Introduction
Constructing a city

Almost everyone who has read some classical literature, or seen a few Greek dramas, is familiar with Thebes and its myths. Perhaps the city is remembered primarily as the home of Oedipus, or the birthplace of Dionysus or Heracles. And many might have an idea – though likely only a barely schematic one – of the contours of the city itself. That it is near a mountain, called Cithaeron, might be its most identifiable feature. The city has a shrine to Heracles and an important one to Apollo, the Ismenion. There are rivers and springs: Ismenus, Dirce. Walls with seven gates. And there is that infamous crossroads somewhere in the vicinity.

The present book seeks to explore ancient Thebes through an examination of the way its topography is represented. This representation survives primarily in two realms: in ancient literature, much of it mythic in content, and in the modern archaeological record. Of course, both of these "records" pose problems for an interpreter. The Thebes of myth is not the same place as the real city, and literary representations of the city are colored by a wide array of factors related to the production of texts and narratives: genre, social and political context, etc. And to a certain extent archaeological interpretations of city space are influenced by similar contextual issues, coupled with the fact that in Thebes archaeological work is hampered by the presence of the modern city squarely in the same location as the ancient settlement and city. In short, we have an incomplete, skewed, biased, and otherwise compromised picture of the actual city of Thebes at any given time in ancient Greek history.

But this is hardly a unique situation. In addition, since what is most fascinating about Thebes as a place has always been, and perhaps continues to be, its function as a setting for mythic tales, the adaptations, biases, and otherwise modified (or corrupted) ways in which the "real" city's topography comes to be represented must be considered as an integral part of what Theban space actually was, and is: too often we cannot separate real space from represented space. Or, to put it succinctly, real Thebes and the

Thebes of myth are neither the same place nor are they different places. Thebes is both: real and imagined, tangible and fictional. This book is aimed precisely at exploring representations of a topography that lies at this juncture of the real and imagined city.

There have been studies by classicists and archaeologists that have recognized the importance of the intersection of real and imagined space. Several of these will come under discussion below, though to my knowledge no one has attempted to focus on a single place, through its changing representations, as this study does. But the idea of space as a type of mental construction, in whole or more often in part, has been explored by cultural theorists and geographers, most profoundly perhaps Henri Lefebvre and, in the States, Edward Soja and Yi Fu Tuan among others. Lefebvre's influential studies of the "production of space" provide a theoretically sophisticated approach to the interrelation of social reality and physical space. Soja's concept of "thirdspace" as a place that integrates, and interfaces with, real space ("firstspace") and purely imaginary space ("secondspace") offers a productive standpoint from which to view not only modern urban space, as he does, but also the ancient cityscape. Soja asks us to consider the poles of "real" and "imagined" with more nuance, and sharpens an understanding of the interaction of these poles. Though his discussions do not treat the concept of myth *per se*, the focus on the interaction between the imaginary and the real could not be more applicable to a conception of topography as the product of mythic discourse. And Yi Fu Tuan's work on the relationship of "spaces" and "places" *vis à vis* the power of narrative offers a robust tool for understanding the roles the city of Thebes plays as a space and also as a collocation of mythic places, defined by narrative as much as, or perhaps more than, any other productive impetus.

This book examines topography that could be defined as "fictional" or perhaps "mythic." The former is clear enough: fictional topography consists of representations of the settings of fictional discourse, in our case of narratives set in or focused on Thebes. This "fictional" topography, of course, is fungible, depending on the many contingencies of the discourse in which it is described: genre, place, time period, etc. In some ways "mythic topography" is more descriptive, since it implies a sense of middle ground: mythic topography should not consist of the spaces of fantasy and pure imagination, nor any actual place one can enter, walk around, touch, and experience with one's senses. It shares in both of those spaces, and should be understood to express a dialectic between them. But the project of defining "mythic space" can fall into, and founder upon, the same

difficulties one finds in defining myth itself. "Myth" can be defined in many ways, depending on a variety of factors: what material is one studying (literary narratives, ritual actions, visual arts?); what is one's perspective (anthropological, religious, literary-critical, or a combination?); what is the purpose of the study (historical, cultural, again literary-critical)? The answers have been as multifaceted as the perspectives from which the questions stem. Similarly, "mythic space" might mean to some simply "imaginary space," or it might mean something as concrete as the route a particular ritual procession takes through a particular landscape. In the study that follows I will use the terms "mythic space" and "mythic topography" occasionally to help define the interplay between reality and fictional accounts that consist of mythic discourse; the mythic topography of Thebes has real elements, to be sure, but is not "real." But I will more regularly employ the term "fictional topography" when discussing particular literary descriptions of the spaces of Thebes, since a particular literary version of a mythic narrative can be considered to contain a "fictional" account of its setting's spaces. Generally, and most importantly, what follows is not an attempt to locate myths on the physical landscape of an actual ancient Greece. It is instead a study in the development of a mythic place, an increasingly fictionalized one, that exists alongside reality, and an examination of the relationship between the physical landscape and the topography of the city as a mythic construct that contributes to the manifold and powerful meaning that mythic stories about Thebes have maintained for centuries.

