Religious Practices in Classical Thebes

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History

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May 15th, 2019
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Greek Religion, Thebes, Greek Tragedy, Thesmophoria, Kabeiroi

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ABSTRACT

My thesis uses Thebes as case study to focus on Theban religious practices during the Classical age (traditionally defined as between 510 BCE and 323 BCE). By narrowing my study to this geographical and chronological scope, my research aims to add to the traditional narrative of Theban history by focusing on religious history rather than the political or military. More particularly, by using both literature (Classical Greek tragedies) as well as material culture found in exceptional religious settings of the Thesmophoria and Kabeirion, I strive to delineate some of the religious practices taking place in the *polis* of Thebes during the Classical age. While the Theban tragedies provide a view of religion from a broader perspective, the material evidence of the festival of the Thesmophoria and the rites to the Kabeiroi provide a glimpse into the practices of Theban religion that lie outside the traditional, Olympian pantheon. I argue that studying Theban literature and votive offerings in tandem can provide a perspective at the micro-level of Greek religion that can be expanded in order to understand the religious landscape of ancient Greece on a much deeper and richer level.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

My thesis focuses on Thebes, a city-state in Ancient Greece famous for being the setting of the tragic stories of Oedipus and his family. Many historians focus on this literary tradition or the ways in which Theban military exploits affected their position of power in the Greek world; however, I center my study on the religious landscape of this particular city-state between the years of 510 BCE and 323 BCE. My first chapter takes a step back, outlining the way in which religion is presented to an audience at this time through the plays *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Seven Against Thebes*. In the next two chapters, I turn to look at items housed in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes regarding two specific religious events that took place in and around ancient Thebes: The Thesmophoria and the initiation into the rites of the Kabeiroi. The material evidence that I survey in these two chapters provide a glimpse into the practices of Theban religion that lie outside the traditional practices and participants. I argue that studying these particular pieces of written and material evidence in combination with one another provides a perspective at the local level of Theban religion that can also be expanded in order to under the religious landscape of ancient Greece on a much deeper and richer level.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes for being so receptive and open to my visit and study of the materials there. This thesis is based on the materials currently display on that collection, and it would not have been possible without their guidance and their kindness as I explored the material evidence. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Stephanie Larson for her guidance through numerous emails about the archaeological sites of Thebes as well as the contents of the museum's collection. Her input was invaluable in shaping this thesis from the very beginning. I am in debt to her as well as to Dr. Glenn Bugh for putting me in contact with her.

In addition, I would like to thank my entire committee for their guidance throughout this entire process. Specifically, many thanks to my committee head, Dr. Trudy Harrington Becker, for her continued help and her role in shaping my writing as a professional historian. I could not have made it through my time here at Virginia Tech without her, with her being both a mentor and a support system. Dr. Glenn Bugh's deep knowledge and love of the material culture and the Greek landscape have also been exceedingly valuable in developing my own love of religion in the ancient world as well as the ways in which we can study religion through material sources. Last, but certainly not least, I am in debt for Dr. Andy Becker's support and comments throughout this entire process, especially as I have continued to study languages during my time here at Virginia Tech. All three of these individuals have helped me grow in my love of the ancient world, and they have shown me what kind of historian, teacher, and colleague I would like to be.

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Introduction

The most visible symbols of Ancient Greek religion include impressive temples and statues of Olympian goddesses and gods, such as the temple of Athena on the Acropolis of Athens. This temple housed a chryselephantine statue of the goddess, which was considered a great work of beauty in its own time. Ancient authors praised these great temples and statues from all over the ancient Greek world, expounding on their beauty, their craftsmanship, and their function as homes for the intended god or goddess. An emphasis, however, on these outsize representations minimizes the complexities of Greek religion. By focusing on these specific symbols, the generalized narrative of ancient Greek religion privileges state religion, especially that of Athens. This history often includes only Olympic deities, which crowds out the worship of other deities that fall outside the traditional Greek pantheon.

My thesis aims to explore a broader range of the history of Greek religion, and look more deeply at the layers of religious experience including and beyond the Olympians. In order to do this, I use a narrowed geographic scope, one city, Thebes, and its surrounding neighbors in the Boeotian region. While Thebes is an essential part of the Greek historical narrative, it is often considered primarily in the context of political struggle and war or through the Greek tragedies set there. Many historians, such as John Buckler, Michael Furman, and Murray Dahm, center their research on military alliances, such as the Boeotian League, and Thebes' claim to power in the short-lived Theban Hegemony.[1] The religion of Thebes has not received its own historical monograph outside of its mythical origins, leaving a lacuna in the scholarship on this specific

[1] John Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony, 371-362 B.C.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Michael Furman, *Thebes, the Boeotian League, and Central Greece: Political and Military Development and Interaction in the Fourth Century B.C.* (St. Andrews, Scotland: University of St. Andrews, 2017); Murray K. Dahm, *Breaking the Spartans: Epaminondas, Pelopidas, and the Brief Glory of Thebes* (Barnsley, England: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2016).

city-state.[2] By focusing on Thebes, I direct attention away from sites such as Athens, Delphi, and Olympia, which have been traditionally associated with Greek religion, while furthering a narrative of religion as it was practiced within Thebes.

Argument and Significance

My thesis uses Thebes as case study, focusing on Theban religious practices during the Classical age (traditionally defined between 510 BCE and 323 BCE)**.** The central effort will be to distinguish practices of Thebes in that broad narrative of Panhellenic worship. In the past, historians such as Hans Volkmar-Herrmann, Walter Burkert, and Donald Kyle have established this approach within their works on Greek religious worship and practice. Hermann and Burkert specifically refer to Panhellenic sanctuaries, while Kyle focuses on athletic events as they were practiced within a religious context in Athens.[3] Each of these scholars recognizes to a differing degree the importance of studying individual sites under the broad umbrella of Greek religion. Hermann's work engages with this idea the most, as he creates a case study, *Olympia: Heiligtum und Wettkampfstätte* (1972)*,* which centers only on a single ancient Greek site known for its popular athletic event dedicated to the god Zeus, to distinguish its influence as a religious center.[4]

My thesis follows Hermann's example by narrowing the scope of my study to a single polis at a specific time period: Thebes during the Classical age. By narrowing my study to this geographical and chronological scope, my research can add to the traditional narrative of Theban

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[2] Daniel W. Berman, *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the Topography of Thebes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): Berman touches on this topic; however, his focus is on the mythological landscape of Thebes as created by the Theban tragedies rather than the religious landscape.
[3] Julia Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 124.
[4] Summary of Hans Volkmar-Hermann, *Olympia: Heiligtum und Wettkampfstätte* (Munich: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1972) in Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion*, 124.

history by focusing on religious history rather than the political or military. More particularly, by using both literature (Classical Greek tragedies) as well as material culture found in religious exceptional religious settings of the Thesmophoria and Kabeirion, I am able to delineate some of the outstanding religious practices taking place in the *polis* of Thebes during the Classical age. I argue that Theban literature and votive offerings provide a perspective at the micro-level of Greek religion.

Organization

My thesis looks at the religious practices in city-state of Thebes during the Classical age, the time period in which the majority of my primary sources originate, both literary and material. The time frame allows me to directly compare the ways in which Ancient Greek writers such as Sophocles and Aeschylus portray Theban religion with the ways in which religious practice is displayed in the material culture, including votive offerings and statuettes. These pieces of material evidence suggest the ways in which Theban religion was practiced on the ground and they help provide a narrative of the Theban religious landscape.

Chapter One of my thesis examines ancient Greek drama which concerns Thebes or takes place in Thebes. Sophocles' and Aeschylus' works will be central in this study, especially such works as *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, and *Seven Against Thebes*. These plays were works of ancient Greek tragedy, characterized by a plot that includes a drastic change in fortune and a recognition of that change and its consequences.[5] In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, when Oedipus recognizes who he is and what he has done, the king ultimately blinds himself as punishment and goes into exile. These tragedies were written for an Athenian audience at an

[5] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 14.

Athenian festival known as the City Dionysia, a religious festival to Dionysos in which tragedies were performed for an audience and winner was awarded.[6] This first chapter will also be supplemented with the material sources from sanctuaries to the Olympian gods in Thebes, such as the Sanctuary of Herakles and the Temple of Ismenion Apollo. This establishes both a literary and material base for the Olympian pantheon in Thebes, a pantheon that was indeed worshipped across Greece.

In the second chapter, I center my research on the women's religious festival of the Thesmophoria. Practiced throughout the ancient Greek world, the most well-documented celebration was the one in Athens.[7] This festival was held in honor of Demeter Thesmophoros, the goddess of the harvest and the fertility of the earth. The women of the festival performed secret rites to the goddess in order to ensure "agricultural fertility" for the coming year.[8] Men were not allowed at the festivals, and there are many stories detailing the dire consequences of men interrupting the festival - consequences ranging from the castration of Battos, the king of Cyrene, to Miltiades' death caused by gangrene that developed after he was injured while fleeing from the Sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros.[9] This festival was celebrated at different times throughout the Greek world and the practices vary slightly. My first chapter will use the votive offerings from the site of the Theban Thesmophoria, such as figures of the sacrificial pigs and female figurines, to study the practices of the festival and female worshipers in Thebes.

The third, and final, chapter of my thesis will also extend my research beyond the Olympic pantheon, and examine the worship the of the Kabeiroi and the material evidence found at their sanctuary just outside of Thebes. The Kabeiroi were chthonic deities of the ancient Greek

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[6] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy*, 11.
[7] Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 110.
[8] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 110.
[9] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 110; Herodotus, *Histories* 6.134.1-135.3.

world - meaning that their origin and practice were associated with the underworld. They were worshipped throughout ancient Greece; however, their presence is most noted in the locations of Lemnos and Thebes.[10] In each location, the Kabeiroi are given different forms and varying familial ties to the Olympian gods.[11] However, these religious figures are sometimes known as non-Greek and pre-Greek, making their rites even more "enigmatic."[12] For example, on the island of Lemnos, where the Kabeiroi were most celebrated, the gods were inserted into the ancient Greek pantheon through representations of the two gods as sons or grandsons of Hephaistos.[13] The island and its cities did not come under Greek rule until the 6th century BCE, during which time religious practice to the Kabeiroi continued, uninterrupted.[14] The *polis* of Thebes holds the second-most amount of material evidence to these gods, but their worship and representation varies from that which was practiced on Lemnos. The Theban Kabeirion and its material culture, such as votive vases and statues, are at the center of this chapter's attention. I use this chapter to discuss the ways in which these gods existed outside the Greek pantheon, but also how they were incorporated into the local practices, in this case study of Thebes.

Literary and Material Sources

The primary sources for Classical Thebes are less abundant than those for other sites, such as Athens. The literary sources of Pausanias or Sophocles largely focus on its mythical past or its physical landscape, with very little of its religious practices discussed in detail. The lacuna created by these texts can be filled in using the archaeological evidence, a portion of which is

[10] Albert Schachter, "Evolutions of a Mystery Cult: The Theban Kabiroi," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 112.
[11] Albert Schachter, "Evolutions of a Mystery Cult: The Theban Kabiroi," 112.
[12] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 281.
[13] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 112.
[14] Burkert, *Greek Religion,* 281.

housed at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. This evidence, in addition to the archaeological sites themselves of the area, have been recorded and published through archaeological reports such as those in the journal *Archaiologikon Deltion*. In turn, these reports have been interpreted by other scholars. These sources, both primary and secondary, are necessary to study the Theban religious landscape during the Classical age.

Ancient Greek Drama and Literature

The first chapter will rely mainly on ancient Greek tragedy, which depict Theban religion in drama. For Thebes, this means the use of Sophocles' most notable works: *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, as well as Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. These sources may not be a purposeful explanation of the particularities of local practices, but their inclusion provides a literary and mythological background to the lived practices seen in the material evidence. It is possible that by taking back-bearings we can tease out actual religious practices of the Thebans. The Classical age of Thebes has very few written sources outside of tragedy that expand on the practices at the local level, yet I can make use of the writings of Xenophon and Pausanias, a fourth century BCE Athenian historian and a second-century CE Greek geographer, respectively, as specific sources on local Theban religion. While Pausanias lived in the post-Classical world, his work is useful for preserving earlier practices, as he gives a window into the cultural history of the places he describes in his *Description of* Greece. These written sources studied together will help to provide a more complete view of local Theban practice.

Material Evidence

The material evidence that I utilize for Theban religion is currently on display in the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Arranged chronologically, the museum's

collection develops a narrative of Theban history and culture through coins, inscriptions, statues, pottery, private votive offerings, and more, and is not exclusive to religious world. The evidence which I am using focuses specifically on the Theban Thesmophoria (Chapter 2) and the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi (Chapter 3) a few miles to the west, and they have all been dated between the late fifth century BCE and the early third century BCE. For the Thesmophoria, the material culture consists mostly of representations of women and piglets, due to their significance in the women-only cultic practices. Those regarding the Chthonic deities at the Kabeirion are votive offerings, such as inscribed *kantharoi* dedicated to the gods, decorated *skyphoi*, and figurines of animals. I'll be discussing the material culture for the Thesmophoria in Chapter 2 and the Kabeiroi in Chapter 3. In order to keep to the museum's presentation of the material evidence, the labels for the figures appear exactly as they do in the museum.

