμήνιος καὶ Ἰσμηναῖος καὶ Ἰσμηνεύς καὶ Ἰσμηνίτης. ἔστι καὶ Ἰσμηνός ποταμὸς Βοιωτίας, ἀφ' οὗ Ἰσμήνιος ὁ Ἀπόλλων καὶ Ἰσμηνία). For the spring, see Pherecyd. *FGrHist* 3 F 95.

108. Kontouri 2008 and 2014; Aravantinos 2017.

109. Kontouri 2014.

mudbrick. This burned down ca. 700 according to the original excavator Keramopoullos.[110] The temple was rebuilt during the seventh century, which was replaced by a grander structure of substantial size (46 x 23 m) around 600. This rebuilding was probably partially out of necessity, but also to embody the growing prosperity and rising importance of Thebes in the Greek world.[111] These efforts aimed to boost the cult's place as a prominent oracle in Central Greece, right at a time when Delphi witnessed rising fortunes as well.[112] Thebes would have probably profited from the destruction of Delphi's second temple ca. 548/7. Traffic for Apolline oracles was re-directed to Akraiphnia at the time, and people could have looked towards Thebes.[113]

The temple built around ca 600 incorporated visual remains at the site. Mycenaean chamber tombs have been uncovered in excavations and the latest temple was visibly oriented alongside them and would have been visible for people attending the sanctuary. According to Stephanie Larson, the gradual appropriation of the site by Apollo –the previous inhabitant of the site is difficult to uncover– was meant to memorialise the Mycenaean legacy of these landmarks.[114] The details of that transformation remain vague, but the graves could have offered a compelling story to the Thebans to connect themselves to this panhellenic god (Apollo), who gradually took over the site of a local hero, deity or prophet. It mirrors other divine amalgams across mainland Greece, for instance at Aigina and Epidauros.[115]

That investments were made from an early period at the site, starting from the mudbrick structure to the seventh-century temple, suggests the importance of the sanctuary for both the civic community at Thebes and the smaller satellite settlements on the outskirts of the city. As the polity grew and Thebes

110. Keramopoullos 1917, with Pharaklas 1996 who found Geometric pottery in the layer that seems to confirm Keramopoullos' hypothesis. Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 242 states that no certainty can be reached due to the lack of a detailed publication. New excavations have been undertaken at the sanctuary by Bucknell University and its publication is eagerly awaited.

111. Beck forthcoming a.

112. Scott 2010, 40-74.

113. For the redirection of traffic, see Schachter 1994 [= 2016, 155-156].

114. Larson 2018, 34-36.

115. McInerney 2013.

emerged as a larger community, the Ismenion became a focal point of collective religious celebrations for that polity. Its location on a crossroads accessible for all these peripheral settlements, a (low) hill imbued with epichoric tales of myth and acting as an clear landmark, means that the Ismenion was perfectly geared to act as the beacon to unify the town.

Although linked with other cult types around Lake Kopais where hydromancy was the core of the oracle, the cult at the Ismenion revolved around ash altars and divination through fire.[116] The water source appears to be less relevant to the cultic activity at the site. Apollo was afterwards associated with the river, but this reflects a topographical epithet and says nothing about the environment in which this oracle arose.[117] In Sophokles' *Antigone*, Teiresias divines through the flight of birds by sitting on "his old seat of augury".[118] The connection to the Ismenion is not certain, but Pausanias refers to "Manto's seat" as a landmark at the entrance to the Ismenion; Manto was Teiresias' daughter, making the connection plausible.[119] If Teiresias did divine at the Ismenion and it reflects actual practice, then the choice for the hill as the site of the oracle takes on added importance. Its raised platform allowed for a better and clearer reading of the birds' flight, meaning the natural surroundings played a role in the earliest development of the cult site. The seat's prominent location could then perhaps have been spotted by the various communities living around Thebes. Ornithomancy was especially popular in the archaic period.[120] In later times, its popularity tapered off in favour of other forms of

116. Cult type: Schachter 1967. For the ash altar and smoke divination, see Schachter 1981, 77-82. For the divination through fire, see Soph. *OT* 20; Hdt. 8.134; Philochoros *FrGHist* 328 F 197 [= Schol. Soph. *Oed. Tyr.* 21: Ἔστι παρὰ τῷ Ἰσμηνῷ Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερόν· διό φησι (Σοφοκλῆς) μαντείᾳ σποδῷ· τοῦτο δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ βωμῷ, ὅτι διὰ τῶν ἐμπύρων ἐμαντεύοντο οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὥς φησι Φιλόχορος].

117. Paus. 9.10.2 states: "Both the hill and the god are called Ismenian, as the river Ismenos flows by the place".

118. Soph. *Ant.* 999-1000 (τέχνης σημεῖα τῆς ἐμῆς κλύων. Εἰς γὰρ παλαιὸν θᾶκον ὀρνιθοσκόπον ἵζων, ἵν' ἦν μοι παντὸς οἰωνοῦ λιμήν, ἀγνῶτ' ἀκούω φθόγγον ὀρνίθων).

119. Paus. 9.10.3: ἔστι δ' ἐνταῦθα λίθος ἐφ' ᾧ Μαντώ φασι τὴν Τειρεσίου καθέζεσθαι. Οὗτος μὲν πρὸ τῆς ἐσόδου κεῖται, καί οἱ τὸ ὄνομά ἐστι καὶ ἐς ἡμᾶς ἔτι Μαντοῦς δίφρος. Pindar calls the Ismenion the "true seat of prophecy" (Ἰσμήνιον δ' ὀνύμαξεν, ἀλαθέα μαντίων θῶκον) perhaps hinting in that direction too (Pind. *Pyth.* 11.6).

120. Kindt 2021.

divination. But in the early period, the popularity of ornithomancy could have been an additional reason –if it was practised at the Ismenion– to develop the sanctuary into a central feature in the newly arising Theban cityscape, and bring people together at a key site for oracular responses that would have been beneficial to the entire population.[121]

The Ismenion remained a focal point of Theban expressions of power and local identity throughout the Archaic and Classical period.[122] As can be gathered from the *Daphnephoria* festival, to which I will turn in the next section, the Ismenion was the locus for ritual re-enactments of Theban connections to its *chora* in the form of a procession to the Galaxion sanctuary.