Topography, space, and place

Scholars of geography, anthropology, and related disciplines, especially in the past few decades, have begun to consider more deeply the implications of perception – individual and social – for the study of geography and topography. In one sense it is an obvious enough observation that the understanding, and experiencing, of a place is colored by the social and even biological frameworks an individual brings to that place. But the extent to which space, and the places within it, are socially constructed and experienced has not always been recognized as fully as it might by readers of ancient literature.[1] One of the theorists most influential in bringing

[1] There is a longstanding tradition – if now somewhat outdated, it is hoped – of reconstructing ancient physical spaces, buildings, etc., based primarily, if not solely, on literary representations such as those found in tragedy. This book, it will be seen, offers a different approach. A recent work by a classicist

attention to the social and cultural aspects of perception of space and place, to which many later studies look, if sometimes obliquely, is Henri Lefebvre, whose work *The Production of Space* (originally published in French as *La production de l'espace* in 1974; translated into English only in 1991) is a major theoretical manifesto that seeks to marshal social theory – Lefebvre was a Marxist philosopher and cultural theorist – to an understanding of space. Lefebvre's work is difficult but compelling, and has encouraged others to continue to theorize the nature of the relationships between perception, socially constructed tropes of understanding, and the built and natural world. His insistence on looking to the social forces that define how space is perceived forms the foundation of an important first step in the present study: this book is organized according to a series of "perspectives" on Thebes – many of which are not indigenous, it should be noted – that exert strong influence on how the city's topography is defined in a mythic context.[2] These are literary perspectives, but they can be associated with the sociological points of view so important to Lefebvrian analysis of the meaning of space and spatiality.

Lefebvre is credited by many as initiating a "spatial turn" in cultural and philosophical studies.[3] His work, however, is dense, wide-ranging, and not easily applied. Others have thus taken Lefebvre's lead and brought the recognition of the centrality of spatiality to cultural understanding to new fields and methodologies. Edward Soja, an American geographer, has been influential in bringing the Lefebvrian perspective to American spaces, in particular to Los Angeles, especially with his aforementioned influential book *Thirdspace*. His concepts of "first-," "second-," and "thirdspace" create a framework for understanding not only how reality is perceived, understood, and narrated, but how people and cultures can define and relate to spaces that are not "real" *per se* at all: the concept of "thirdspace" seeks to define a space that is neither imagined nor real, but intermediary

that has embraced theories of space and spatiality is Thalmann 2011; his theoretical introduction of space and place, and the ways the Argonauts are represented as "producing" space in the *Argonautica*, offers discussion of many of the theorists mentioned below, with a slightly different focus.

[2] The work of Henre Lefebvre is wide-ranging and at times opaque; it covers far more ground than a simple summary can hope to capture. For the purposes of this study the Lefebvrian focus on spatiality, writ large – whether from a political, sociological, or philosophical, perspective – is most important. An interesting and enlightening discussion of Lefebvre's impact on more strictly spatial disciplines, especially cultural geography, is given by Soja 1996: 26–52. See also Thalmann 2011: 22–24, who discuses the Lefebvrian triad of "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "spaces of representation"; these are significant concepts for Soja as well; see below.

[3] The "spatial turn" is a commonplace; e.g. on the back cover of the paperback edition of Soja 1996; Lefebvre's role in catalyzing this theoretical shift is discussed by Soja 2009: 18–22, discussing Lefebvre and Foucault.

between the two, with some characteristics of, or at least some connections to, both.[4] Soja's interest in, and in some ways, refinement, of Lefebvre's schema of understanding the production of space focuses on space as "perceived, conceived, and lived, with no one inherently privileged *a priori*."[5] For Soja, the understanding of spatiality as encompassing more than simple topography or mappable geography is a starting point, but the ways of understanding spaces and places, and the uses to which they are put, are equally important.[6] Soja's insistence on the presence of an interstitial conception of lived topography – neither wholly imagined nor wholly real – gives his "thirdspace" a characteristic that can easily be associated with the fictionalized "mythic space" of the current project.