Excavation Reports

In order to interpret the material evidence, I have utilized archaeological reports, especially those works of other historians and archaeologists who have summarized and interpreted these finds in their own research. The most recent excavation reports deal with the archaeological dig at the Ismenion Hill, where the sanctuary of Apollo was located.[15] I also will make use of the reports of the *Archaiologikon Deltion* which are recorded and described in works by other archaeologists, such as Sarantis Symeonoglou, which document over 270 archaeological sites in Thebes and their artifacts.[16] Other reports I use for the site of the Kabeirion have been summarized in the work of Albert Schachter (2003), including W. Heyder's

[15] Stephanie Larson, *Joint Thebes Synergasia Project* (2011-2016).
[16] Sarantis Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), xix.

and A. Mallwitz's *Die Bauten in Kabirenheiligtum*, written in 1978, who documented and studied the site of the Kabeirion. In addition, the review of their work by F. Cooper (1982) and the examination of the Kabeirion's material evidence by Albert Schachter (2003) have proved valuable.[17]

Historiography and Methodology

The scholarship on the history of Thebes has largely revolved around the political and military developments. Nicholas Rockwell's recent work *Thebes: A History* (2017) discusses the history of the city from the Mycenaean to the Roman Age, covering over two thousand years of history, which includes three chapters on Classical Thebes.[18] From the First Peloponnesian War to the Theban Hegemony and, finally, to the destruction of Thebes by Alexander, Rockwell focuses on the military conquests as well as its political relations with other *poleis* around Greece.[19] This source benefits my own study by providing perspective on the influence Thebes held in the Boeotian region as a political power. This centrality may have affected the ways in which local religion was practiced and how far the term "local" may have extended in the Classical Greek world.

Both Nancy Demand's work *Thebes in the Fifth Century: Heracles Resurgent* (1982) and Sarantis Symeonoglou's work *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times* (1985) discuss some aspects of Theban religion. While Symeonoglou notes the presence of

[17] W. Heyder and A. Mallwitz, *Die Bauten in Kabirenheiligtum bei Theben* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978); F. Cooper, "Review of Heyder and Mallwitz 1978" in *Gnomon* 54 (1982): 56-63; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi."
[18] Nicholas Rockwell, *Thebes: A History* (2017).
[19] This approach to Theban history is a common one, as most scholars focus specifically on Thebes' rise and fall in political power and its influence in the Boeotian League. See, for example, S. C. Bakhuizen, "Thebes and Boeotia in the Fourth Century B. C." *Phoenix* 48, no. 4 (1994): 307-30; John Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony*, 371-362 BC (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); J. G. DeVoto, "The Theban Sacred Band" in *The Ancient World* 23 (1992): 3-19.

archaeological remains at specific religious sites with only brief background information, Demand discusses the cults of Thebes in detail, noting their religious function, the specific practices associated with the sites, and the surrounding belief system.[20] Demand's work notes various religious cults around Thebes, which includes the cult of the Kabeiroi. In comparison, Symeonoglou purposely excludes the Kabeiroi from the narrative, since he states that the sanctuary did not directly contribute to the topography of Thebes.[21]

Both authors survey the written sources of Pausanias in conjunction with the archaeological sources from the sites of the sanctuaries.[22] Demand's discussion of the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi is detailed, and her research will benefit my own as I interpret the sources from the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Her discussion of dedicatory vases will be particularly helpful, especially those referring to their decorations and the ways in which they may or may not depict Theban culture during the fifth century BCE Symeonoglou's work on the site of Demeter Thesmophoros will be helpful in a similar manner.[23] Both works do not use Greek tragedy, relying solely on the words of Pausanias and Pindar as direct narrative sources on the culture of Thebes. My research will attempt to put all of these sources in conversation with one another to develop a fuller picture of Theban religion, especially as it was worshipped at the ground level.

In particular, my thesis benefits from the research of Julia Kindt in her 2012 work *Rethinking Greek Religion*. Kindt suggest various ways in which historians could more productively move forward in the study of religion. One of her six separate subarguments

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[20] Nancy Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 48-69; Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century,* 85-105.
[21] Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times*, 137.
[22] Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century,* 64-68.
[23] Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times*, 123-125.

demonstrates that focusing solely on "Panhellenism" severely limits the way in which scholars perceive ancient Greek religion. She directly contests the approaches of Hans Volkmarr-Hermann, Walter Burkert, and Donald Kyle. Kindt challenges these distinct categories of the local and the Panhellenic by doing a case study on Olympia.[24] She argues that sanctuaries, like those at Olympia, were intended to mediate between the local and the universal, blurring the lines between the two. Julia Kindt's study inspired my own work, as I will use her example and apply it to Thebes. Within her research, she focused on a site most famously recognized for its religious role in ancient Greek culture. I, in turn, will focus on a city known for its political and military participation more than its religious or cultural prominence.

Hans Volkmar-Hermann, in his research entitled *Olympia: Heiligtum und Wettkampfstätte* (1972), also used Olympia as a primary example of Panhellenic religion. In his case study on ancient Olympia, he distinguished between sanctuaries that only held local importance and those that "exceeded the confined boundaries of the city and region. Some were - in contemporary terms - world famous."[25] As Kindt explains in her own work, Hermann argued for an overarching Panhellenic belief system, but he also distinguishes between Panhellenic religious festivals and the local practices. Due to this, he argues for two separate levels of religious practice that can be neatly separated into categories.

These arguments are upheld and expanded by the work of Walter Burkert, one of the foremost authors of ancient Greek religion whose formative work on the nature and practices of Greek religion was published in 1977. In *Greek Religion*, Burkert argued that ancient Greek religion was tied directly to the *polis* and the creation of social relationships within, which later

[24] Julia Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion*, 124.
[25] Summary of Hans Volkmar-Hermann, *Olympia: Heiligtum und Wettkampfstätte* in Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion*, 124.

scholarship came to call "polis religion." Burkert posited that the existence of Delphi and Olympia supports the notion of a common panhellenic religion. Delphi and Olympia were sites of pilgrimage for individuals from many *poleis*, due to Apollo's oracle in the former and the Olympic festival to Zeus in the latter. Because of this central status and function, Walter Burkert refers to them as locations of "Panhellenic importance."[26] He organized ancient Greek religion on the understanding that the same gods were worshipped in *poleis*; however, he also recognized that were "idiosyncrasies" of local worship - using the phrase "essentially compatible" to describe how religion functioned between different *poleis*.[27] His description prompts the question: How important might these "idiosyncrasies" be?

Burkert goes deeper into the meaning of religious practice in *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (1983). He explores ancient Greek religion as a conduit of social and cultural communication rather than simply a system of belief and practice.[28] He uses specific religious practices and beliefs, surrounding animal sacrifice, ritual feasting, maidenhood, motherhood, and fatherhood, to discern what kind of information is being given to the community in an attempt to create, preserve, and repair social structure.[29] For example, Burkert explores sacrificial ritual as it harkens back to a time in which the Greek people were hunters and gatherers. He especially focuses on the meaning of killing the animal, speculating that, of many functions, it fulfills man's need for violence as a "predatory animal."[30] This need was developed, as Burkert states, "in the course of becoming man."[31] His anthropological perspective will be valuable for understanding the purpose and practices of local

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[26] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 8.
[27] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 8.
[28] Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth,* trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), xx.
[29] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, xxiv.
[30] Burkert, *Homo Necans,* 17.
[31] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 17.

Theban religion, especially when examining the material evidence with depictions of religious figures. Burkert's perspective influences, though it does not determine, my interpretation of these objects.

Burkert's understanding of ancient Greek religion was foundational for later scholarship, lending his ideas to the 1989 work of Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel in *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*. Their introduction states that they do not "set out to explore… the state of religion before the emergence of cities" and they define a city as a political unit that acts a capital for an entire region, which consists of villages, wild land, and cultivated land.[32] Zaidman and Pantel classify Athens as the central city of Attica, allowing for all Attic religious locations, large and small, to be considered in the scope of Athenian religion. Although I will not fully embrace this definition of a city to include the entire Boeotian region as Theban, I will include the closest towns and villages in the scope of Theban religion. This method will fit well with the collections of the religious materials from the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, which holds religious artifacts from the entire Boeotian region.

Burkert's standard of 'polis religion' is carried on by scholars like Simon Price and Donald Kyle. In his introduction to *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (1999), Price states that there is a "religious system common to all Greeks."[33] This understanding of religious beliefs crossing borders was expected, as he shows in the example of the Boeotians becoming enraged that the Athenians had used their sanctuary at Delium as a fortress. Religious sanctuaries were to be left alone, even by invaders.[34] Kyle, in his work "Gifts and Glory: Panathenaic Prize Amphoras and the History of Greek Athletic Prizes" (2007), uses Burkert's distinctions to discuss the

[32] Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.
[33] Simon Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.
[34] Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, 4.

differences between inter-state athletic events and local games, especially as it related to the Panathenaia of Athens.[35] Kyle discusses the differences between those prizes given for Panhellenic cults, such as the cultic wreaths, in contrast to those prizes given by the Athenians that were specifically from local sources and what those differences might represent.[36]

Walter Burkert continued his contribution to scholarship on ancient Greek religion in his work *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence in the Early Archaic Age,* written in 1998. The hypothesis of this work is that

> in the orientalizing period, the Greeks did not merely receive a few manual skills and fetishes along with new crafts and images from the Luwian-Aramaic-Phoenician sphere, but were influenced in their religion and literature by the eastern models to a significant degree.[37]

Burkert studied the influence that came from craftsmen, seers, and priests who migrated into the Greek world. He argues that there was significant cultural transfer between the local populations and travelers from the East in the 8th century BCE. Greek religion at this point was "malleable" and much more open to influence than in later centuries.[38] In addition, Martin L. West's *The East Face of Helicon* also acts as a window to a broader cultural interaction between ancient Greece and the cultures to the east. West's work explored the development of the Greek epic tradition and how it draws from "Indo-European influence."[39] His section on the origins and tradition as it appears in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* will be especially informative.[40] These work will inform the ways in which I study and understand the role, for example, of chthonic deities in

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[35] Donald Kyle, "Gifts and Glory: Panathenaic Prize Amphoras and the History of Greek Athletic Prizes," in *Niels* (1996): 106-136; Kindt, *Rethinking Greek Religion,*124.
[36] Kyle, "Gifts and Glory," 106-136.
[37] Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6.
[38] Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 6.
[39] Martin L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.
[40] West, *The East Face of Helicon*, 553-556.

Theban religious practices and the presence of outside influence in the sources from which I draw.

A significant transformation in the historiography of ancient Greek religion began in the 1970s with Sarah B. Pomeroy's seminal work, entitled *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (1975). In this work, Pomeroy explores the lives of women in varying walks of life from the mythological register, the Greek Bronze and Homeric Age, down to the Roman Empire. She notes the preference for military and political history in the study of Classical Athens by other historians during her time, stating that it excludes women and slaves from the narratives of ancient Greece.[41] Pomeroy examines many facets of these women's lives, though she treats religion in only two specific ways: goddesses and their female worshippers in Athens. She studies the festivals celebrated in honor of Athena, Demeter, and Kore, examining their possible origins and the way in which they were practiced by these women. Pomeroy concedes in the introduction that she ascribed to using the "glory of Classical Athens" as a traditional approach to Greek history and focuses only on the women of the city-state.[42] Her work strives to includes women in the narrative of Athenian life and landscape, which includes the festivals of the Thesmophoria. I will refrain from assuming an Athenian experience as I examine Theban religious experiences of the women's festival. While Pomeroy does not mention Theban women, her model serves as a valuable perspective, especially in the absence of other sources.

Pomeroy also dedicates an entire chapter to the use of dramatic literature to study women in the ancient Greek world. While she utilizes both tragic and comedic Greek drama, she states in her introduction that comedy is the more reliable form of the two for historical and cultural

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[41] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), x.
[42] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, ix.

information.[43] Fewer studies, particularly those regarding Theban characters in literature, exist in comedic drama, but this is understandable due to the dominance of tragedy in the portrayal of Theban culture and myth. Despite the inclusion of Theban characters in comedies like *Lysistrata*, which mentions a woman in the role of ambassador from Thebes, comedies present little to no information regarding religious life in Thebes. Even though Pomeroy expresses a preference for comedic works, she addresses works like *Antigone* in order to study women participants in religion.[44]

Ross Shepard Kraemer's *Her Share of the Blessings*, written in 1992, attempts to move toward the same goal as Pomeroy. In order to address a lacuna in the history of the Mediterranean world, Kraemer focuses on women's religions from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE. She confines her geographical area to what will eventually become the Roman Empire, including in her scope Ancient Greek religion, Roman religion, Judaism, and Christianity. Her main objective is to compare women's role in religion to that of men.[45] Kraemer develops her research from the foundational theoretical work of anthropologist Mary Douglas**.**[46] Douglas was a British anthropologist who developed a system which categorized the people of a society by their group versus their grid, or the extent to which their life relies on the community versus the amount that an individual's experience is regulated.[47] Kraemer praises the work of Douglas as a system essential to studying diverse religious system. Kraemer's critique

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[43] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, x.
[44] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves, 99.*
[45] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992)*,* 12.
[46] Cf. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings,* 13-15; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Douglas, "The Background of the Grid Dimension: A Comment," in *Sociological Analysis: A Journal in the Sociology of Religion* 50, no. 2 (1989): 171-176; Douglas, "Introduction to Grid/Group Analysis," in *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).
[47] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings,* 14.

lies in the lack of consideration of women's roles and placements within these categories. Douglas places women into one broad category, the strong grid with weak group.[48] This designation means that women have an ascribed status in which they are pressured to conform, and they are given no rewards other than fulfilling their station in life.[49] In this station, women are completely separated from men. Ross Kraemer finds this definition to be too broad and devotes her research to testing Douglas' theory in each of these religious perspectives.[50] My research will follow Kraemer's example in critically considering the work of Mary Douglas as a foundation to understanding the ancient Greek religious world. I will especially look to Kraemer's inclusion of women in this narrative in my second chapter, as I study the material evidence that survives from the practice of the Thesmophoria in Thebes.