Traipsing along the Milky Highway: The Galaxion and the *Daphnephoria* ritual

The *Daphnephoria* was an enneateric festival. It was an enigmatic celebration of Apollo and the ritual connection of Thebes to its *chora*. Its epichoric expression was rooted in a sensory experience at a site called the Galaxion. The procession that formed the central feature of the festival was filled to the brim with phenomenological input, ranging from musical instruments to olfactory pleasantries. The evidence for the celebration is fraught with difficulties, since the ritual evolved into a different celebration between its original celebration in the sixth and fifth centuries and the time our literary sources –Plutarch, Pausanias and Proklus– recorded the ritual.[123] Proklus in particular is problematic, since his *Chrestomathia* has only survived through Photius' tenth century CE *Bibliotheca*. The rituals described by these later sources seem to reflect the festival's reformed fourth-century rendition.[124] Proklus' description

121. In that sense, the epigram from Thebes that details the recovery of Croesus' shield to Amphiaraos, which was set up in the Ismenion through the work of the "prophet at the sanctuary" (ἱαρο͂ στᾶσε κ[ατευχσάμενος,] | [μα]ντοσύναις in line 3-4), hints at the utility of the prophets here for the community. See Papazarkadas 2014, for the *editio princeps* with the most recent comments by Renberg 2021.

122. For these expressions of power, see Mackil 2014.

123. Proklus, *Chrestomathia* 25 in Phot., *Bibl.* 239. Pausanias (9.10.4) and Plutarch (*De Pyth. or.* 29) provide other hints. There is a Pindaric fragment (94b) which probably relates to the Daphnephoria, but it does not provide enough evidence for a reconstruction, if it details the ritual at all.

124. Schachter 2000 [= 2016, 255-278].

is the most extensive and, as long as his testimony is accepted as valid for the ceremony from the fourth century onwards, his work is a valuable resource to explore.

The existence of a ritual in the fifth century is attested through Pindar.[125] He describes some of the rituals performed in his *Daphnephorikon* for the *daphnephoros* Aioladas, a member of a prominent Theban family.[126] The poem is normally dated late in Pindar's life, between 446 and 443.[127] The procession was quite the experience:[128]

> ἀλλὰ ζωσαμένα τε πέπλον ὠκέως
> χερσίν τ' ἐν μαλακαῖσιν ὅρπακ' ἀγλ̣αόν
> δάφνας ὀχέοισα πάν-
> δοξ̣ον Αἰολάδα σταθμόν
> υἱοῦ τε Παγώνδα
> ὑμνήσω στεφάνοισι θάλ-
> λοισα παρθένιον κάρα,
> σειρῆνα δὲ κόμπον
> αὐλίσκ̣ων ὑπὸ λωτίνων
> μιμήσομ̣' ἀοιδαῖς
>
> But quickly tying up my robe
> and carrying in my gentle hands a splendid branch
> of laurel, I shall hymn
> the all-glorious house of Aioladas
> and of his son Pagondas,
> my maidenly head flourishing
> with garlands,
> and I shall imitate in my songs,
> to the accompaniment of lotus pipes,
> that siren's loud song[129]

125. Perhaps it can even be pushed back to 8th cent. if a late 8th-cent. pithos from Pyri, a suburb of Thebes, did depict an early *daphnephoria* (Langdon 2001, 592-599).

126. Pind. *Fr.* 94a-b.

127. Beck 2020, 145, with older bibliography.

128. Pind. *Fr.* 94b.

129. Pind. *Fr.* 94b. For the translation, see Race 1997.

Song, dance, ceremonial robes, pleasant smelling garlands and the tones of the lotus pipes (*aulos*) must have made for quite the sight to behold with many prominent Theban families participating in the procession. In the same fragment, Pindar reveals that Aioladas' family was well-respected across Boiotia. They were *proxenoi* of their neighbours (presumably other communities) and had won victories at the games at Onchestos and the Itonia temple near Koroneia.[130] The integration of the *Daphnephoria* into a "pan-Boiotian" victory list is interesting, and could hint at a reorganisation of Boiotian festivals in the wake of the victory at Koroneia in 446 and the re-establishment of the *koinon*.[131]

The route for this procession remains unclear. Its starting point is unknown, but Proklus mentions that the participants delivered a log to the Ismenion and the Galaxion.[132] The Galaxion was presumably one of the destinations in the Classical period as well, since a Pindaric fragment –aptly named *Daphnephorikon to the Galaxion*– has survived via Plutarch.[133] This sanctuary seemingly went into disuse by the late fourth century. Names derived from Galaxios, attested for the fourth century, disappear from the epigraphic catalogue at a time of increased epigraphic evidence in Boiotia.[134] On the basis of Pindar and the name Galaxidoros in Xenophon, it appears the sanctuary was in place during the fifth and fourth centuries.[135]

But can the Galaxion be located? Its location and history are shrouded in mystery. Earlier scholars such as von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf placed the shrine near the Ismenion, on account of the many springs in the proximity of the temple.[136] Springs, however, are of secondary importance in the ritual,

130. Pind. *Fr.* 94b, ll. 38-49: τί | μαθεν γὰρ τὰ πάλαι τὰ νῦν | τ' ἀμφικτιόνεσσιν | ἵππων τ' ὠκυπόδων πο̣[λυ | γνώτοις ἐπὶ νίκαις, | Δ΄ αἷς ἐν ἀιόνεσσιν Ὀγχη[στοῦ κλυ]τᾶς, | ταῖς δὲ ναὸν Ἰτωνίας ἀ̣[μφ' εὐκλέ]α | χαίταν στεφάνοις ἐκό | σμηθεν ἔν τε Πίσᾳ περιπ[.

131. Beck, Ganter 2015, 141-145.

132. Proklus, *Chrestomathia* 25: ᾧι χορὸς παρθένων ἐπακολουθεῖ προτείνων κλῶνα πρὸς ἱκετηρίαν ὑμνῶν. παρέπεμπον δὲ τὴν δαφνηφορίαν εἰς Ἀπόλλωνος Ἰσμηνίου καὶ Γαλαξίου.

133. Pind. *Fr.* 104b. This will be treated in-depth on the next page.

134. Schachter 2000 [= 2016, 266-267]. Galaxidoros was a hapax, though Schachter points out that other names derived from Galaxios existed.

135. Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.14; Tufano 2020.

136. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1899, 244 [= 1962, 66]. Symeonoglou 1985, 12 agrees with him.

making it less of a necessity for the placement of the Galaxion. It would be a necessity for a very short procession, only if the parade went from the Ismenion to a sanctuary nearby. Albert Schachter has therefore proposed another location for the Galaxion: the Teneric Plain, somewhere between Onchestos and the Kabeirion, halfway between Thespiai and Thebes (**fig. 1**).[137] Part of his proposal relies on Pindar's description of the Galaxion:

οἱ μὲν οὖν περὶ τὸ Γαλάξιον τῆς Βοιωτίας κατοικοῦντες ᾔσθοντο τοῦ θεοῦ (sc. Ἀπόλλωνος) τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν ἀφθονίᾳ καὶ περιουσίᾳ γάλακτος·

προβάτων γὰρ ἐκ πάντων κελάρυξεν,
ὡς ἀπὸ κρανᾶν φέρτατον ὕδωρ,
θηλᾶν γάλα· τοὶ δ' ἐπίμπλαν ἐσσύμενοι πίθους·
ἀσκὸς δ' οὔτε τις ἀμφορεὺς ἐλίνυεν δόμοις,
πέλλαι γὰρ ξύλιναι πίθοι <τε> πλῆσθεν ἅπαντες.[138]

"Those who lived around the Galaxion in Boiotia 'sensed' (ἤσθοντο) the god's (Apollo) presence by the unstinting profusion of milk.

For, like the finest water from springs,
milk gushed forth from the teats
of all the flocks; the people rushed to fill the jars,
and not a single wineskin or amphora remained in their homes,
for all the wooden buckets and jars were filled."

The surge in cow milk production prompted the people living in the vicinity of the sanctuary to perceive this phenomenon as the presence of the god Apollo. Two things can be gathered from this testimony. First, a settlement was located in the vicinity of the Galaxion and second, "flocks" imply that abundant amounts of cattle must have been herded around here.

Fortifying the connection between pasturing and the site is the time of celebration. The blossoming of laurel starts in spring and the festival appears to be a celebration of spring renewal and blossoming.[139] Spring's bloom would

137. Schachter 2000 [= 2016, 266-267].

138. Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 29 (409b) [= Pind. *Daphnephorikon to the Galaxion*].

139. Calamé 2001, 103; Schachter 2000 [= 2016, 276]. It is interesting that the month Galaxion in Delos –nowhere else attested– was in March (Schachter 1999, 174). During this month in 300/299, the *hieropoioi* in Delos had to take a census of the cattle owned

have further augmented the sensory input at the Galaxion. According to Efrosyni Boutsikas, the astronomical and cosmological character of the festival suggests a spring celebration as well.[140] If it was an early spring celebration, perhaps it started just before the pasturing season began, when shepherds would herd their flocks towards the mountains.

This emphasis on milk and herds points to the Teneric plain. The plain is characterised by fertile lands. Whereas rich farming lands and farming as a substance occupation distinguishes most of Boiotia, the edges of Lake Kopais were well-suited to cattle farming.[141] The Teneric plain fits into that pattern.[142] Flat lands and long stretches of grass provided for a natural passageway full of resources for herders to move their flocks between Thebes and Onchestos and onwards.[143] Moreover, the results from the Cities of Boeotia survey revealed that the western part of the plain was thinly inhabited. Instead of larger farmsteads that could be tilled from civic centres like Thebes or Thespiai, hamlets or small villages determined the landscape of the western end of the plain.[144] This suggests farming was less central to life in the plain than elsewhere in Boiotia as less land was cultivated, perhaps in an effort to utilise the plains for herding cattle. The interactions between local herders near the sanctuary could have resulted in the early cult site developing as a place of negotiation between various communities.[145] Plutarch's reference captures the stories these people would tell each other: that the site of the Galaxion was blessed with abundant yields from their cattle. Whether a natural landmark prompted their amazement or if this was the result of worshipping Apollo and

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by the sanctuary (*I. Délos* 503, ll. 21-22: οἱ δὲ ἱεροποιοὶ τοῦ μηνὸς τοῦ Γαλαξιῶνος ἐξετάσαντες τοὺς βοῦς κατ' ὄν[ομα], εἰὰν?).

140. Boutsikas 2020, 78.

141. See the results in Bintliff et al. 2017; Bintliff, Howard, Snodgrass 2007; see Farinetti 2011, for the emphasis on agricultural cultivation in Boiotia.

142. Farinetti 2011, 145-146 and 191-193.

143. The plain itself did not have perennial rivers, nor springs, except in the nearby hills.

144. Bintliff, Snodgrass 1985; Farinetti 2011, 199.

145. This pertains to the vexed question of ownership of the Teneric plain; its western part could have belonged to Haliartos (Farinetti 2011, 188-193) or Thespiai (Fossey 1988, 249).

thus stimulating this occurrence, is harder to reconstruct.[146] The role of the Teneric Plain for herding cattle is captured in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes,* in which the trickster leads Apollo's cattle from Pieria to Onchestos and then to the Alpheios.[147]

A place within the Teneric Plain would also align with the *aition* given for the festival's establishment, which brought together communities from both sides of Lake Kopais:

ὅσοι κατῴκουν Ἄρνην καὶ τὰ ταύτῃ χωρία κατὰ χρησμὸν ἀναστάντες ἐκεῖθεν καὶ προκαθεζόμενοι Θήβας ἐπόρθουν προκατεχομένας ὑπὸ Πελασγῶν. Κοινῆς ἀμφοῖν ἑορτῆς Ἀπόλλωνος ἐνστάσης ἀνοχὰς ἔθεντο καὶ δάφνας τέμνοντες οἱ μὲν ἐξ Ἑλικῶνος, οἱ δὲ ἐγγὺς τοῦ Μέλανος ποταμοῦ ἐκόμιζον τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι. Πολεμάτας δέ, ὁ τῶν Βοιωτῶν ἀφηγούμενος, ἔδοξεν ὄναρ νεανίαν τινὰ πανοπλίαν αὐτῷ διδόναι καὶ εὐχὰς ποιεῖσθαι τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι δαφνηφοροῦντας διὰ ἐννεαετηρίδος προστάττειν.[148]

"Those of the Aiolians living in Arne, having set off and left the land there because of an oracle, encamped and ravaged Thebes which was already occupied by the Pelasgians. But when on both sides a common festival of Apollo was begun, they arranged a truce, and cut laurel –one group from Helikon, the other from near the river Melas– and brought it to Apollo. And Polematas, the leader of the Boiotians, dreamed that a young man gave him a suit of armour and commanded him to pray to Apollo and set up an enneateric Daphnephoria."