Another useful schema for discussing social and even psychological perceptions and interpretations of space comes from Yi Fu Tuan, a geographer whose studies have been appropriated by many literary critics, including recently the classicist William Thalmann in an interesting book on the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes.[7] Tuan locates spatiality at the center of mankind's perception of many social and natural features of existence, to put it broadly: the spatial orientation of the body extends to a frame of reference that defines the world along spatial terms both in a personal and social sense. His distinction between "space" and "place," in addition, offers another powerful tool for discussion of Theban topography. For Tuan, "space" defines what is around us, what is filled with things, people, buildings, mountains, or what have you. It is also a feeling of openness, or at least can be. But, crucially, it is constructed socially or psychologically in this sense: the openness of space can be felt on the beach, at the ocean, or just as much in Manhattan – if the openness is felt as possibility, freedom, or lack of (social, for example) boundaries.[8] Places, on the other hand, fill space, and places carry particular meaning through the process of being defined in particular ways.[9] Philadelphia's City Hall is a place: it contains within its definition physical dimensions, and a particular location, but also a history and a collection of associations that

[4] Soja 1996: 53–82. His discussion of Lefebvre's triad is on 66–68. It is more theoretical, and less pointedly focused on the practicalities of interpretation of texts, than Thalmann's (see note 2 above).
[5] Soja 1996: 68.
[6] Soja 1996: 72 gives a representative flavor: "All excursions into Thirdspace begin with ... the presupposition that being-in-the-world, Heidegger's *Dasein*, Sartre's *être-là*, is existentially definable as being simultaneously historical, social, and spatial. We are first and always historical–social–spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production – the 'becoming' – of histories, geographies, societies."
[7] Thalmann 2011, who also makes use of Lefebvre and Soja; see notes above.
[8] Tuan 1977: 55–57.
[9] "Enclosed and humanized space is place": Tuan 1977: 54.

define what it is to groups of people; critically, these characteristics are, in some cases but not in others, shifting, depending on the groups and on shifting perspectives and perceptions.

The two terms can define the same space/place, depending on perspective, and in Tuan's usage they are not limiting or limited by physical particulars. In addition, any space that has mythic import becomes at once a place. In fact, one way to understand what delineates space from place could be to define that entity's relation to myth – that is, to stories told and retold about it, or within it. A topographical entity with a presence in myth is a place. Myth ratifies its placehood; it is mythically reified. From the perspective of myth, at least, presence in topography guarantees placehood, since a place's existence in mythic discourse is inseparable from its attachment to cultural meaning (which can be construed, in the case of myth, as narrative significance). It is thus a feature of myth that its spaces become places: that meaning is attached to space, and thus, conversely, that space carries meaning that is to some extent independent of particular (that is, cartographic) location or, more broadly, even physical reality.

We can see the terms' utility if we consider them in the context of an ancient city such as Thebes. On the one hand, Thebes itself is a place. But the city is also a constellation of smaller-scale places that together define it. It occupies space in Boeotia, and Theban places occupy space in Thebes. The Theban spaces created in mythic discourse are populated by places that are, in many respects, distinct, and, to an extent, independent of each other. As a constellation of places (fountains, tombs, sanctuaries, etc.) fictional Thebes has many features of a real ancient city. Yet these places maintain significance within the texts in which they are defined, or at least have the potential to do so, while at the same time in these texts there are significant spatial gaps between them. Speaking of "space" and "place" in this way allows one to discuss the interactions between particular places and the topography of the city as a whole, real and imagined. Thus Tuan's categories are useful, insofar as they help to define, and trace, how meaning can inhabit topography in myth. In what follows these categories will be maintained, though I shall also employ the term "space" in its more loosely defined sense, especially in phrases such as "city space" or "Theban space"; it is hoped that the distinction between those more general idioms and the Tuanian use of the terms will be readily apparent.

Tuan, in fact, himself considers the concept of "mythic space." His definition of such space as an "intellectual construct," "differ[ing] from pragmatic and scientifically conceived spaces in that it ignores the logic of exclusion and contradiction," will strike any student of Greek myth as

nuanced and perceptive. But though contradictions are common in mythic constructions of space, they do not necessarily define it. Another type of indifference to logic can be seen to operate as well: "In mythic thought the part can symbolize the whole and have its full potency. . . . The small mirrors the large."[10] An additional strength of Tuan's discussion, informed by his (at times incomplete) dichotomy between space and place, is its insistence on the importance of metaphor and especially metonymy, concepts of great significance in the study that follows.