Matthew Dillon also approaches ancient Greek religion by focusing solely on the populations that were historically excluded from religious scholarship in his 2002 work *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*.[51] His addition to the scholarship on women in religion relies on his focus on iconography, placing at the forefront images and epigraphy. This shift in focus, he claims, allows him to create a narrative that more accurately conveys the religious lives of girls and women as they practiced rites and festivals every day.[52] His work also includes an authoritative chapter on the Thesmophoria as it was practiced in varying *poleis*, including information about the history and iconography of the festival within Thebes.[53] This chapter is largely a gathering of information on the subject, to which I will add my own interpretations of material culture and literary evidence.

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[48] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 15.
[49] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 15 .
[50] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 20.
[51] Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[52] Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 4.
[53] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 110-120.

My research will also include the study of women as they participated in the religious rites such as Thesmophoria of Thebes, and how they are portrayed in material and epigraphic evidence. In her 2007 work *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece*, Joan Breton Connelly explores the lives of women who participated and led religious events in the ancient Greek world. She utilizes material evidence not only to bring forward a narrative of women in the ancient Greek world, but to identify 150 individual women by name and "sketch portraits of actual lives lived."[54] In order to do this, Connelly uses archaeological remains, such as grave stelai and votive offerings, not only to study the daily religious lives of women but also to study the lives of the few particular women who were mentioned in the archaeological record due to their status as priestesses.[55] Her contribution lies in expanding the narrative of Greek religion to include these women who occupied significant religious roles in the community. Such roles, she argues, must be studied without the modern tendency towards pessimism and with the recognition that women served their community proudly through religious office and they were respected and remembered by their communities.[56] Unfortunately, the material evidence in the current collection on display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes does not preserve the name of any Theban women in the context of Classical religion.

Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz's *Greek Tragedy* (2008) takes particular notice of Theban tragedy specifically. In her work, she explores the many facets of tragedy, from its very nature to its relationship with the *polis* and religious practice.[57] The chapter entitled "Tragedy and Greek Religion" reviews the religious practices found in the production of Greek tragedies as well as

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[54] Joan Breton Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 25.
[55] Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess,* 57-59.
[56] Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess,* 278-281.
[57] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy.* Blackwell Introductions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

within the tragic works, themselves. Rabinowitz recognizes the importance of Thebes in the genre of tragedy, pulling examples from many of Euripides' tragedies, including *Suppliants* and *Phoenician Women*, as well as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone,* and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. Rabinowitz posits that Thebes operated as a way to distance Athens from the plays and their mythological and social aspects.[58] Thebes' mythological role in tragedy is an aspect that I will keep in mind as I study *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Seven Against Thebes* in order to situate Thebes' prominence in the genre as well as in the mythology that lies behind the stories being told.

Literary and archaeological sources are brought together to focus on Thebes in Daniel W. Berman's *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the Topography of Thebes* (2015). His work combines the use of the archaeological and written sources to examine "real and the imagined city" of Thebes.[59] In this work, Berman evaluates various facets of Theban history, ranging from the myths of its foundations to Thebes as represented in Greek tragedy. His section entitled "Thebes on Stage" has helped to shape my initial chapter regarding Thebes and its representation in Classical dramatic sources.[60] His perspective on Thebes as a construction of the imagination provide me with a specific way to interpret the writings of Athenian authors and to understand Thebes' place in the stories being told in the tragedies. This understanding will allow me to interpret the texts and aid me in determining how the texts may reflect the religious practices associated with Thebes.

All of these historians and classicists contribute to a historiography of Classical Thebes that is focused on its role in the political landscape of ancient Greece or the history of Thebes as

[58] Rabinowitz, *Greek Tragedy,* 79-81.
[59] Berman, *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the Topography of Thebes*, 2.
[60] Berman, *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the Topography of Thebes,* 75-121.

it originates from Theban tragedy. By applying the information and methodology from these as well as scholars of Greek religion, my thesis attempts to explore the ways in which the religion of Classical Thebes appeared through tragedy as well as through the material sources present at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. While the Theban tragedies center on Panhellenic rites, the material evidence in Thebes provides a way in which to explore the exceptional religious practices of Classical Thebes. These exceptional practices are those that were performed by the only women of the *polis* at the festival of the Thesmophoria or the mystery rites that took place at the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi.

The materials found at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes are only available to those who are able to visit, but the Theban tragedies are the way in which most individuals interact with the history of Thebes. It is from these literary sources that I begin to explore the religion of Classical Thebes and from which it will grow.

Chapter 1: Theban Religion in Literature and Landscape

A prominent discussion of religion appears in the conflict between Antigone and Creon, King of Thebes, in *Antigone* written by Sophocles in 442 BCE. While King Creon asserts his political power and dominance, Antigone looks instead to the gods for their laws and expectations. She places the law of the gods above the laws of her king. While such an action would be taboo on its own, she is also a woman taking action in a society which favors the actions of men. Even Ismene warns Antigone of this, before Antigone commits treason: "We are only women, / We cannot fight with men, Antigone!"[61] When Creon questions her tenacity to disregard his decree against the burial of her brother, Polyneices, Antigone speaks:

> I dared.
> It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice
> That rules the world below makes no such laws.
>
> Your edict, King, was strong,
> But all your strength is weakness itself against
> The immortal unrecorded laws of God.
> They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,
> Operative forever, beyond man utterly.[62]

This scene not only represent religious piety, but it is also a dramatic depiction of Theban religious participation.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Theban religious practices are portrayed in Greek tragedy, such as works by Sophocles and Aeschylus, written for and first produced, at the City Dionysia of Athens.[63] In a thesis about religious practices specifically associated with

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[61] Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *The Oedipus Cycle*, translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1977), 191. The specific translation of this work relies on page numbers rather than line numbers to cite sections of the plays.
[62] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 208-209.
[63] On the City Dionysia, see Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Christine Sourvinou-Inwood and Robert Parker, *Athenian Myths and Festivals: Aglauros, Erechtheus, Plynteria, Panathenaia, Dionysia,*

Theban men and women, these literary works may seem out of place. However, their inclusion in the narrative of Theban religion is necessary. In the realm of ancient Greek written history, there are very few sources that note the religious practices of Thebes in the Classical age, such as the works of Xenophon, Pausanias, and Pindar. The Theban tragedies rely on the Theban story of Oedipus and all of the characters within: whether it be the life and death of Oedipus and Antigone in the works from the eponymous tragedies by Sophocles (429 BCE and 442 BCE) or the story of Thebes as the two princes, Eteocles and Polyneices of Thebes, fight over control of the city (467 BCE) in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. The Theban tragedies were written for an audience of Athenians who would have sympathized, questioned, and tried to make sense of the actions of the plays' characters. In addition, the reading of Theban tragedy is the most common way in which modern scholars and students interact with the city of Thebes in Greek literature. In order to study the religious world of Thebes, these literary sources can provide a baseline from which this study will grow. The practice of using tragedies in the study of ancient city-state religion falls directly in line with historians, for example, such as Louise Zaidman and Pauline Pantel, who did so in their work *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*.[64]

Both Sophocles and Aeschylus depict their characters in various situations which require them to perform religious actions and/or interact with the divine. These actions and interactions manifest in rites, practices, spoken prayers, and expectations of belief. For example, the Athenian audience likely would have known what it meant to come into contact with hallowed ground or how one would interact with similar and strange gods. Such experiences would have informed an audience's viewing of the tragedy, and they would have been able to judge the characters

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Eric Csapo, "The Theology of the Dionysia and Old Comedy" in *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, edited by Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt, and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[64] Zaidman and Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City,* 42-43.

accordingly. My exploration of the religion of Classical Thebes relies on four main religious aspects as they appear in the Theban tragedies: the divinities worshipped, and the specific practices of religion, shown through loyalty, prayer, and rites. These are key pieces of religious worship in the ancient world, not particular to the city of Thebes, but they present aspects of Theban religion as it may have been practiced on the ground.

The Gods of Thebes

In the Theban tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus, the central characters worshipped a number of gods in the *polis* of Thebes. These gods in *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, and *Seven Against Thebes* were not restricted to a specifically Theban practice of religion; these gods were, in fact, all Panhellenic and their worship would have been recognized across the ancient Greek world. Not religious treatises, these plays centered on gods with specific ties to issues that arise within the tragedies. The most specific religious references found in the text were those made to Apollo while others refer to a collective of Greek divinities.

The god most referred to throughout plays of Sophocles is Apollo. This is not a surprise as it is his prophecy that has followed Oedipus throughout his life and causes the plague to fall upon the city of Thebes. Teiresias serves the god as his prophet in Thebes, bringing his unwanted news and interpretations to the king when the city falls into peril.[65] Teiresias pledges his devotion to Apollo as he stands before Oedipus, defending the truth of Oedipus' troubled past.[66] As discussed later in the section on prayer, Iocaste, Oedipus' wife, looks to Apollo for guidance while her husband is bothered by his prophecy.[67] In the scene of her prayer, Iocaste states that

[65] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex,* 20-24; Sophocles, *Antigone*, 223-232.
[66] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 22.
[67] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 47-48.

she chooses to pray to Apollo because he is "the closest."[68] Perhaps Iocaste meant that the altar to Apollo is the easiest to access at that moment or that Apollo's will is closest to the plight of Oedipus – since the particular troubles are caused by a plague and an ill-wishing omen revolving around Oedipus' parents. In addition to Apollo's role in the prophecy, his centrality to both disease as well as healing places him in the midst of the city's concern at this time, as the city is burdened by affliction caused by Oedipus' transgression.

The worship of Apollo was important in ancient Thebes, as represented by his temple on the Ismenion Hill, with three various phases of the temple beginning at the eighth century BCE.[69] He was not central, however, to the foundation of Thebes nor was he the patron god of the city, but he was an important figure to the historical city. His continued association with the city in the plays is essential due to his role in the specific mythical story being told by the Athenian playwrights. Apollo's importance to the historical city of Thebes came through its role in prophecy, most apparen through the local temple of Ismenion Apollo. The temple was considered the true seat of prophecy by the ancient Greek poet, Pindar, who may have been biased due Thebes being his home.[70] Beyond its central role of prophecy, the temple would also have been important for a Theban festival known as the *Daphnephoria*.[71] This festival took place every nine years and was celebrated in honor Apollo Ismenius, in which a young boy of a noble family leads a procession.[72] The boy carried a laurel pole with a bronze ball hanging from the end with smaller balls around them representing the celestial bodies (sun, moon, and stars),

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[68] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 48.
[69] Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes*, 93; Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek City-States,* vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
[70] Pindar, *Pythian Odes,* 11, 5-10.
[71] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 97-98, 100.
[72] Rebecca I. Denova, *Greek and Roman Religions* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), 118; Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 98.

dressed in a robe with his hair untied and a golden garland around his head.[73] This temple was central to Theban religion, as well as the religious landscape of all of Boeotia, but this was not the context in which the god is mentioned in the Theban tragedies.[74]

Beyond Apollo, the characters of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* as well as *Seven Against Thebes* often refer to the gods as a collective, or mention various gods in a single instance. Often, the gods mentioned are numerous, identifying specific roles for each in relation to the issue at hand. For example, the chorus of women in *Seven Against Thebes* prays to multiple gods in the context of war. The women mention six gods and goddesses:

> … Father Zeus, you who have the power of fulfillment of everything, hear us and save us from the grasp of the Argives' might!
> … Be near and dear to us in battle, O Pallas, you Zeus-born maiden of might! O lord of horses and the sea, may your trident be uplifted to strike in eager desire for battle Poseidon![75]

The chorus continues on to list Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, Hera, and Artemis, each in turn, to bring them to Thebes for the sake of protecting the population of the city. This calling out of gods and goddesses by name also appears in the context of the festival located at the Kithairon which is described by the chorus in *Oedipus Rex*, this time addressing only three gods (Apollo, Pan, Hermes, and Dionysos).[76] The prayers of these Theban women in each instance come from a chorus addressing a city in crisis. In each instance, the gods are each named, invoking them individually, possibly in the attempt to maximize the amount of divine influence for the crisis at hand. In these plays, prayers and invocations, to a single god and to the many, are often

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[73] Cf. Pindar, Fr. 94B; Pausanias 9.10.4; Denova, *Greek and Roman Religions*, 118; Stephanie Larson, "Meddling with Myth in Thebes: A New Vase from the Ismenion Hill (Thebes Museum 49276)," in *Myths on the Map: The Storied Landscapes of Ancient* Greece, edited by Greta Hawes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 109.
[74] For more information on the temple of Ismenion Apollo and the Daphnephoria, see: Pausanias, 9.10.4; Berman, *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the Topography of Thebes*, 106-107; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 97, 100, 144; and E.M. Berens, *Public Worship of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (Athens: Gregory Zorzos, 2009).
[75] Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 79-165.
[76] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 58-59.

accompanied by religious rituals in an attempt to guarantee favorable intervention of the gods and goddesses, to which I now turn.