146. On the difficulties of defining cattle-herding and transhumance, see Chandezon 2003 and 2006. The overall lessened importance of livestock holding in the transition from the Archaic to Classical period, as captured by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*, points to the settlement's inhabitants as the people herding cattle around there, rather than long distance transhumance. For this insight, see Cruz Cardete 2019, 113, with Hes. *Op.* 231-239; 308.

147. Richardson 2010, 169 suggests that Hermes' encounter at Onchestos with an old man while herding the cattle was influenced by the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where it occupies a prominent place. At *Hymn. Hom.* 4.201-211 the old man is visited by Apollo and replies that he sees "many wayfarers to and fro this way (Onchestos)" (πολλοὶ γὰρ ὁδὸν πρήσσουσιν ὁδῖται). See *Hymn. Hom.* 4.68-93, for Hermes' herding near Onchestos. For the inclusion of Onchestos in the poem, which is not found in other versions of the text, see Thomas 2020, 198-199.

148. Photius *Bibl.* Codex 239 Bekker 321b.

Proklus links it to the Boiotian arrival myth from Thessaly, which seems a later addition to explain the ritual. The mention of the Pelasgians hints at Ephorus' fourth-century work, as it is absent from the Pindaric fragment.[149] That one group came from around Helikon and the other from the edge of Lake Kopais, could suggest that the reformed *Daphnephoria* aimed at reconciliation and collaboration. In the context of in-fighting and restoration of independence after 446, when the fissures across Boiotia needed to be sutured to forge a stronger cohesion across the region, one might envision a ritual where the Galaxion was a meeting place for the procession coming from Thebes and where other communities gathered too.[150]

Further supporting a sanctuary in the Teneric Plain is Plutarch's reference to the people living around the shrine. In the stretch of land between Thebes and Thespiai, near the Kabeirion, a small settlement has been attested.[151] According to Pausanias' Theban informers, a community used to exist near the Kabeirion, but the name was lost.[152] Archaic and classical grave sites were found nearby on the route between Onchestos and Thebes, which could have belonged to the settlement mentioned.[153] Parallels with other contemporary grave sites, such as those near Tanagra and Mykalessos, support a similar interpretation.[154] Xenophon also mentions Kynoskephalai ("Dog Heads") on the route from Thespiai to Thebes as a dependency of Thebes; this could have been the name of the settlement.[155]

The reason for this ascription is rooted in the nature of the procession. Judging from the description and the various locations visited during the

149. Tufano 2019, 110 and 407 on the Pelasgians in Boiotian historiography. Kurke 2007 argues the Pindaric fragment's first *lacuna* may have mentioned a military campaign akin to Proklus.

150. Contrary to what Kurke 2007 argues for. She views the appropriation of "pan-Boiotian" elements, like the carrying of a log, as tying in with Theban hegemonial ambitions. Similarly, Kowalzig 2007, 377-382.

151. Farinetti 2011, 198.

152. Paus. 9.25.6: πόλιν γάρ ποτε ἐν τούτῳ φασὶν εἶναι τῷ χωρίῳ καὶ ἄνδρας ὀνομαζομένους Καβείρους.

153. Aravantinos 1994; Blackman 2000.

154. For these cemeteries, see Andreiomenou 2007; Ure 1927.

155. Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.15; Steph. Byz. s.v. Kynoskephalai who refers to it as Pindar's birthplace.

procession, it seems likely that it constituted a "sacred way" between Thebes, via the Ismenion, and the Galaxion. The inclusion of the Ismenion hints at an integrative action of the Theban hinterland, as happened during the *tripodophoria* ritual, but this time with Parasopian communities.[156] It is a centrifugal procession through which the Thebans staked claims over the *chora* across the Teneric Plain.[157] In addition, it acted as a bonding ritual for the inhabitants of the city, bringing together its families in the procession –at least in its early stages. From Plutarch's statement it seems that the Galaxion was perceived as a sanctuary where Apollo's presence could be gleaned through the miraculous flows of milk pouring from the cattle arrayed there. Connecting that sanctuary to another prominent seat of Apollo –the Ismenion– thus forged a link between the Teneric Plain and Thebes. Unfortunately, no archaeological remains of a sanctuary have been attested, which makes it harder to conjecture anything about the site's development.

If Proklus is to be believed, then at one point the Galaxion developed into a mediatory sanctuary where the reconciliation of the Boiotians was celebrated, perhaps after the Battle of Koroneia (446). Pindar's *Daphnephorikon* fragments hint in that direction too, with its emphasis on the respect garnered by the Aioladai among their neighbours, as well as their victories at pan-Boiotian sanctuaries like Onchestos and Koroneia. The lack of archaeological remains –or an unequivocal identification of the site– prevents a better understanding of the changes the sanctuary underwent. If Proklus' aition for the ritual can be accepted, it would provide an intruiging insight into the role of the Galaxion as a place of reconciliation between various regions of Boiotia (446). Perhaps the daphnephoric procession mentioned by Pindar was a similar ritual that brought together a third group of people to the sanctuary. The testimonies imply that there was some form of mythologising surrounding the Galaxion, with people believing the god's presence transformed the site into a special location, rooted in the epichoric experience.

The next example ties in with some of the themes set out here: sanctuaries developing into a mediatory place for various communities, stemming from its role as a meeting place for herdsmen, elites and others living in the vicinity.

156. Mackil 2014.

157. Beck 2020, 144-145. For more on the contested ownership of the plain, see n. 146 above.

Bulls and banquets: the Kabeirion

The Kabeirion is located some six kilometres west of Thebes along the modern road between Thebes and Lebadeia in the low hills south of the Teneric plain.[158] Along this route were other important sanctuaries, such as the Poseidon shrine at Onchestos (**fig. 1**). The valley of the Kabeirion borders on a stream to the west that runs north into the plain: the seasonal river Kanavári(s). In antiquity, the river was perhaps named Thespios because of its origins near Thespiai. A second stream originally bisected this flow from the east and meandered into the north-south stream. It originated in the Kithairon mountains and streamed downwards into the plains. Due to natural erosion, the northern slope of the valley forms an irregular amphitheatre. The site's entrance point was in the north-west corner, next to the aforementioned south-north stream. Surrounding the inner "sanctum" were slopes on three sides, forming an irregular horseshoe shape. In the north-eastern sector of the sanctuary, an outcropping rock stood out as a natural feature, –although currently less prominent due to the re-orientation of the cult site in the Hellenistic period. The physical surroundings of the sanctuary were never altered, despite various phases of refurbishment and expansion at the Kabeirion.[159]

Whether that suggests a link with the deities worshipped there, is hard to pinpoint. It suggests there was a keen appreciation of these surroundings, which could have formed the basis for worship in the first place.[160] Part of that stems from the confluence of streams, providing fresh water in an area conducive to cattle herding, but with few perennial streams available.[161] Another factor is its sheltered location in the plain between Onchestos and Thebes. The Kabeirion sanctuary is surrounded in three directions by chains of hills and lower mountain slopes. In addition to these features, the site –seemingly in an isolated position– was strategically positioned. Important communication routes ran across the Teneric plain that connected Thebes to the communities

158. Most of the description is based on Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 319-320]; Schlott 2021, 416-417.

159. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 318-325].

160. Berlioz 2004 connects the site to pastoralism.

161. McInerney 2010, 7, for the notion that flat, swampy terrain is well-suited to grazing cattle to deliver the copious amounts of water needed for them. For the lack of perennial streams, see Farinetti 2011, 190-194.

on the western edge of Lake Kopais,[162] whereas the Kanavaris valley linked the site to Thespiai and its *chora*, the Thespike and Helikon massif (**fig. 2**).[163]

The combination of a sheltered site at a strategic location with sufficient amounts of water –for the cattle to drink, but also for banqueting, sacrificial slaughter and ritualised cleaning– created the perfect foundation for congregations of peoples clustering together for collaborative feasting and worship. The natural *koilon* would also have affected the selection of the site as it offered a theatre for spectators to view performances or sacrifices.[164] Its "natural" entry in the north-western corner granted access to people moving along the Teneric plain, whereas the outcropping rock provided a distinctive landmark that could have drawn people in and offered an anchor on which to possibly project divine presences.[165]

According to Schachter, this crag could have been the focal point for the Mystery-cult that was celebrated in the sanctuary in Hellenistic times.[166] However, there is little evidence for an early Mystery cult, which is only firmly attested for the Roman period.[167] Nevertheless, Schachter's interpretation of the emerging rock as embodying a direct connection to the deities underground is compelling. It would equally work for Beck's interpretation of the deities worshipped at the shrine –the Kabeiroi– as heroes, rather than gods.

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162. Termed the Kopais corridor by Beck 2023.

163. Berlioz 2004.

164. Cooper 1982, 59: "I maintain that the natural koilon at the Kabeirion affected the selection of the site and served as a theater from the earliest times of worship".

165. In a (lost) early 4th-cent. vase by the Mytes painter it was perceived as a prominent part of the sanctuary. It depicts the rock between the deities Pan, Hermes, the Kabiroi and Mater; Wolters, Bruns 1940, 106.M4.

166. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 319]. Schachter makes the comparison with Eleusis and Samothrace.

167. Beck forthcoming b. His argument rests on the description of the deities ("Kabir" or "Kabiroi") as ἱερός in the earliest bull dedications (Schmaltz 1980, no. 193, 210, 214, 267, 299, 304, 355, 359) and the reference to "lords of Boiotia" in *AP* 6.245. For ἱερός as qualifying a deity "not of the first rank", see Schachter 2003 [=2016, 329 n. 22]. Daumas 2005, 861 rejects this evidence since it would not denote a higher initiate in the cult in her opinion, but provides no evidence against this interpretation other than "Il s'agit plutôt d'un remploi ou d'une erreur de graphie".

The site was excavated in two segments; first in 1887/8 and then from 1956 to 1969.[168] These excavations unearthed remains dating back to the late Archaic period, the so-called Lower and Middle Tholos, which were believed to be the first constructed buildings on site. Schlott, however, proposes to view parts of a polygonal wall, located underneath the later Middle Tholos, as belonging to a small apsidal building from the Geometric period or, conversely, to an altar.[169] Only a couple of sherds from the middle-Geometric period have been uncovered, but other evidence suggests early roots for the Kabeiroi-cult. An enormous amount of metal (bronze and lead) bulls were unearthed during excavations. We know that the Kabeiroi were worshipped at the site, since some of the figures, starting in the eighth century, were inscribed in their honour.[170] Schmaltz originally dated some of these bulls to as early as the tenth or ninth century on stylistic grounds.[171] But based on comparative epigraphy, Paul Roesch deduced that the first bulls belonged to the end of the seventh or the early sixth century.[172] A recent comparison with animal figurines from other Greek sanctuaries revealed that some of the earliest bulls found by Schmaltz could belong to ca. 800.[173] In that light, the rare middle Geometric sherds and the possibility of a (late) Geometric apsidal building becomes more plausible. Whether that means the site was embellished with a building from

168. Wolters, Bruns 1940, 1-7; Heyder, Mallwitz 1978, 1-5.

169. Schlott 2021, 421-423. At p. 421 Schlott states that "Als vorklassische Strukturen könnten m. E. der Apsisbau, das sog. Polygonalmauerwerk sowie die Mauer M 124 unterhalb des Mittleren Rundbaus (MRB) identifiziert werden (Plan 1). Gebäude mit einem apsidialen Grundriss wurden in Griechenland bis in die früharchaische Zeit errichtet. Das weist auf ein frühgriechisches, geometrisches Erbauungsdatum des Apsisbaus im Kabirion hin". Heimberg 1982 had already suggested the possibility of an earlier building at the site made of perishable materials.

170. Twenty-six figurines are dedicated to "Kabiros", three to Kabiros and Pais; and another "to the Kabiroi" (Schmaltz 1980, 90 nos. 333, 356, 357 and 358 among others). See also New York Metropolitan Museum 20210.

171. Wolters, Bruns 1940, 81-82 and table 38, 1-2; Braun, Haevernick 1981, 75-76 table 25. For the bulls, see Schmaltz 1980, 44-62 and 99-104, but see Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 329].

172. *Teiresias* 15 (1985), Appendix: Epigraphica e.88.29 [= *SEG* 35, 412].

173. Bol 2002, figs. 13-20; 24-25 (8th cent. BCE).

its inception is harder to gauge, but the early investment at the shrine corresponds to the wealth of the dedications –bronze and other metal figurines– at such an early stage.