There have been enlightening and useful studies of space and place in the ancient Greek world from a cultural and literary perspective, some more explicitly aligned with the "spatial turn" than others. Richard Buxton's *Imaginary Greece*, published in 1994, covers some similar ground to what follows, though he is concerned with categories of natural features, such as mountains or springs, and not a particular location or city.[11] His insistence on understanding the ways Greeks imagined their environment, and used the imaginary to help process and create discourse about cultural and social issues is an influential building block of what follows. Buxton shows that there are associations, metonymies, metaphors, and other culturally marked tropes that can be tied to particular types of locations in myth, and that these are not always, or even often, available on the surface of a story's meaning.[12] One implication of this is that, yet again, it is possible to dissociate a place from the space it inhabits: that is, a topographical feature can gain meaning in mythic discourse in ways that are not connected to its particular location in space, and gain a meaning broader than its immediate spatial connotation. Metonymy here again is of primary importance to the expression of spatial meaning. Buxton's discussion of natural features in myth, especially mountains and springs, informs many observations below, particularly regarding prominent natural features on the Theban landscape.

Others have considered the Greek landscape from a mythic and cultic perspective, and come to similar observations about the influence of mythic discourse on the perception and understanding of space without necessarily expressing an explicitly theoretical method. François de Polignac's well-known study on the importance of rural sanctuaries in the definition and maintenance of *chorai* of Greek cities is important here.[13]

[10] This and the previous quotation are from Tuan 1977: 99–100.
[11] Though he does discuss the Cadmus myth in some detail, 1994: 184–93.
[12] Buxton 1994 *passim*, but especially 80–113 on "landscape."
[13] Polignac 1995 (English translation of 1984 French edition)

This influential study demonstrates clearly how sanctuaries in cities' hinterlands can carry meaning that is secondary to the primary cultic practices they support. And more specifically, others such as Susan Alcock and Carla Antonaccio have underscored the significance of memory, and the relationship Greeks in the archaic and classical periods had with their past, as a crucial component of creation of religious and civic space and of its representation and conception.[14] Alcock, especially in a 2002 book, *Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments, and Memories*, also cites the groundbreaking work of Maurice Halbwachs, to good effect: his 1941 study of Jerusalem, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: étude de mémoire collective*, takes an approach that is in some ways similar to that of this book, examining how changing stories and influences concerning particularities of a topography that is simultaneously legendary and real contribute to an instability in the meaning of places.[15] Alcock also invokes the importance of metaphor in understanding how memory interacts with landscape and sense of place; again, from a different perspective, we see the importance of metaphor and metonym.[16]

There have been a few influential studies on Thebes and Boeotia concerned specifically with topography and space. Albert Schachter's *Cults of Boiotia* is certainly the most comprehensive treatment of cultic sites in the area; it treats a far wider territory than Thebes and its *chora*, but does compile evidence for, and offer interpretation of, all cultic and religious sites in and around Thebes that were known at the time of his study.[17] Schachter's work presents a hybrid of archaeological and literary/historiographical evidence for each site, and is invaluable as a starting point for understanding cult in Boeotia and Thebes. And Schachter does offer interpretation of particular sites, or cult complexes: their chronological development over time, as far as can be traced from the archeological or literary record, is analyzed and explained. But Schachter is sometimes too willing to grant literary representation real status on the landscape. This approach can be problematic since secondary, non-locational meaning is sometimes minimized. Schachter can also be too eager to see reference to particular cult practice in literary texts,

[14] Alcock and Osborne 1994 contains an important article (Antonaccio 1994), entitled "Placing the past: the Bronze Age in the cultic topography of early Greece," which is in conversation with de Polignac among others. Alcock 2002 has a good introduction on monuments, archaeology, and memory, citing Halbwachs. On the issue of use of the past see also the discussion in Boardman 2002, *passim*.

[15] Alcock discusses Halbwachs in 2002: 24–32.

[16] Alcock 2002: 27, though not entirely with the same purpose as mine.

[17] Schachter 1981.

especially tragedy.[18] The work is seminal for an understanding of the cultic landscape of Thebes, but its focus, which is decidedly on the real, does not attempt to understand the spatial element of mythic discourse on its own terms.