Religious Practice in Theban Tragedy: Loyalty, Prayer, and Rites

The Theban tragedies depict various types of religious devotion and practice in their verses to the gods. The characters Teiresias and Antigone practice the most exceptional devotion to the gods through loyalty to their divine command. While Teiresias' loyalty is already demonstrated by his position as a priest, Antigone's led her to bury her brother, Polyneices, as she believes in the divine duty assigned to her as a family member.[77] In *Oedipus Rex* and *Seven Against Thebes*, belief in the gods and their abilities is best witnessed during the royal family's despair over the fate that has befallen them, shown particularly through their pray to the gods in anguish and fear.[78] These cries manifest themselves in the prayers of characters like Iocaste, Eteocles, and the chorus of the women of Thebes. These cries to the gods could have been a form of ritual practice, calling on the divine in times of trouble in ways that suggest a prayer formula. Beyond the rites that accompany prayer in the works of Sophocles, there were also festivals, the reading of divine signs, as well as the burial rites. It is through conversations and proclamations that the characters in the tragedies display loyalty to the gods, the respect meant to be given to gods, and what they hope to acquire from their interactions with the divine. These acts of loyalty and prayer were often accompanied by religious rites, which are the third, final, part of the religious landscape described in the Theban tragedies.

[77] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 208.
[78] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex,* 47-48; Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 79-155.

Loyalty

The most famous instance of loyalty to the gods in the Theban tragedies is that of Antigone, in which she loses her life because she performs burial rites for her brother.[79] Nearly as famous is the loyalty to the gods of Teiresias, a blind prophet of Apollo, who is threatened by Oedipus after he attempts to tell the king the truth: that it is Oedipus' own actions are the reason for Thebes' misfortunes and the death of the former king.[80] In this moment, like Antigone, Teiresias claims: "I am not your servant but Apollo's."[81] Even though he stands before the king, he does not fear Oedipus' threats as so many others in the kingdom have. Teiresias' loyalty is unsurprising as he is one of very few people who was able to act as conduit between the god and the community. As a long-important member of the community with such a respected religious role, standing up to Oedipus was a great risk but not as socially damning as Antigone's rebellious actions. Nonetheless, displaying loyalty to the gods was necessary to both in their understandings of the world around them.

Antigone's drive to bury her brother is a final act of honor and duty for an individual's family. Since the rest of her family had died already or was unwillingly to bear the consequences, she counts it as her own duty, above all things, to bury her brother.[82] She was willing to lose her life rather than live in a way that did not allow to her to follow through on her religious duties. In addition, these duties to the gods must be performed willingly and wholly, as Antigone rejected her own sister, Ismene, from dying alongside her because it would have tainted her own sacrifice. Her sister had neither betrayed the orders of King Creon nor honored

[79] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex,* 208-209.
[80] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 22.
[81] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 22.
[82] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 190-192, 208.

her brother and the gods, so she did not deserve the punishment for committing a crime nor the recognition for performing duties for the dead.[83]

This loyalty shown to the gods by these two characters may not have been the exceptional attitude towards the service of the divine of the ancient Greek world. The respect for the gods was expected in everyday actions and thought. The chorus, during the second choral ode of *Oedipus Rex,* for example, reacts to Oedipus' attempts to discredit the Oracle of Apollo in the preceding scene and discusses the consequences of not having honor for the gods. The chorus states that "any mortal who dares hold / No immortal power in awe / Will be caught up in a net of pain… Our masters call the oracle / Words on the wind, and the Delphic vision blind! Their hearts no longer know Apollo, / And reverence for the gods has died away."[84]

Part of the respect daily paid to the gods meant to avoid presenting them with sounds or images that were displeasing. For example, when Oedipus realizes his own sins and has punished himself by taking his own eyes, he does not think himself worthy to be seen by anyone. Creon orders the servants to take Oedipus out of the public eye, stating:

> - You, standing there:
> If you have lost all respect for man's dignity,
> At least respect the flame of Lord Helios:
> Do not allow this pollution to show itself
> Openly here, an affront to the earth
> And Heaven's rain and the light of day. No, take him
> Into the house as quickly as you can.
> For it is proper
> That only the close kindred see his grief.[85]

The importance of reducing pollution to the gods extends into the practice of sacrifices, in which this desire manifested in the spoken words of the participants or the camouflage of

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[83] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 190-192.
[84] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex,* 47.
[85] Sophocles, *Oedipus* Rex, 75-76.

displeasing sounds.[86] Oedipus, because of his sin and self-mutilation, was to be kept from the eyes of the gods. As the god Helios is able to watch the Earth during the day, the specific reference to him is unsurprising. It suggests that specific gods were almost omnipresent, forever watching the Earth. Therefore, the presentation of pollution to the gods was not confined to the religious ceremonies, but it could apply individuals as they went through their daily lives.

These brief passages from the Theban Tragedies present a small picture of the importance of loyalty to the gods. Antigone and Teiresias placed the gods above everyone else, even their king. Such loyalty may not have been representative of all Thebans' actions, but characters like Antigone and Teiresias present a religion in which devotion to a divine duty is an expression of loyalty and respect.

Prayer

Another aspect of religious practices as seen in the Theban tragedies is prayer. Prayer is an essential act of worship in the Theban tragedies that involved both groups and the individual worshiper.[87] This dynamic can be seen on the stage in *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Seven Against Thebes.* In these productions, prayer is performed both by individual characters as well as the choruses. Literarily and dramatically, they function as ways in which the characters can portray their concerns, fears, and hopes to the audience in a way that still looks to the daily practices of women and men.

One of the most extensive examples of the personal practice of prayer in *Oedipus Rex* is that of Iocaste, queen of Thebes, for the sake of her husband, Oedipus. Distressed by her husband's despair, she turns to the gods for assistance. Iocaste prays for deliverance from the

[86] Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 4-5.
[87] For more information on Greek sacrificial ritual, see: Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 1-82; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 279.

plague that has befallen Thebes, bringing with her branches and incense to the altars of the gods at Thebes.[88] This scene suggests that prayer consisted of the verbal communication between the individual or group and the god. The words were accompanied by offerings, and these rites were practiced in a location where there were multiple altars, one of which was to the god Apollo.[89] Although she may have come to Apollo because of his association with the events at hand, she did not make her way to his temple or a location sacred only to him but to a location where the altars of many gods and goddesses were present.[90]

Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* begins with a discussion of prayer between Eteocles and the chorus, implying a proper way to communicate to the gods. Eteocles, the acting ruler of Thebes, prays to the gods to save the city from the invading foe - his brother, Polyneices. After he prays, he leaves the stage and he is replaced on stage with a chorus of Theban women. These women cry out to the gods in prayers, asking each god and goddess in turn for their protection and favor in the coming bloodshed.

> Be near and befriend us, O Pallas, the Zeus-born maiden of might!
> O lord of the steed and the sea, be thy trident uplifted to smite
> In eager desire of the fray, Poseidon! and Ares come down,
> In fatherly presence revealed, to rescue Harmonia's town!
> Thine too, Aphrodite, we are! thou art mother and queen of our race,
> To thee we cry out in our need, from thee let thy children have grace!
> Ye too, to scare back the foe, be your cry as a wolf's howl wild,
> Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou, of she-wolf Leto the child![91]

Asking for safety and deliverance from a future of slavery and horrors that accompany warfare, the chorus prays for help. They are loud, and they are afraid.

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[88] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 47.
[89] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex,* 47-48.
[90] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 48.
[91] Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 129-150.

Because of the panicked nature of their prayers, Eteocles returns to scold the chorus for their behavior. According to Eteocles, such prayer was "detestable" and it would spread panic throughout the city and its people.[92] This instance of rebuking by Eteocles is noteworthy and peculiar in its function and usefulness within the bounds of the tragedy. Some scholars, such as Richard Caldwell in article 1973 "The Misogyny of Eteocles," argue that Eteocles' reaction to them is a part of the effects of Oedipus's curse on his reign, while others, such as E. Jackson in his 1988 article "The Argument of *Septem contra Thebas,*" suggest that its purpose is unknown and it remains disjointed from the rest of the work.[93] In either of these possibilities, this instance suggests that ancient Greeks, indeed ancient Thebans, may have felt that there was a correct or effective way to pray and an incorrect or less effective way, especially in times of war. It is understandable that Eteocles would not want the women to incite panic throughout the city, but it is significant to examine how and exactly why he chides them.

Eteocles accuses the women of being "immodest" and "uncontrolled."[94] He states that they had flung themselves at the shrines of the gods, "scream[ing] and shriek[ing]."[95] According to him, the women had brought disgrace upon themselves by praying in such a state of fear. These women are also committing taboo when they throw themselves on the shrines of their gods. In most Greek religious rituals, it was expected that worshipper should approach the altar with *euphemia* or "speech of good omen."[96] This suggests that actions at shrines and altars of the divine must be performed in way that welcomes the gods to the sacred space. During the

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[92] Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 181.
[93] Richard S. Caldwell, "The Misogyny of Eteocles," *Arethusa* 6 (1973):197–231; Eva Stehle, "Prayer and Curse in Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes," *Classical Philology* no. 2 (2005): 102; A. P. Burnett, "Curse and Dream in Aeschylus' *Septem*," *GRBS* (1973): 343-344; E. Jackson, "The Argument of *Septem contra Thebas*" *Phoenix* (1988), 42: 287-303. A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bristol Classical Press, 1996), 109-115.
[94] Aeschylus. *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 185-190.
[95] Aeschylus. *Seven Against Thebes*, ln. 185-187.
[96] Stehle, "Prayer and Curse," 103-105.

ritualistic performance, all other individuals watching must remain silent.[97] Any distractions or displeasing instances must be avoided in order to prevent any level of miscommunication between the human and the divine.[98] The screams of women have a designated time and place in animal sacrifice and funerals. It seems, however, from this scene in *Seven Against Thebes*, that the vulgar expression of grief or panic is unacceptable to the gods in the practice of prayer.[99] The prayer of these women would not have only incited panic in their own community, but they would have also been pushing the gods away from the city and preventing any possibly favor the gods could have brought. Such expectations of prayer could have been recognized throughout the Greek world, making it an aspect of Panhellenic religious practice. Prayer was practiced by both individuals and groups, men and women, suggesting that direct communication with the gods was not confined to any one individual or any specific time.

Rites for the Olympian Gods

The Theban tragedies describe ways in which both individuals and communities (as seen in the chorus) practiced religion. While public religious practice is a feature of these texts, the bulk of religious experiences in the Theban Tragedies happen on the level of the individual. For Antigone, this religious experience revolves particularly around the rites of burial. Individual

[97] Burkert, *Greek Religion*; Stehle, "Prayer and Curse," 103; E. Stehle, "Choral Prayer in Greek Tragedy: Euphemia or Aischrologia?" in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. P. Murray and P. Wilson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121–55.
[98] Stehle, "Prayer and Curse," 103.
[99] There are two instances in the Greek religion where screaming was encouraged: At the time that the animal is sacrificed and during a funeral procession. Women were the main actors in both of these practices. The former was to mask the sound of a weapon killing the animal, as that sound was considered displeasing, and the latter was to express grief over the passing of an individual. Women's screams during funerals were accompanied by tearing one's clothing and pulling at one's own hair to physical express the same grief. The purpose and function of the scream is contested, however, as it could be considered jubilant. For more information, see; Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 5; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 242-243; Billie Jean Collins, "Greek *ololyzo* and Hittite *palwai*-: Exultation in the Ritual Slaughter of Animals," *GRBS* 36: 319.

intimate religious practices are seen in these works through loyalty and prayer to the gods and goddesses. For Teiresias, his connection and interaction with the divine burdens him with a truth he is reluctant to admit.

In these tragedies, a number of scenes portray religious ritual. From individual prayer to the gods in a times of distress, to a local festival, inauspicious sacrifices, and the description of private burial rites, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* both focus on the religious as it affected the city and the individual lives of the characters. I have already discussed one of these instances from *Oedipus Rex*, in which Iocaste undertakes rites of the gods in addition to her prayer for her husband. The scene describes the items she brings with her and the way in which she pleads for the god to help. Her prayer and offerings are quiet and resigned, with pleasing items that would be inviting to the god she is attempting to speak to.[100] Iocaste's personal devotion to her gods and to her husband are clearly outlined in this instance.