What can these figurines tell us about the people frequenting the sanctuary? The Kabeiroi are an enigmatic group. Their name can roughly be translated as "the Mighty Ones", stemming from the semitic *kabr* (great or mighty).[174] A first interpretation links the figurines to the heroes' pedigree in strength, since bulls exude strength and animal fertility. A second option is that the dedication of animal figurines was meant to safeguard the livestock and put these under the heroes' protection.[175] Thirdly, it is possible that the bulls and oxen were meant to represent the animals that were eaten at the banquets (see p. 358); however, the analysis of the zooarchaeological material indicates that bovine animals were rarely slaughtered for sacrifice. Rather, ovicaprids were the preferred animal.[176] Finally, Lebessi argued that the dedication of cattle figurines served to commemorate a coming-of-age ritual for young men.[177] This is akin to how the yoking of cattle was perceived as part of the ritualised transition from boys to men.[178] The story of Kleobis and Biton in Herodotus, who took up the yoke to convey their mother to the temple and take the place of the delayed oxen, provides an example of this ritual.[179] The boys took up the yoke of manhood and died serving their community, earning eternal *kleos* in the process. In light of the later emergence of terracotta figurines depicting

174. Bowden 2010, 61-63.

175. Schachter 1986, 97. That is the *communis opinio* regarding the dedication of bovine figurines. Patay-Horváth 2020 offers older bibliography and argues against this thesis. He provides a new interpretation of the bovine figurines at Olympia, seeing them as (part of) the dedications of elites visiting from afar and representations of feral or escaped oxen and bulls that were hunted, which was the origin for the Olympic Games in his opinion. Whereas this could certainly be possible for Olympia, it is hard to make the same case for the Kabeirion, since the area surrounding the sanctuary is of a different character than the fords near Olympia.

176. Schmaltz 1980. This pattern is found at other Greek sanctuaries: Hägg 1998; Forstenpointer 2003.

177. Lebessi 1992; Avronidaki 2007, 98-102.

178. McInerney 2010, 120-122.

179. Hdt. 1.31.2-5.

male youths (see pp. 358-359), the last suggestion definitely has some merit to it. What stands out above all is that these dedications cannot be interpreted monolithically and could have served various uses.[180]

These dedications can also potentially disclose the background of the dedicators, especially if these figurines represented coming-of-age rituals or the preservation of life-stock in the dedicants' possession. The raising and maintenance of bulls and oxen was not the preserve of every social group but rather the prerogative of elites.[181] The connection with elite visitors is augmented by the fact that some of these figurines were inscribed at an early stage. That does not exclude the possibility of non-elite visits, but the material of the bulls –bronze and lead– argues against a broad clientele, despite the copious amount of dedications.[182] Bronze was perceived as a valuable good and even the (relatively) small size of the figurines should not be regarded as reflecting non-elite involvement.[183] What is lacking in comparison to other sites of (supra-local) elite interaction like Olympia, are grander dedications in the form of tripods, statues or larger offerings.[184] Therefore, the figurines are the only real attestation of cultic activity until the mid-sixth century (see pp. 358-359).

It is difficult to determine the exact provenance of these bulls, other than they were Boiotian-made.[185] These elite visitors thus seem to have come from the region, and in light of the strategic location of the sanctuary –right at the crossroads between three important civic centres of the Archaic period; Haliartos, Thespiai and Thebes–, viewing the Kabeirion as a venue for mediation for

180. See the insightful treatment of animals in Greek dedications by Gaifman 2021.

181. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 330]. At Schachter 1986, 97, he opined these were herdsmen's dedications.

182. There is a (now lost) vase that depicts Hermes and Pan, both herdsmen's gods, with Hermes holding a shepherd's crook (Braun, Haevernick 1981, 64.358). Sabetai 2019 argues that Pan's inclusion points towards the transitioning of young boys into adulthood, rather than shepherds.

183. Gaifman 2021, 218, with references to bronze as a prized metal.

184. Patay-Horváth 2020, for Olympia. It need not be a regional idiosyncrasy, since at the Apollo shrine in Akraiphia, numerous tripods and life-size *kouroi* were found: Guillon 1943a; 1943b; 1971.

185. Supporting this notion, perhaps, is the fact that hardly any of the Archaic pottery found stems from outside Boiotia: Schlott 2021, 423 n. 38.

(select) elite interaction from these places seems likely.[186] The sheer amount of finds does not necessarily contradict this interpretation. The limited amount of the early figurines underlines the limited scope of the visitors. An uptick in dedications is only perceivable from the mid-sixth century onwards and that "expansion" accelerated after ca. 500 when the figurines were increasingly made of terracotta.[187] The same groups could thus have made repeated visits, each time bringing new figurines.[188]

Other evidence from the site bears marks of elite interaction. From the mid-sixth century onward, sympotic pottery starts showing up in the excavated materials of the site. This would be the notorious Kabeirion ware with their famed depictions of debauchery and festivities. It appears to have been more of an artistic change rather than any change in the ritual; earlier pottery fragments found at the site were certainly used for drinking. From 500 onward, there is a rapid increase in Boiotian black-glazed *kantharoi* for instance.[189] That indicates a continued interest in banqueting and combibulation at the site. In the earlier period of the sanctuary, such a divide would not have been extraordinary– the combination of meat consumption and wine was commonplace (at sanctuaries) across Greece until the Early Archaic period. From that point onward, these two activities were increasingly celebrated separately, with ritual banqueting as the prerogative of sanctuaries consecrated to the gods, whereas wine drinking moved towards the private sphere.[190] That combibulation and feasting occurred at the site at the end of the sixth century is therefore remarkable.

The possibility that the Kabeiroi-cult concerned some form of ephebic ritual or transition from boyhood to adulthood can be discerned in a change in the dedicatory trends at the sanctuary. More than 700 terracotta figurines (albeit some fragmentary) of boys and youths have been found. This trend

186. For Thespiai, see Bintliff et al. 2017. For Haliartos, see Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 242-243.

187. For the uptick, see Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 330-331].

188. Patay-Horváth 2020 suggests this pattern of repetition for Olympia, thus explaining the large amount of figurines dedicated there rather than a large clientele.

189. Schlott 2021, 426-427. Schlott 2021, 429 notes most of the Archaic and early Classical pottery was used for drinking and banqueting, rather than votive. For a recent investigation of the ware, see Schmidt 2022.