The work most central to any modern study of Theban topography in particular is Sarantis Symeonoglou's *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times*, published in 1985. Symeonoglou offers an analysis of Theban topography from the beginnings of settlement through the periods in question here, and beyond. Analysis is based on archaeological material when available, and also the same literary/historiographical material Schachter makes use of in *Cults*. Symeonoglou is particularly dependent on the imperial-era travel writer Pausanias; in fact he offers a text and translation of the passages in which Pausanias describes the Theban landscape (much of which will be discussed in some detail below, especially in the final chapter). There are many useful analyses of sites, but the study suffers from an even stronger case of the same credulity as Schachter's volume. The problem is compounded because Symeonoglou attempts to create a diachronic description of the city through its historical periods. In some periods he relies on archaeological evidence (which is often spotty or defective, as he is not reluctant to note), and for others almost entirely on the literary record, including oral epic, lyric, and, to a large extent, Pausanias. To read mythic texts – Hesiod, Pindar, etc. – as though they are able to accurately reflect topographic reality, or for that matter even as if they purport to do so, is a serious methodological shortcoming. The volume's strengths as a collection of archaeological information, much of it extremely difficult to find, some of it known to the author because of his own work on site, are undercut by this lack of sophistication in dealing with literary and mythic texts. The present volume does not claim to offer a comprehensive understanding of real topography in answer, or supplement to, Symeonoglou, but my approach to the literary material should call into question many of Symeonoglou's topographical conclusions. Using Pindar or other mythic texts as accurate reflections of topographical reality for any period is untenable within the theoretical framework outlined here, and treating Pausanias as an accurate witness of anything other than the Thebes of his own time is highly problematic – to leave aside the problems Pausanias offers for those

[18] For example in his discussion of Athena Onka (1981: *s.v.* Athena [Thebes]), which while presenting a logical reading of the appearances of this cult title, includes also other appearances of the goddess in tragedy (such as *Phoenissae* 1372–76) that should not necessarily be associated with her title Onka.

even wishing to reconstruct what he saw in his own time in a comprehensible, or mappable way.[19]

Symeonoglou's work is the descendant of a tradition of topographical studies of Thebes that rely on an admixture of types of evidence with the goal of reconstructing the Theban landscape as it was at various times in the city's history. In Greece, Symeonoglou's direct, and influential, predecessor, is A. D. Keramopoullos, who was active at the turn of the twentieth century as an archaeological officer in Boeotia and Thebes. Keramopoullos wrote much on the topography of the city, basing his conclusions on excavations he carried out over a lifetime of work in Thebes and on readings of the Greek texts, again especially Pausanias. Some of his work was carried on contemporarily by Soteriades, and more recent work on topography has been done by Faraklas as well.[20] Outside Greece, notable students of Theban topography and myth who entered the same discussions included Wilamowitz, who wrote on the seven gates of Thebes, F. Forchhammer, E. Fabricius, A. W. Gomme, C. Schober, and perhaps most visibly, J. Frazer, whose monumental commentary on Pausanias includes much topographical analysis that casts a net far wider than Pausanias' text.[21] Their conceptions of the topography of the city, in its earliest stages and in the classical period and beyond, present a less than consistent picture, some applying more sophisticated methodologies than others.[22]

But that is hardly surprising; in fact, it is exactly what we should expect. Archaeological evidence, which is incomplete even under the very best circumstances, at well-attested and excavated sites, is uneven and spotty for Thebes (though this is slowly changing). And the preliminary discussion above should make it clear that the literary record is not to be treated as

[19] A recent study of Pausanias (Hutton 2005) has shown that Pausanias' methods are not random, nor do they create a product devoid of value even for a topographer. But the method relies on a firm understanding of the traveler's own cultural and literary context: his descriptions of cities especially (the book focuses on Corinth) are colored by contemporary values and assumptions. In the case of Thebes there is little to commend Pausanias' representation, which comes four centuries after the city's destructions by Alexander and Demetrius (335 and 290 BC), as a consistently accurate representation of the city in the classical, let alone later, periods. See also Schachter 2008: 649–50 on Pausanias' perspective on Thebes and Boeotia.

[20] Keramopoullos 1917; Soteriades 1914; Faraklas 1998.

[21] Forchhammer 1854; Fabricius 1890; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1891; Gomme 1910; Frazer 1913; Schober 1934.

[22] Frazer is wont to expand discussions of topographical import beyond the specifics of Pausanias' details; for example, his discussion of the gates of Thebes covers the literary material from a period far before Pausanias and offers a comprehensive discussion of available evidence (1913, v: 35–39). Wilamowitz's analysis of evidence for the seven gates (1891) was, as often, ahead of its time. See Appendix II below.