This devotion also expands to groups of people within the tragedies through the chorus, who describes a festival to the gods and their king within *Oedipus Rex*. This work includes a third choral ode in which they describe a festival which would have taken place at night, "the festival of the next full moon."[101] The chorus mentions the performance of dances and the singing with the aid of torches for light, appropriate for many festival in the ancient Greek world. The chorus states:

> Kithairon, now by Heaven I see the torches
> At the festival of the next full moon,
> And see the dance, and hear the choir sing
> A grace to your gentle shade:
> Mountain where Oedipus was found,
> O mountain guard of a noble race!
> May the god who heals us lend his aid,
> And let that glory come to pass

[100] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 47.
[101] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 58.

For our king's cradling ground.[102]

Although the text does not mention a specific name for this festival, the verses do give honor to Kithairon, the mountain on which Oedipus was found.[103] The rites were also meant to be pleasing in the eyes of the god who could heal the Thebans, Apollo.[104] The invocation by the chorus describing the festival also mentions multiple gods associated with the myth of Oedipus and the mountains, including Pan, Hermes, and Dionysos.[105] They are each associated with Oedipus' story, whether they are associated with the landscape and its features or with the finding of Oedipus as a child. In this instance, the rites described are intensely localized and connected to the issues at hand. The rites at the Kithairon are meant to honor the king of Thebes as well as an Olympian gods, such as Apollo, with both deeply interwoven with the Boeotian landscape.

The prophet and priest of Apollo, Teiresias, practices his religious rites in *Antigone*, as well, to interpret the will of the gods.[106] For example, we see him sitting in his "chair of augury," and he hears birds fighting all around him and their songs had turned to screams as they killed one another.[107] In response, he attempted to practice rites on the altar, which were foiled when the fire failed to burn. The "entrails dissolved in gray smoke, the bare bone burst from the welter."[108] Teiresias interprets these as ill omens for the future of Thebes in which the gods reject prayers and offerings due to a new corruption, caused by the new king, Creon, and his imprisonment of Antigone.[109] As a prophet of Apollo, he has the specific tools and ability to

[102] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 58-59.
[103] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 59.
[104] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 58-59.
[105] Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 58.
[106] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 230-232.
[107] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 231.
[108] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 231.
[109] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 231-232.

interpret the will of the gods in this way, making his practice of religion unlike the practices of the other characters. It is clear that even though he was a prophet of a specific god, Apollo, his abilities applied to the interpretation of all gods will towards the city.

In *Antigone,* the burial of Polyneices includes a distinctly religious motivation, although this is not always the case for ancient burial rites.[110] Antigone claims that her duty to care for her brother's decaying body was a law established by the gods, above any law that Creon could try to force upon her.[111] Due to these circumstances, burial rites are put at the forefront of religious ritual within *Antigone*. These rites included covering the body of her brother and offering libations three times "for her brother's ghost."[112] This burial rite and Antigone's devotion to the divine and her family is the central cause of conflict in Sophocles' play.

Conclusion

The gods, especially Apollo, as well as religious loyalty, prayers and rites portrayed in the Theban tragedies are not unique to the landscape of Thebes. The works of Sophocles and Aeschylus do begin to develop the conversation focused on the religious practices of Thebes as they were portrayed Athenian playwrights. This perspective is vital to understand the ways in which the religious landscape functioned throughout the Greek world, especially as individuals from one *polis,* Athens, sought to describe the practices of another, Thebes. This conversation of religious practice is one facet of the many cultural, political, and personal values portrayed

[110] On burial rites in ancient Greece, see: Department of Greek and Roman Art, "Death, Burial, and the Afterlife in Ancient Greece, 'in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000); Frank Graves, *The Burial Customs of the Ancient Greeks* (Brooklyn, NY: Roche & Hawkins, 1891); Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 49-58.
[111] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 186-187.
[112] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 187.

through the texts of the Sophocles and Aeschylus, and they portray religion as integral to the experiences of the characters within their texts.

The gods that were worshipped by the characters in the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus were Panhellenic, and they were worshipped in a variety of ways by individuals as well as communities. While these rites were certainly meant to honor the gods, the purpose of them within these particular works were to ask for the gods' aid as the city attempted to combat the tragedies that were befalling them, whether it was divine punishment brought down by Oedipus on the *polis* or impending warfare caused by internal strife.

The more "local" rites, such as those practiced at Kithairon by the community, as seen in *Oedipus Rex,* were tailored to addressing the wrath of a specific god and attending the current needs of the city. Other religious practices and rites expressed in the tragedies were largely Panhellenic, from the interpretation of the gods' will through auspicious signs, the practice of devotion and loyalty to the gods, and the practice of prayer as it applied to the community of ancient Thebes. This description of Theban divinities and practices hints at a distinctively Theban religious world and provides a way in which that Theban religion can be couched in those rites that were practiced in other *poleis*, such as Athens.

Chapter 2: The Theban Thesmophoria and the Landscape of the Female Worshipper

Beyond the practices of religion in Thebes as described in the tragedies, there existed many other kinds of religious worship including the separate religious practices of women during the festival of the Thesmophoria. While women attended community festivals and religious rites within the various *poleis* of the Greek world, and even could serve as priestesses, their consistent roles in religious were often limited raising up a "sacrificial scream" to the cover the cries of the dying animal.[113] This role and others like it were vital to the festivals, but this meant that women were often kept out of the central aspects of the rites, such as sacrificing the animal or communicating with the god or goddess. The Thesmophoria, however, provided a unique opportunity for women of a community to take part in all facets of religious worship and sacrifices without the presence of men, and this happened regularly in Thebes. The festival of the Thesmophoria as a women's religious practice makes it exceptional in the religious landscape of Classical Thebes as well as throughout the ancient Greek world. This exceptionality is what provoked me to study this religious festival further through the literary evidence of Pausanias and Xenophon as well as the through material evidence on display in the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes.

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[113] This cry is mentioned in plays and other literary works, and it was often used to express joy, invoke courage, or cover the sound of an animal's death during sacrifice; Cf. Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical* Greece, 242; Burkert, *Homo Necans,* 12; Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Functions*, 78; On women as priestesses, see: Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess*; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*; S. Blundell and M. Williamson, *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (New York: 1998); C. Cole, *Landscape, Gender, and Ritual Space: The Ancient Greek Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

The Festival

The Thesmophoria was a festival celebrated in honor of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, and her daughter, Persephone. This festival would take place once a year, before each planting season, and its central purpose was to guarantee the fertility of the fields.[114] As a women's festival, whose practices were to be kept a mystery to the male population, the rites were practiced in a location that was often both within the *polis* and yet bounded. For Athenians, the festival was likely practiced on the emptied Pnyx, a place usually of male assembly, which is attested to within Aristophanes' comedic work *Thesmophoriazusae* or *Women of the Thesmophoria,* written in the 5th century BCE.[115] The rites were based, in part, on the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the most culturally influential telling of which is *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. In the hymn, Demeter's daughter, Persephone, is stolen from the world by Hades, who takes her to the Underworld to make her his wife.[116] In her grief at the sudden loss of her daughter, Demeter disguises herself as an old woman and walks the Earth until she finds the family of Keleos, a family whose child needs significant care. It is here in this house that Demeter stays, finding comfort in her renewed role as a child-rearer and care-giver.[117] She becomes so fond of this child that she feeds him ambrosia and begins the process of making him immortal by placing him in the embers of the house's fire. The mother of the child witnesses

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[114] Cf. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 69, 242-246; Esther Eidinow and Julia Kindt, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31, 250, 453-455; Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 112-115 ; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 77-78.
[115] See Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae,* 655-658; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion, 110-116;* Habash, "The Odd Thesmophoria of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae,*" *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 20-21. Martha Habash interprets the location of the Thesmophorion, Aristophanes states, on the Pnyx hill. Broneer, however, does not think this is the case. He argues that the location of the Thesmophorion must have been close to the Eleusinion. His argument is built on the work of Thompson, who states that there are no remains that could have been associated with the temple: Oscar Broneer, "The Thesmophorion in Athens," *Hesperia* 11 (1942), 250-274; Homer Thompson, "Pnyx and Thesmophorion," *Hesperia* V, 1936, 186.
[116] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ln. 15-39, 75-92.
[117] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* ln. 218-238.

these acts and cries out in terror, which, in turn, enrages the goddess. Demeter abandons her attempts to make the child immortal, revealing her true form to the women of the household, and she then demands rites to be made in her honor.[118]

The hymn closes with a compromise between the gods and goddesses, in which Persephone would spend two-thirds of the year on Earth with her mother and one-third of the year with her husband in the realm of the dead. This deal was an explanation for the seasons of fertility, depending on Demeter's happiness or grief. The material evidence of the Theban Thesmophoria reflect significant portions of the story told in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, connecting the festival and its female participants to a foundational story of Demeter and her daughter.

This Chapter

The first section of this chapter focuses primarily on the limited written primary sources that discusses the Thesmophoria as it was experienced and practiced in Ancient Thebes. These sources include: the *Hellenica* written by the Athenian historian Xenophon largely during the 4th century BCE, and the *Description of Greece,* by Pausanias, a travel writer, in the 2nd century CE.[119] Through them, I will explore the basic characteristics of the Theban festival, with an eye to what they can tell us about where and when the Thesmophoria took place. Although these aspects of the Thesmophoria seem relatively simple to establish**,** a significant amount of debate

[118] *Homeric Hymn to* Demeter, ln. 239-255, ln. 265-275. The rites of Demeter, whose origin story is the focus of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, happened chiefly at the Eleusinian Mysteries, a larger mystery cult in the ancient world that were open to any free man or woman who spoke Greek; Cf. Cole, *Landscape, Gender, and Ritual Space: The Ancient Greek Experience*, 92; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 251; Jan N. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 2-3.

[119] For Xenophon's interest in Thebes, see: H. D. Westlake, "Xenophon and Epaminondas," *GRBS* 16 (1975): 23-39; and Richard Fernando Buxton. "Modeling Hegemony through Stasis: Xenophon on Sparta at Thebes and Phlius." *Illinois Classical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2017): 21-40. For Pausanias' interest in the Theban landscape and the mythical stories behind it, see: Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 173-202.

surrounds the place and time of these festivals throughout Ancient Greece.[120] This first section establishes the chronological and spatial context of the festival to which the material sources, that is the material culture from the site of the Theban Thesmophoria, can begin to build.

The second half of this chapter will focus on the material evidence for the festival's celebration in Thebes; these can provide information that cannot be determined through the written source material, which is, as expected, male-dominated. Twelve pieces of material evidence I use in this chapter come from a carefully curated section focused solely on the Thesmophoria on display at The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. This collection primarily includes votive offerings, whose find sites have been used by archaeologists to determine the central location of the Thesmophoria in Thebes as the site of the ancient Kadmeia. These votive offerings include statuettes of women participants, figurines of ritualistic materials, such as pigs, rams, and snakes, and a sherd of a red-figure krater that portrays a section of the foundational myth of Demeter.[121] These pieces, representing objects that were commonly used in the Thesmophoria, can provide us with some insight to the rites of the ancient festival in Thebes, and they also demonstrate the intention of the rites to bring fertility and fecundity to the local fields as well as to the families of the Theban *polis*.[122] By joining the material evidence, the literary evidence, and the mythology of Demeter, we can perhaps discern some aspects of the ways in which the women understood their roles in the community and how central those roles were to the larger Theban community.

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[120] Jon D Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 133-134; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 110-111; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 242-245.
[121] Votive offerings were items given to the divine in exchange for a vow. They were sometimes given for the community in order to ensure an event, like a victory or the growing of crops in the coming season, but they also operate on the individual level, sometimes to aid with physical ailments; Cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 68-70.
[122] *Homeric Hymn to* Demeter, ln. 370-395; Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114.

Written Evidence of the Theban Thesmophoria

The majority of the primary literary sources for the Theban Thesmophoria come from two male authors who discussed the city in their histories and travelogue. These men were often particularly interested in chronicling the physical and social characteristics of the city, but they also touch on the local religious landscape. Since both Xenophon and Pausanias were outsiders and male, they were not allowed to view the particular rites of the Thesmophoria. They were, however, able to recognize the festival's significance within the community. The universality of the Thesmophoria across Greek city-states may have allowed these two men to recognize the festival in their travels across the landscape. Xenophon of Athens, the historian, was likely familiar with the Thesmophoria due to its practice in his home of Athens, yet his perspective is clearly of one outside the festival and its rites. Pausanias, on the other hand, a travel writer who traveled extensively across Attica, Corinthia, Laconia, and more, directed careful attention to the culture and religion of the Greek city-states and regions.[123] Both Xenophon and Pausanias, in two separate and distinct ages of ancient Greece, were able to describe the Theban festival from the outside, including where and when the rites took place.