190. See van den Eijnde 2019, 12-15, with bibliography.

starts in the late sixth century and tapers off in the late fourth. The coroplasty could suggest a fascination with the youthful male body, which is connected to symposiastic settings.[191] However, these figurines could equally reflect the identity of the dedicators, with young boys following in the footsteps of their predecessors –if the bull figurines can be interpreted in that way– as celebrating their transition into adulthood.[192] Finally, these "soft youths" could be identified as one of the deities worshipped at the site.[193] Bull votives were then the preserve of the "older" deity, with the terracotta youths offered to the younger of the two deities.[194] In various configurations, deities at the Kabeirion were age differentiated males, akin to a father and a son. Moreover, in the early fifth century, a building well-suited for symposiastic feasting was constructed (the "Rectangular building" near the Lower Tholos).[195] This building could strengthen the connection with a male initiation ritual generationally passed down or via the influx of "new" elites, perhaps in the context of elite military groups, since the terracottas disappeared from the record after the destruction of Thebes in 335.[196]

The sanctuary was not, however, just the prerogative of these young men and other males. An inscribed rim of a tub buried below the floor of the revamped fourth century Lower Tholos and dated to the early fifth century reads: ΤΟΘΑΜΑΚΟ, το ταμακο, "to the spouse". This suggests a marital couple was venerated at the site, whose identities remain unknown. Moreover, in the late sixth century, evidence in the form of offering pits, round buildings, and dedications made by women implies the site was visited by large groups

191. For the terracottas, see Schmaltz 1974. Some of the Kabirion vases suggest homoerotic practices: Wolters, Bruns 1940, 96k2; 106m4.

192. An interesting comparison comes from the sanctuary at Kato Syme on Crete. In this case, bull figurines were "replaced" by terracottas of (young) males. The terracottas represent figures engaging in homoerotic affairs, suggesting these formed part of an initiation rite; see Lebessi 1985 and 2002.

193. Rosenberg-Dimitracopoulou 2019, 248.

194. Schachter 1986, 89 n. 1.

195. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 320 fig. 20.1].

196. Daumas 2005, 869 connects the decline of the terracottas at the site to Thebes' military nadir and connects changes in the cult –perhaps a shift towards a Mystery-cult– as the result of this development. For the elite military groups in Boiotia from the Archaic period onward, see Schachter 2007 [= 2016, 193-215] .

and families.[197] First, two *tholoi* (the "Lower" and the "Middle" Tholos) were constructed in the late sixth or early fifth century. Because of the presence of two separate *tholoi*, with the Lower Tholos as the domain of "the spouse", and the Middle Tholos possibly dedicated to the Kabeiroi and Pais, Schachter proposes that these two buildings were the property of two distinct priestly families as that would explain the clustering of the early architecture into two parts.[198]

Whether the Kabeirion was the prerogative of a small clique of families remains open to debate.[199] There were few impediments to enter the shrine, with one possible boundary marker found.[200] Three early offerings made by a priest from roughly the late sixth century show their participation, but that implies –in my opinion– more of an involvement from a civic community and its extensions, rather than a prerogative for a small clique.[201] Other evidence, such as the construction of the buildings mentioned above, suggest financial involvement from nearby communities as well.

Obvious candidates include Thebes and Thespiai. Each town was in the vicinity of the sanctuary and had easy access to the valley in which the Kabeirion was situated.[202] Both were burgeoning settlements from the seventh century onward.[203] Another aspirant is Haliartos. Despite its relatively small stature in Boiotian history, the monumental urban infrastructure that arises there at the end of the sixth century implies they would have the means to finance construction work at the sanctuary, in addition to its proximity to the site.[204]

197. See Cooper, Morris 1990, for round buildings implying family rituals. The amount of pearl beads found at the site, more than at other Greek sanctuaries, indicates females' and children's participation (Schlott 2021, 433-436).

198. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 331].

199. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 316].

200. NTṢS (possibly for [ἐ]ντός; see Heyder, Mallwitz 1978, 99 n. 1.

201. These dedications are *IG* VII 3646 (Λέον ho hι[αρεὺς - - -]); 3684 (Φιλόχορος hια[ρεύς]); 3686 (hιαρεὺς [- - -]). There is also a reference to a "fine shrine/temple" (ναός καλός) to Kabiros (*IG* VII 3598, ca. 500-450); cf. Schachter 1986, 77.

202. The Thebans financed the expansion of the sanctuary in the 3rd cent.: Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 321-322].

203. For Thespiai's flourishing, see Bintliff et al. 2017, 201-205 and 287-316; Schachter 1996.

204. For Haliartos' late Archaic flourishing, as reflected in the recent work un-

It appears there was also a small settlement nearby; Archaic and Classical graves were unearthed some 3 km away from the Kabeirion, in the direction of Onchestos.[205] The cluster of graves, however, does not seem to have been substantial enough to have been responsible for the significant investment at the site at the end of the sixth century.[206] Nor would its existence explain the early flourishing of the sanctuary, since the burial evidence does not date back to the earliest dedications.[207]

In light of the early dedications, it is possible to conjecture, akin to the Zeus sanctuary at Olympia, that the Kabeirion started off as a "central place", between elites from surrounding areas, such as Thespiai, Thebes and Haliartos.[208] The unique rock formation provided a natural setting for (theatrical) sacrifices, whereas the presence of perennial fresh water allowed for the cleansing of the sacrificial animals. The conceivable construction of an apsidal building in the Geometric period would corroborate this function, offering the worshippers a place for ritualised banqueting. Perhaps herdsmen from surrounding communities discovered the site, which is possible on account of the location, its natural resources and the nature of the dedications, but they do not seem to be the ones dedicating the bull figurines due to their precious material.

The function of the site as a locus of interaction appears to be confirmed by the transformation of the sanctuary at the end of the sixth century. The

dertaken by the Cities of Boeotia Project, see the WiP section in *Teiresias* 47.2, 13-24; *Teiresias* 2.2 (2023), and the lecture given by Lieve Donnellan at Münster University (https://www.uni-muenster.de/HiLanG/neueforschungeningriechenland/20220208.html) (accessed 30/7/2024).

205. Aravantinos 1994; Blackman 2000. Admittedly, no Kabeirion ware was found in these graves unearthed, making it harder to confirm a connection to the cult.

206. Perhaps it is the settlement mentioned by Paus. 9.25.6 as once being in the vicinity of the Kabeirion but abandoned by his time (and its inhabitants chased away by the *Epigonoi*).

207. That such a wealth of dedications does not need to be connected to a large town in the vicinity is perhaps demonstrated by the case of Olympia. But the welter of (expensive) votive offerings can also not be linked to the locals dedicating at the site, as that same case shows (Patay-Horváth 2020).