Location

These authors recounted the site of the Thesmophoria in Thebes at two significantly different points of time, Xenophon during the 5th/4th centuries BCE, and Pausanias during the 2nd century CE. Although they were separated by a little over five centuries, they each point to a similar location of the Theban Thesmophoria. Both place the rites as occurring on the Kadmeia, the most central point of Thebes.[124] The Kadmeia was the city's acropolis, fortified by walls and

[123] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5. 2. 29.
[124] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5. 2. 29; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.16.5.

gates on all sides with seven gates for entrance.[125] In the early centuries of Thebes' history, the Kadmeia had served as the location of an even more ancient palace which was believed to have been the home of the city's founder, Kadmos.[126]

Pausanias tells his readers that the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros, where the Thesmophoria took place, was in the very location of the palace of Kadmos, but the only remaining marker of the festival during the 2nd century CE was some type of image of Demeter, which he described as representing the goddess down to her chest.[127] Pausanias states that he gathered information regarding the sanctuary, and other local histories and cults, through the Theban community.[128] It is unclear whether or not the rites were still occurring as Pausanias walked through the city, but it could be interpreted from his writings that the sanctuary itself was no longer in use at the time of his visit.[129] Pausanias mentions only the statue and that he heard that bronze shields of the Spartan officers who had fallen at Leuctra had once been dedicated here, yet it is unclear if they still remained at the time of his visit.[130]

The location supplied by Pausanias is supported by Xenophon's description of the city as he experienced it on one summer's day in Thebes in during the second century CE. Although the sanctuary seems as if it has already fallen into disrepair by the time of Pausanias, Xenophon confirms that the Thesmophoria was still occurring during his visit during the Classical Age. He states in his work, the *Hellenica*, that the *boule*, the city's main governing body, had to meet in the portico of the agora so that the women of the Theban *polis* could inhabit the Kadmeia for the duration of the Thesmophoria.[131] As a part of the ancient Theban city, separated from the rest by

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[125] Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 116-118; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.8.4-7.
[126] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.16. 5-6; Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 47-48, 123-125.
[127] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.16.5.
[128] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.16.2; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.18.3.
[129] Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes*, 124.
[130] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.16.5.
[131] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.2.29.

virtue of stone walls, the Kadmeia was a place where the rites of Demeter could remain a mystery, yet women participants could still be confined to a controlled location within the city walls (much like in Athens).[132] It is at this location that the women could perform their sacred duties to the goddess and serve their city. Such a placement could have consequences. The festival was a sacred time, but also a vulnerable one as the city's main defenses were down due to the women's occupation of the Kadmeia. The city was often only protected at these times by sacred laws that forbid invasion which the population practiced their rites.[133] Plutarch mentions that it was during the Thesmophoria that Phoebidas, leading Spartan forces, invaded the *polis* of Thebes in 382 BCE and took the citadel, holding the women of the festival captive until the city surrendered.[134] Phoebidas' occupation of the Kadmeia was considered illegal, and he was relieved of his title following this action. Nonetheless, Sparta continued to hold Thebes by establishing a Spartan garrison on the Kadmeia.[135]

These sources' suggestion of a location of the Kadmeia has been supported by the archaeological evidence found on the Kadmeia of Thebes. Material evidence, now collected in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, was found in St. George Square, a section of the modern city of the Thiva located on the site of the ancient Kadmeia.[136] This site is also known as the location of a Late Helladic palace, one of two whose remains have been found on the Kadmeia.[137] If the works of Pausanias and Xenophon are combined with this archaeological

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[132] The Kadmeia was not a sharp acropolis like those in Athens or Corinth, but a flat outcrop of land that required bridges or manmade landfills for access, see: Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes*, 13, 118.
[133] Plutarch*, Life of Pelopidas*, 280; Xenophon, *Hellenica,* 5.2.25-29.
[134] Plutarch, *Life of Pelopidas*, 5; Nigel M. Kennell, *Spartans: A New History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 102, 139.
[135] Cf. Nigel Kennell, *Spartans: A New History* (Malden, MA: Wiley- Blackwell, 2010), 139; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.2.25-35; Diodorus Siculus, 15.20.2.
[136] Wall text, *Thebes: The Thesmophorion of Demeter*, 134, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.
[137] Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 124.

evidence, the palace could be the very one the Thebans associated with their founder, Kadmos.[138] Sarantis Symeonoglou posits that there could have been a physical temple built in the ruins of the palace to serve as the sanctuary of Demeter, later replaced by a Byzantine Cathedral, but he states that "it has not been possible to identify remains of the sanctuary itself."[139]

In a central sector of the city and with the sanctity of their religious space preserved, the women were able to inhabit a most crucial sector of Thebes for a short amount of time. Their presence displaced the most important men in the city, the *boule*, who would have gathered there to govern the city.[140] Their duties as women of the Thesmophoria were correlated with the prosperity of the coming harvest. Without their annual supplication to the goddess, the *polis* would not have been able to ensure that they would receive plentiful growing season. While the women of Thebes experienced restricted social, legal, and political in their everyday lives, as did all Greek women they were able to live apart as equals to the "lawgivers" that inhabited the Kadmeia for the rest of the year for a span of three days or five or ten.

Time

Scholars generally place the celebration of the Thesmophoria in Athens in the month of Pyanopsion, which was known as Demetrios throughout the other city-states of Greece.[141] The month of Demetrios occurred during the fall, spanning part of the months that we know as

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[138] Symeonoglou supports the claim of a physical temple through the presence of other physical sanctuaries in Pausanias's work which the Greek historian had visited in the order of a ring and that the loss of the temple would have left sufficient space for a temple at this location; Cf. Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 124.
[139] Summary of Antonios D. Keramopoullos, "Thēbaïka" in *Archaeologikon Deltion* 3 (1917): 353-356 can be found in Symeonoglou, *Topography of Thebes*, 124.
[140] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 118, 140, 189.
[141] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings,* 26-27; Lewis R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek City States, vol.* 3 (Reprinted Chicago: Aegean Press, 1971), 75-105; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 57, 110-111; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 242-243; Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 133.

September and October.[142] This timing was essential, as the festival's practices included the creation of a mixture that served as ritualistic fertilizer.[143] Yet Xenophon states merely that "it was summer and midday" in Thebes when the festival of the Thesmophoria came to pass.[144] Matthew Dillon argues that the beginning of the month of Demetrios or Pyanopsion is still quite hot, and that the festival had to take place at the very end of the summer season.[145] Walter Burkert, in comparison, uses inscriptions from the sites of Delos and Thebes to posit that the Thesmophoria in Thebes, as well as in Delos, was celebrated two months earlier than in Athens.[146] Dillon argues that the Theban Thesmophoria must have happened close to the fall, as it was in Athens, in order that the ritualistic mixture made by the female participants could be included in the fall's harvest. The exact nature of this mixture and how long it was left in the pits is uncertain, however, and it does not help the dating of the event. Some scholars argue that the mixture used in the process came from a previous festival or even from the last year's Thesmophoria.[147] Others argue that the pigs and the snake figures were tossed down into the pit, but the date of extraction and use is not clear. This could have been at a later date, once the mixture had decomposed well after the fall. [148] The fact that a debate exists over the timing between the times of the festival's celebration, however, is important. This suggests that not all details of the festival should be based on the knowledge from the sources which focus solely on Athens.

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[142] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 111.
[143] It is important to note that the amount of mixture that would have been used for the fields from this ceremony would not have functioned as a fertilizer as we understand it. It would have been a smaller amount that would have served a more symbolic purpose than actual nourishment for the ground. Burkert describes this use as a form of "agrarian magic." For more information, see: Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 277.
[144] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.2.29.
[145] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 114.
[146] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 245.
[147] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 246.
[148] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114-115; Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 26.

Xenophon and Pausanias provide a picture of the festival's location that spans over centuries, and the time and place is crucial for contextualizing the material evidence from the sanctuary. The time and place of the Theban Thesmophoria is the only information that we can learn from the written source material. Any further particularities of the festival must be gained by studying the surviving material evidence.

Material Evidence of the Theban Thesmophoria

At the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, the story of the Thesmophoria is told through votive offerings given by Theban women at the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros on the Kadmeia. The pieces from this collection build a narrative of the Thesmophoria, specifically related to Thebes, and they tell their own story of the women of the Thesmophoria here. The material evidence provides clues that aid in answering questions such as: Who were these women? How did they worship Demeter? And, during this ritual process, what images, and stories, might they have had on their minds?

The material evidence relating to the Thesmophoria housed in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes Thesmophoria are all labeled as votive offerings and include three statuettes of women spanning from the 5th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE (two full statuettes and one partial statuette), as well as three boar figurines, one snake figurine, one ram figurine, and a sherd of a 5th century BCE red-figure *kantharos*. The statuettes likely portray the ritual participants of the Thesmophoria, depicting both their roles as participants and the varying statuses of women who would have attended. In addition, a single statuette from the site from the 5th century BCE portrays a male in a *himation* with a snake to his side, and complicates this narrative, but it is possible that this particular offering refers to another of Demeter's cults that

included both men and women. The figurines of animals, dated during the 4th and 5th centuries BCE, depict animals that would have been used for ritualistic purposes. Additionally, the sherd of a red-figure *kantharos* depicts a four-horse chariot that may have been related to the myth of Demeter. All of these pieces were found on the Kadmeia near St. George Square, the probable location of the festival of the Thesmophoria, and they all date between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE.

Ritual Participants

The most abundant material evidence related to the Thesmophoria in the Theban museum are statuettes that likely represent the women of the festival. These depictions not only provide information regarding the participants of the Thesmophoria, but they also help integrate aspects of the foundational myths of the festival's practices. The museum's statuettes depict them distinctly: a dancer, a young standing woman, and an older seated woman. These pieces date from the early 5th BCE to the 3rd BCE. One of the most intriguing aspects of female representations found at the sites of the Thesmophoria throughout Greece is that the statuettes can be interpreted as representations of the women participants of the festival as well as representations of the goddess, Demeter, herself.[149]

[149] Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114.

The first and oldest statuette (5th c. BCE) is a 6-inch terracotta representation of a seated woman on a throne with a veil covering her hair (Fig. 2.1). Her position is reminiscent of the goddess Demeter as she sat in the house of Keleos.[150] This is where Demeter smiles for the first time since loss of her daughter, Persephone. As Demeter sits here, she also requests the barley and pennyroyal drink, the kykeon, associated with her mystery cult in Eleusis.[151] Our statuette in Thebes can perhaps be associated with an older woman, representing the elderly woman into which Demeter had transformed herself following the loss of her daughter. Although this statuette lends itself to a depiction of the goddess, it is also might portray the older women who would have been a part of these festivals.

Figure 2.1 Seated female figure, early 5th c. BCE, Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

The representation of Demeter as an older woman sitting on a chair is not unusual. Demeter is often portrayed as seated; such statues and statuettes were found at the locations of her ancient sanctuaries throughout the Mediterranean world. Museums such as the British Museum, the Bardo Museum in Tunisia, and the Archaeological Museum in Milan all house at least one representation of the goddess in a similar style from the 6th century BCE to the 1st century BCE. The statues at these locations all show the goddess seated on the throne, with the most notable being the marble statue of Demeter of Knidos.[152] A different find also housed in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, a marble "enthroned goddess," may have signified the

[150] *Homeric. Hymn to Demeter*, ln. 197-205.
[151] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* ln. 203-205.
[152] *Demeter of Knidos*, British Museum, London, UK. Found in the port of Knidos, in present-day Turkey.

Figure 2.2 Statue of an enthroned goddess, 5 c. B.C. Eutresis, Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

location of another sanctuary to Demeter in ancient Boeotia at the nearby city of Eutresis (Fig. 2.2). The small figurines and large statues of Demeter housed in these other museums may provide a glimpse of what a main cultic statue would have looked like within the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros, and that might be what Pausanias would have seen.[153]

The second terracotta statuette (4th c. BCE), that of a 9-inch standing woman wearing a himation, probably indicates the kind of women who participated in the Thesmophoria in Thebes (Fig. 2.3). These individuals were mature women, not maidens, and they would most likely have been married at this age. This woman's hair is adorned, and her visage and the draping of her *himation* suggests that she is still a young woman. Her chest is exposed, revealing her breasts which can refer to the role of a mother. Exposed breasts as a reference to fertility and motherhood can be seen, for example, in the 6th century BCE *metopes* of the temple of Hera located at the Sele River, Italy. Women are depicted dancing in layered dresses that have their *himation* covering only their left breast.[154] These dances were performed

Figure 2.3 Female figurine, mid-4th c. BCE, Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

[153] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.16.5.

[154] Dillon, *Girls and Women,* 66-68, 314 n. 2.134; Dillion references *metopes* as they are illustrated in works like: G.M.A Richter, *Archaic Greek Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), fig. 291; G.M.A. Richter, *Perspective in Greek and Roman Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1970), pl. 81; and H. Hellenkemper, *Die Neue Welt der*

in the honor of Hera, the goddess of marriage, and their dress in the *metopes* is considered to be representative of her role as a mother and child-rearer.[155] In both examples, the *metopes* at Sele and the statuette at Thebes, the whole bodies of the women are not exposed, but only the breast which is associated with raising children and the mother goddesses, those associated with childrearing and fertility.

This statuette could also reflect the myth of Demeter, when the goddess reveals herself to the women of Keleos' household.[156] The hair of the statuette reflects the description of her, as it is loose and down, instead of being covered or bound like the other two statuettes.[157] The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* describes her hair as being long and flowing down to her shoulders, and this description is repeated multiple time throughout the hymn in reference to the goddess, both before and after her transformation into an older woman.[158] This statuette with the long hair found in the context of the Theban Thesmophoria could refer to the goddess Demeter in this particular scene, but it is also possible that she is representative of the young women participants that would have taken part in the festival as well.

The statuette of the standing woman may refer to the expectation that the women who attended would have been child-bearers and -rearers themselves, and suggests a connection between Demeter and her participants in this particular role. The women participants were mothers, meant to be able to understand the love of a mother for her child or to have had the unfortunate ability to understand the loss of a child.

Grieschen: Antike Kunst aus Unteritalien und Sizilien (Cologne, Germany: in Kommission bei Verlag P. von Zabern, 1998), 113, pl. 37.
[155] Dillion, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 14.
[156] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ln. 275-276.
[157] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* ln. 279.
[158] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ln. 1, 75, 251, 279.

The final terracotta female statuette, a representation of a dancer, survives only partially in a two inch piece, and it dates to the third century BCE (Fig. 2.4). Her role as a dancer is portrayed through the motion implied in her shoulders. The presence of this particular figurine at the site of the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros might indicate that dancing was a part of the rites here, as appears to have been a part of the Thesmophoria elsewhere in Greece.[159]

Figure 2.4 Head of a figurine of a female dancer, 3rd c. BCE. Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva Greece.

The depiction of a veil covering her hair and her face, however, is a possible reference to the foundational myth on which the festival of the Thesmophoria was built. This particular aspect of the dancer's appearance may refer to the goddess's appearance as she sat at the house of Keleos, disguised as an older woman. Her hair was covered and, while in the home, she covered her face as well.[160]

In many Greek religious rituals, such as the Panathenaia at Athens or the rites to Artemis at Ephesos, dancing would have been performed by young maidens right before they were of marriageable age, known as *parthenoi*, rather than married women. The participants of the festival of the Thesmophoria, however, were to be married and hold a pure reputation within the surrounding community.[161] The dancers of the Thesmophoria would therefore have completed their initiation rites into womanhood. It is likely then our statuette is of a married woman who

[159] Habash, "The Odd Thesmophoria of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*," 21.
[160] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ln. 197.
[161] On married women in the Thesmophoria, see: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata,* ln. 1296-1320; Isaeus 8.19-20; Isaeus 6.49-50; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 112, 211-212.

would have performed these dances instead of maidens. Though her clothing mirrors the aged Demeter on Earth, her exact age remains unknown.

While the presence of female statuettes at the Thesmophoria site is expected, the presence of a male figurine with a snake symbol is less so. A 5th century BCE broken terracotta statuette, standing about six inches tall, which depicts the lower half of a man wearing a *himation* with a snake moving up behind the man's right side (Fig. 2.5), was found at the site as well. As men were not allowed in the sacred space during the festival or even know the sacred objects at the center of the celebration, a male would not likely be depicted within the bounds of the sanctuary.[162]

Figure 2.5 Fragment of a male figurine with himation and accompanied by a snake, 5th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

The presence of a male figurine might instead refer to the role of male individuals in the sacred rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries, also devoted to Demeter. While this secret cult springs from the same myth of Demeter as the Thesmophoria, its festival allowed both men and women to participate in the rites of the goddess. The presence of such a statuette in Thebes at the site of the Thesmophoria could indicate that the sanctuary saw itself as connected to the mystery cult of Demeter in a larger consideration of the Greek religious landscape, not just in the local sense of Theban religion.

These particular statuettes, though few, represent the individuals who would take part in the ceremonial rites to Demeter. Although these particular pieces do not provide any information regarding the nature of these women, some supplementary sources from Athens, particularly the

[162] Wall text, *Thebes: The Thesmophorion of Demeter*, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

writings of Isaeus during early fourth century BCE , suggest that the women of the Thesmophoria had to be of marriageable age and pure reputation, and their husbands had to be able to fund the women's stay at the sanctuary (likely providing them with bedding, food, and materials).[163] These statuettes, a dancer, a seated woman, and young woman, suggest that these various women would have come together to serve the goddess, bonding over their shared experiences and providing wisdom in experiences that others may have yet to face.

Ritualistic Items and Symbols

The rites practiced by the women of the Thesmophoria in Thebes and elsewhere largely remain a mystery. The evidence, both literary and material, suggests that the festival was celebrated throughout the Greek world for at least three days. At its minimum, the three days were separated into the first day, called Anodos, the second, called Nesteia, and the third, called Kalligeneia. On the first day, the women would ascend to sacred place of the rites. The name itself means "ascent" as this day established the separation between the women and the rest of the *polis*, and for the women of Thebes this meant ascending to the Kadmeia.[164] It is possible that this initial day was the day of the sacrifice of the piglets for the goddesses. The Anodos was followed by the Nesteia, the second day of rites, on which the women would fast. In comparison to the other days, this day was solemn in reflection of Demeter's fasting after her daughter was taken from her; moreover, fasting also played an important role in many Greek festivals as a way of purification.[165] In contrast, the third day was one of great celebration, at which time the

[163] Isaeus, 6.49-50; Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 112.
[164] Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*, ln. 1045; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 113; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 243-244.
[165] Cf. Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae,* ln. 949, 1045; Aristophanes, *Birds,* ln. 1519; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* ln. 47-50; Parker, *On Greek Religion,* 188; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 113; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 243-244.

women would call on the goddess Kalligeneia to make their own bodies fertile in the coming years and ensuring a lineage for their families.[166] This third day possibly included the rites of the *aischrologia*, or the use of the crude jokes as a fertility rite.[167] This description of the rites of the Thesmophoria derive chiefly from the celebration at Athens.

The Archaeological Museum of Thebes also preserves figurines and other miniatures representing the rites that may have taken place in Thebes. Most of the votive offerings found at the site of the Thesmophoria represent animals, such as boars and a snake, also suggest a connection to fertility and were meant to invoke Demeter's power of growth in the local fields.[168] In the museum's collection of figurines from the Thesmophoria, there are three terracotta boars, one snake, and one ram. They are all relatively small in size, but carry significant ties to the goddess and her foundational myth.

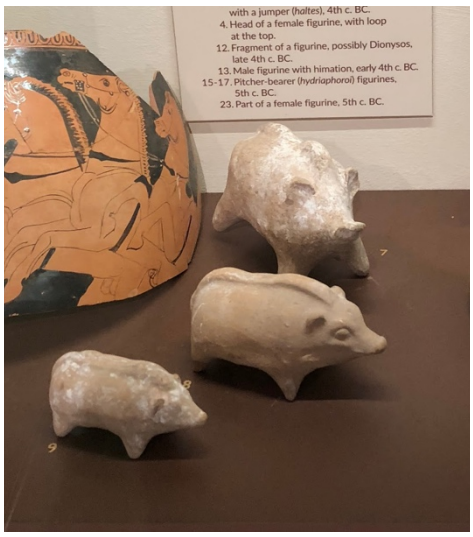

Figure 2.6 Boar figurines, 5th. C. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

Three 5th century BCE terracotta boar figurines, complete with crests on their backs as well as snouts and ears, are the most closely tied to the rites of the Thesmophoria (Fig. 2.6). These figures stand about one to two inches tall, and they likely represent the central sacrifice that took place during the festival.[169] During this sacrifice, women would kill piglets and throw them into a *megaron*, or a deep pit, that was associated with the Thesmophorion.[170]

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[166] Cf. Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 209; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 113; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 243-244.
[167] Diodorus Siculus, 5.4.7; Apollodorus, 1.30; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 207-208, 242; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 113-114.
[168] Cf. P. Leigh Fermor, *Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece* (London, 1966), 25; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 209.
[169] Dillion, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 114; Burkert, *Greek Religion,* 243.
[170] Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.14.

This central sacrifice is believed by many scholars to come from the myth of Persephone's kidnapping. During her abduction, also known as the Rape of Persephone, Hades took her into his chariot and opened a rift to the underworld. When he did, he also sent a herd of boars owned by Eubouleus cascading in as well. Thus, the pig becomes the central sacrifice of the festival in honor of the herd that was lost alongside Demeter's daughter.[171] The pigs of the festival are thrown into the dark *megara*, or sacrificial pits, like the rift to the Underworld, to decompose for later ritualistic use.

In this pit, the pigs would decay, and it was believed that mixing their remains with the soil would bring good harvest for the year.[172] In some locations of the Thesmophoria, such as Thasos and Naxos, votive offerings of pig figurines are depicted with their bellies slit lengthwise, sometimes with the intestines showing.[173] This may have been a practice that aided in the decaying process; however, this practice is not explicitly clear in these particular figures found at Thebes. Without being able to examine the underside of the pigs, it is hard to know whether there were intentional markings made to hint at this practice; however, there are no obvious signs of the pigs' mutilation from the outside. Pausanias mentions that piglets like these were released, alive, into the pits of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore Potniai outside of Thebes, and they were believed to later appear in Dodona.[174] Pausanias, however, did not seem to suggest that this practice was carried over to the Thesmophoria in Thebes, nor that it may have happened at all, due to the fact that the piglets would need to decompose quickly and remain in a specific area for collection.[175]

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[171] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 114; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 243.
[172] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114.
[173] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion,* 114.
[174] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.8.1
[175] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.8.1; Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, 113-114.

One of the most distinctive items in the Archaeological Museum's collection of finds from the Thesmophoria site is a fourth century BCE terracotta figurine of a snake, about three inches in length, functioning as a reminder of the festival's dangers as well as the fertility aspect of the rites (Fig. 2.7). During the Thesmophoria, dough models of snakes as well as dough *phalloi* were created and thrown into the *megara* associated with the sanctuary. This terracotta representation of a snake likely represents the dough models that were being thrown into the pit. Both phalloi and snakes were symbols of fertility in ancient Greek belief, and dough versions would rest with the decaying piglets in the pits until they were later gathered by women referred to as *antletriai*, or bailers/fetchers.[176] When the bailers would collect the remains, they would create noise to fend off potential threat of real snakes as they collected the mixture of piglets and dough snakes and *phalloi*.[177] Each of the representations of snakes and boars was associated with fertility in the ancient world, further connecting to their purpose with the mixture in the *megara* as well as their association with the goddess Demeter.

Figure 2.7 Snake, 4th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

[176] Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek* Religion, 114; Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times,* 22.
[177] Burkert, *Greek Religion,* 243-244.

The smallest item on display in the Archaeological Museum which refers to the Thesmophoria is a 5th century BCE ram figurine standing about an inch tall and made of terracotta. It was found with the earlier votive offerings, which connects it to rites of Demeter. Although the ram was not exclusive to the rites of Demeter, the *Homeric Hymn of Demeter* makes mention of a fleece which Iambe places over the chair which she offers the disguised goddess.[178] In addition, the rites to Demeter at Eleusis regularly included a fleece covered stool that was used as a ritualistic prop for the purification rituals before the mystery rites.[179] Beyond its connection to Eleusis and to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, it is unclear whether the ram was a part of the ritual practiced at the Theban Thesmophoria; it was perhaps incorporated in the same fashion.

Figure 2.8 Ram figurine, 5th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

Mythical Representations in the Material Evidence

The spark of Demeter's grief and her ensuing journey was the abduction and rape of her daughter, Persephone, by Hades. This scene has been represented in art throughout time, from the ancient Greek ages to modernity, in a variety of media.[180] It is the moment that spurs the journey of Demeter and the "death" of Persephone as she is taken into the underworld. One of

[178] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* ln. 196.
[179] Jason Colavito, *Jason and the Argonauts through the Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 185-187; Diodorus, 4.14.3; Daniela Colomo, "Herakles and the Eleusinian Mysteries: P. Mil. Vogl. I 20, 18-32 Revisited," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 148 (2004): 87-98; George Emmanuel Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 205-206, 221, 232.
[180] On representations of the rape of Persephone in various media throughout the centuries see, among others: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Rape of Proserpina*, Carrara marble, 2.55 m, 1622, Rome, Galleria Borghese; Peter Paul Rubens, *El Rapto de Proserpina*, Oil on canvas, 181x271.2 cm, 1636-1637, Madrid, Museo del Prado; Cayetano Rodríguez, *The Rape of Proserpine,* 1832-1837, Madrid: Museo del Prado; and Rachel Smythe, *Lore Olympus,* Webtoon, 2018-2019.

the most common depictions of this story represented in the ancient Greek world was the moment when Hades grabs Persephone and pulls her onto his chariot.[181]

Figure 2.9 Fragment of a red-figure krater with representation of a four-horse chariot (quadriga), 2nd half of 5th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

A single sherd, about 8 inches tall by a foot wide, of a red-figure krater found on the Kadmeia is on display in the collection of Thesmophoria related material culture at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes (Fig. 2.9). The fragment, dating between 450 and 400 BCE, depicts three horses and part of a fourth. The horses have bridles and short-cropped hair. These types of four-horse chariots were regularly used for racing in the ancient Greek world; they were also found, however, in artistic depictions as vehicles of the divine.[182] Found in the context of the other artifacts at the Thesmophoria, it is very possible that this fragment represents the abduction of Persephone, in which she is pulled onto Hades' chariot and carried to the underworld. The scene depicted on the krater is, in fact, similar to other depictions of the abduction of Persephone created during the Classical age of Greece. Other examples include a red-figure volute krater from the Berlin Antiquities Collection (2.10).[183] The krater housed in Berlin

Figure 2.10 *Detail of the body of the Apulian volute krater, c. 340 BCE*, Antikensammlung, Berlin, Germany.