208. Schlott 2021, 562-563 tentatively suggests that this involvement could be related to a Thespian control of the site. She makes too much out of a "Theban take-over" of Thespiai after 424.

enduring dedications of bulls, accompanied by "soft youths" at the time, in combination with the construction of the "Rectangular building", suggests symposia continued, or started, to be celebrated at the time. This was likely done to strengthen "the links" between the various elites that frequented the shrine, or perhaps to "select" new members of the surrounding elites.[209] The Kabeirion vase ware buried with the skeletal remains in the Thespian polyandrion (424 BCE) indicate some of these fallen soldiers had participated in the cult.[210] Therefore, these men and possibly their families had been taken into the orbit of an elite network across western Boiotia, or in the development of a supra-local identity. This finds some support in the fact that those Thespians who perished were in the pro-Theban camp.[211] There might be traces of other "initiates" from across Boiotia from the later fourth century too.[212] Therefore, the Kabeirion can be viewed as a site that fostered collaboration between the elites from Thebes, Thespiai and Haliartos (and possibly other smaller communities in the intermediate space) from the late sixth century onwards. Perhaps this ritual illustrates the more literal sense of the word *amphictyones* that Pindar refers to in his *Daphnephorikon*.[213] After all, the poem invokes this strip of land –by referring to Onchestos– and refers to a Theban family that was celebrated by neighbouring families.

In later centuries, the cult's broadening horizons and participation can be perceived in the onomastic evidence, with theophoric names such as Kabiros, Kabirichos or Kabirinos appearing in places such as Tanagra and Oropos.[214]

209. The argument for the selection of elites through the symposion is made by Wecowski 2014, 19-80.

210. Schilardi 1977, 1.230.9; 2.4.3; 2.5.4; 52.111.

211. Thuc. 4.133.

212. Alexandra Charami and Eleni Goula recently presented evidence from Boiotian graves, including Tanagra, to demonstrate the spread of the initiates in the Kabeirion cult (https://www.ascsa.edu.gr/events/details/conference-recent-work-on-the-cults-of-boeotia-archaeology-epigraphy-and-history) (accessed 30/7/2024).

213. Pind. *Fr.* 94b: τί | μαθεν γὰρ τὰ πάλαι τὰ νῦν | τ᾽ ἀμφικτιόνεσσιν | ἵππων τ᾽ ὠκυπόδων πο̣[λυ | γνώτοις ἐπὶ νίκαις ("for both of old and still today they have been honoured by their neighbours for their celebrated victories with swift-footed horses").

214. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 317 n. 4]. Admittedly, these are all from the Hellenistic period except one. The Theban Kabirichos, the slain archon in 379, hints at a leading

Its fortunes were partially tied to Theban elites. The sanctuary witnessed a dearth of activity after the destruction of the city in 335. It picked up again after 300, but perhaps a change took place in the cult celebrated. Access was controlled by an entry complex whereas other entrances were purposively blocked. The main role of the rock formation was subdued, perhaps pointing towards a departure of the initial cultic experience into one more focused on a mystery initiation.[215]

Conclusion

A phenomenological approach can bring to the fore previously unexplored elements of the ancient experience and illuminate why certain places were first perceived as sacred sites because the natural environment played a fundamental role, with landmarks and natural features allowing humans to imagine divine presences and develop stories that explain their activity at the site. Other factors influenced the creation of sacred sites, such as logistical utility, the strategic location of a site, or through exogenous investments. The latter were meant to formalise political connections, to forge loci for communal interactions and foster social cohesion between communities and for influential individuals to display their power. Ritualised movement between sacred and civic places moreover helped structure the physical, emotional and mental relationship upon which these sacred sites were built. In essence, these were the places for people to go and collaboratively celebrate. Some of these sanctuaries became anchors for regional collaboration and celebration, such as the Apollo sanctuary at Delion, whereas others, like the Theban *Daphnephoria* and the Galaxion, remained a local affair at heart and in practice. Nevertheless, they all constituted parts of the religious grammar of the region that ultimately became the home of the Boiotian *koinon*, constructed upon the regionalisation of initially local cults. This investigation thus showed how a variety of factors –phenomenological, political and economic among others– led to the creation of key hubs in the web of regional interaction.

That is not to overlook endemic neighbourly friction or even warfare within Boiotia. Regional centres were loci for performances of that friction and

role in the *polis* (Plut. *Mor.* 597A-C); there were also Theban coins with KABI-stamped upon them (379-338) (Schachter 1986, 78 n. 2; *BCD*, Boiotia 539).

215. Schachter 2003 [= 2016, 336]; Daumas 2005, 869; Beck forthcoming b; Paus. 9.25.5.

temporary rapprochements, providing an opportunity to settle differences or create ties between regional elites converging together in these centres. Some settlements, like Plataia and Orchomenos, resisted Theban attempts to unify the region. Nevertheless, they did partake in the *koinon,* as evidenced by the Oxyrhynchus historian and his description of that early fourth-century polity.[216] Whether they participated in communal celebrations under Theban aegis is harder to retrace, but as Beck and Ganter put it, "the local elites from both sides of Lake Kopais" came together in the post-446 *koinon*.[217] We can envision a similar scenario happening here. Elites from across southern Boiotia were brought together in the sanctuaries under discussion. Whether the efforts at promulgating a regional identity at these sites were always successful, cannot be fully ascertained. Yet the elaboration and development of these sanctuaries would at least have created venues for the arbitration of these neighbourly difficulties and provided arenas for elite interactions and networks to flourish.

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216. *Hell. Oxy.* 19.2-4 (Chambers); *Hell. Oxy.* 16.4 (Bartoletti); Mackil 2013, 371.

217. Beck, Ganter 2015, 141.

Summary

In this article I aim to clarify how specific cult sites emerged in southern Boiotia by employing a holistic approach, combining the phenomenological investigations favoured by the recent Spatial and Sensorial Turn with a functionalist understanding of these locations. Understanding how the natural environment provided the impetus for the deliberations on divine presences at these sites forms the first step; a second layer of analysis considers the strategic locations of these places, the political powers willing to invest in the development of the sanctuaries, such as elites or communities, and the paths alongside which these places lay. I will look at how the chosen cult sites –the Apollo cult at Delion, the Ismenios temple at Thebes, the Galaxion and the Kabeirion in the Teneric Plain– were either transformed into sites of trans-local importance due to the investment or take-over from neighbouring larger communities, and how this aimed to create key religious hubs throughout the region that aimed to fortify communal interactions across southern Boiotia between 700 and 300 BCE.

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Fig. 1. Boiotia west of Thebes (Western and Central Boiotia) (©Roy van Wijk)

Fig. 2. Delion and Tanagra (Eastern Boiotia) (©Roy van Wijk)