[181] See Antonio Corso, *The Art of Praxiteles* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 145-149. Examples include: Baltimore Painter, *Kidnapping of Kore on a* hydria, around 330 BCE, Bari, Macinagrossa Collection, no. 26; and *Kidnapping of Kore on a* lekanis, around 325 BCE, formerly at Lugano Bolla Collection, current location unknown.
[182] Cf. Parker, *On Greek* Religion, 94, 167, 228; Suessula Painter, *Nike and the Chariot of Zeus*, 400-390 BCE, Attic Red-Figure Amphora, Paris, Musée du Louvre; *Four-Horse Chariot with Poseidon and Aphrodite*, black-figured neck amphora, 540 BCE, London, British Museum.
[183] The entire collection is now housed in two separate museums, the Altes Museum and the Pergamon Museum, in Berlin, Germany.

depicts at least eight separate gods and goddesses, including Dionysos with his chariot of leopards. Each of the individuals is labeled, and Hades and Persephone can be seen on the bottom left side of the krater. The differences between the Theban krater and the krater housed at Berlin lie in the lack of adornments on the horses' heads on the vase from Thebes, thus suggesting that Hades' rape of Persephone is the most probable scene depicted on this krater. Although there are very few artistic symbols associated specifically with Hades, this scene is largely about Persephone and how her rapture affects her mother and, in turn, the world.

This Theban krater lends artistic representation to the stories on which the women of the Theban Thesmophoria might have reflected as they walked up the Kadmeia, making their ascent with the intention to praise the goddess. Demeter's loss of her daughter is the foundational scene on which most of Demeter's cult activity is based, particularly the Thesmophoria as well as the rites that took place at the mystery cult of Eleusis. Although the rites were meant to placate Demeter, the women might have reflected on Persephone's seizure, as well. They would have considered Persephone's fear as she was taken into the underworld to live among the dead. The bailers and the festival goers, the mortal women of Thebes, experienced death and decay firsthand, but they understood that without this decay there could not be new life. It was the job of these Theban women at the Thesmophoria to invoke the goddess' blessing on the fields while she remained content with her daughter in the living world, so that the resulting crop would last them through her season of grief.

Conclusion

Through the study of the written and material evidence regarding the Theban Thesmophoria, we can develop a partial narrative of the Theban female worshipper. The women

participants were of a marriageable age or married, and they would have been associated with goddess Demeter at each phase of their life through their representations in the votive offerings. This would have been possible with both the immortally youthful and beautiful Demeter, as shown in the statue of the standing woman (Fig. 2.3), in comparison to her disguised form at the house of the Keleos, as shown in the statuette of the seated woman (Fig. 2.1). These Theban women would leave their families during the late summer. They may have been sent off by their husbands and children with mixed emotions, with the husband helping her out the door with her provisions for the coming days. As the women ascended the central *acropolis* of Thebes, the Kadmeia, and passed the inner gates, they may have walked with the stories of Demeter and her daughter on their minds. They could have thought of the rape of Persephone, Demeter's descent into grief, and the goddess's anger and final demands at the conclusion of the story. The women participants may have reflected on these myth in conjunction with the purpose they served the community, promising fruits of the earth in the coming seasons and ensuring the fertility of their own bodies for the sake of their own families.

While on the Kadmeia, their days of the festival would be characterized by the sacrifice of piglets and the creation of dough snakes. These women spent the days celebrating the goddess, taking part in jests, mourning and fasting, and praying to the goddesses for fertility in the coming years. The Theban women's experience during the Thesmophoria was centered around their roles as guarantors and providers of fertility within the community. This intention can be seen in the statuette of the standing woman and the presence of the snake and the boars associated with the fertility sacrifices. Such sacrifices were significantly intertwined with the myths of Demeter and her position as a mother and a child-rearer in the house of Keleos.

The material evidence also suggests that in the rites of the Thesmophoria, there was a recognition of the cycle of fertility, with death being an integral part of ensuring life. Such a process was apparent within the yearly seasons, which was caused by Demeter's grief over her daughter. This cycle necessitates Persephone's death in the fall before the life of another year. The piglets in the rites must be killed in order to become fertilizer for the fields. And the bailers must come into contact with the dead and the dangerous scavengers that inhabit the pits in order to provide the ritualistic mixture to the farmers. All of these factors create the rite to Demeter Thesmophoros.

Such an event for these women would also have been a crucial social experience because it would have given them one chance a year to be around one another unbounded by walls or accompanied by a guardian. This event would have given the women an opportunity to exchange stories and personal experiences that would have helped guide others throughout their lives, whether that was through the loss of children or the future coming of new life.

The rites of these women were a central aspect of Theban religion during the Classical Age, both geographically and religiously. While women would have participated in other rites, this festival was only theirs. A study of the Theban religious landscape would not be complete without studying these women in their fertility rites. The festival's centrality can be contrasted with the rites that took place outside of the city walls to gods that were feared because of their very nature instead of being celebrated because of their ability to bring life to the city, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Theban Kabeiroi

Beyond the traditional Olympian pantheon and beyond the Thesmophoria, the Theban religious world also included other exceptional religious practices to gods known as the Kabeiroi. While the religious practices of women during the Thesmophoria were often treated with suspicion by male authors, the agricultural rites that the women performed and their central location within the city suggest an understanding of the importance of their role within society. On the other hand, the sanctuary to the Kabeiroi, two chthonic deities of a mysterious origin, stood on the outskirts of the city rather than inside its walls, as if separated from those in the *polis*. Though lying outside Thebes, the sanctuary, known at the Kabeirion, was a significant part of Classical Theban religion, showing us the ways in which chthonic deities fit into the local religious landscape. The sanctuary of the Kabeiroi and its mystery rites are exceptional in the Theban landscape due to nature of the gods, Kabiros and Pais, as unique to Theban worship at the Kabeirion.[184]

The Kabeiroi

The Kabeirion was one of the most well-known sanctuaries of the Classical Theban world.[185] Unlike the site of the Thesmophoria, it was located outside the walls of the city of Thebes, in a setting not centered in the urban landscape nor in the lives of the majority of the Theban populace. There were only two sanctuaries to the Kabeiroi in the Greek world of which

[184] When referencing the Kabeiroi, I will be using the spellings utilized most by the secondary sources in which they are discussed. Often the gods and their site are known as the "Kabeiroi" and the "Kabeirion" while the name of the singular gods lacks the "e" and is spelled as "Kabiros."
[185] Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 72, 252; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281-285.

we are completely certain, one located on the island of Lemnos and the other in Thebes.[186] The sanctuary at Thebes was dedicated to two gods, one god and his semi-divine servant.[187] The sanctuary at Lemnos, however, was devoted jointly to the Kabeiroi and to Hephaistos, the city's primary deity.[188] In comparison to the centralized sanctuary of the Kabeiroi and Hephaistos at Lemnos, the Theban Kabeirion was located outside of Thebes and it was not associated with the patron deity of the city, Dionysos nor Apollo, but connected only in part to the goddess, Demeter.

The gods worshipped at this sanctuary, called the Kabeiroi, are identified as chthonic deities. The term "chthonic" in the ancient Greek world meant "of the earth," in comparison to Olympian gods who were associated with the heavens. As the name suggests, chthonic deities were most often characterized by an association with the underworld.[189] These associations included Hades and Persephone, rulers of the dead, Hermes, the messenger and guide between worlds, and deities such as the Furies, the bringers of death to individuals who have dishonored them (or others).[190] Because of this association, chthonic gods were some of the most feared deities throughout the ancient Greek world, with the Kabeiroi being no exception.[191]

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[186] The sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace is sometimes referred to in both primary and literary sources as a location of Kabeirian deities, but no material sources have been found here *in situ* that reflect a sanctuary at this location. On the cult location of the Kabeirioi in Thebes, see: Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 112; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 72, 252, 254; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281-283.

[187] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 112.

[188] The Kabeiroi of Lemnos included the worship of three Kabeiroi and three Kabeirid nymphs instead of only two deities at Thebes in conjunction with Hephaistos: Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 112.

[189] Cf. Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 252-254; Eidinow and Kindt, *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, 355-267; Nikolas Dimakis, "Ancient Greek Deathscapes," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage* Studies 3, no. 1 (2015), 32-33; Arthur Fairbanks, "The Chthonic Gods of Greek Religion," *The American Journal of Philology* 21, no. 3 (1900), 259.

[190] Cf. Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 81, 283-287; S. Scullion, "Olympian and Chthonian," *Classical Antiquity* 13 (1994): 75–119.

[191] The line between the Olympian and the Chthonic gods was not always a clear distinction in the ancient world, as many Olympic gods had chthonic associations and titles. Modern scholars, such as Walter Burkert and Robert Parker, use this broad understanding of the chthonic deities, allowing it to remain a flexible term. This is in contrast to previous historians, such as Arthur Fairbanks, who limited this designation to those divine figures that were associated with souls in the underworld; cf. Nikolas Dimakis, "Ancient Greek Deathscapes," 32-33; Arthur Fairbanks, "The Chthonic Gods of Greek Religion," 259; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 252-254; Eidinow and Kindt,

The two chthonic deities worshiped at the Kabeirion of Thebes were Kabeiros, or "Lord," and Pais, "Son."[192] Kabeiros was an older divine entity, shown on some Kabeirian *skyphoi* as an older, bearded man who is reclining and enjoying a cup of wine.[193] Pais, his youthful companion, was shown as young boy, serving wine to the older, bearded man. In combination, they are known as the Kabeiroi: two deities under the plural name of the elder. Though the exact nature and origin of these gods is not well known, their foundation story is mentioned by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*. Pausanias states that the rites practiced for the Kabeiroi in Thebes were given by Demeter to a local population of men known as the Kabeiraians, from which she chose a father and a son to gift her secret rites. Yet, Pausanias refuses to describe the deities that were worshipped at this location, begging understanding from his reader for his silence.[194]

Pausanias's aversion to describing the rites hints at this sanctuary's possible status as a mystery cult. Like the Thesmophoria, the rites held here were secretive, revealed only to those who were initiated into the cult at the sanctuary. Unlike the Thesmophoria, though, mystery cults focused on individuals and their relationship with the divine rather than the relationship between the community and the divine. The initiation in a mystery religion ensured that this connection remained more private and often offered the individual some insight to an "eternal truth" or assurance when it came to the afterlife.[195]

The mystery rites established at the Kabeirion may have originated from a different culture, as their name is not Greek in origin but possibly derived from the Semitic word *kabir* for

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The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion, 355-267. Pausanias expands on the Theban fear of the Kabeiroi: 9.25.8-10.

[192] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 122.

[193] Included in a published report of the finds at the Kabeirion: Wolters and Bruns, *Das Kabienheiligtum bei Theben* 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1940), pla. 44.1, summarized in Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 124.

[194] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.25.5.

[195] Cf. on mystery cults: Parker, *On Greek Religion*, Michael B. Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret* Cults (New York: Routledge, 2003); Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," xii; and Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 276-304.

"Lord" or "Mighty".[196] These rites may have come from a family group migrating into Thebes during the eighth or seventh centuries, originating from regions like Aeolis in Asia Minor.[197] Nonetheless, the beliefs surrounding the Kabeiroi became integrated into the local religious landscape of Thebes.[198]

This Chapter

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on Pausanias' description of the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi, which he claims he gained from talking with the Theban populace.[199] The sanctuary still stood during Pausanias' own time, and many new additions had been made, including a theater and buildings within the complex. Pausanias' stories may have been a combination of his own experience of the Kabeirion itself with those who participated in the rituals.

In addition to the literary evidence, I will use material evidence from the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi that is presently on display in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. By studying the *kantharoi*, *skyphoi*, potsherds or fragments of past two types of pottery, and other items found largely at the archaeological site of the Kabeirion, I explore the nature of the sanctuary, those who would have worshiped here, and what rites they may have been performing to worship the deities residing at this sanctuary. Although the Kabeiroi were frightening chthonic deities, the material evidence suggests the practice of rites that were anything but grim.

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[196] This interpretation of the title originated with the classicist Joseph Justus Scaliger and has largely been accepted by scholars since then; Cf. Jan Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 47, n. 153; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi,"138, n. 2; Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia 2: BICS* Supplement 38.2 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1986), 96 n. 4.
[197] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 112-113; Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 47; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 280.
[198] Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 72; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi, 112.
[199] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.6.

Written Evidence: Pausanias and the Kabeiroi

The single most instructive literary primary source on the Kabeiroi in Thebes is the writings of Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*. The Thebans provided information to Pausanias regarding the sanctuary's location, its establishment, and the nature of the divinities that inhabited it. These divinities remain respected even in the time of Pausanias. He records the stories told by the Thebans of the consequences that come to those individuals who attempt to disturb the holy ground.[200]

According to the oral histories of the Thebans, as recorded by Pausanias, the location of the sanctuary outside of Thebes was once a city populated by individuals known as the Kabeiroi:

> They say that once there was in this place a city, with inhabitants called Kabeiri; and that Demeter came to know Prometheus, one of the Kabeiri, and Aetnaelis his son, and entrusted something to their keeping."[201]

Among the people lived a man and his son, Prometheus and Aetnaios, who were chosen by Demeter Kabeiraia to whom she presented secretive rites, establishing a religious practice at this location.[202] Pausanias clearly states in his first reference that the rites at Thebes were practiced to the two gods as well as the "Mother."[203] Throughout the years, the inhabitants of this city were dispersed, spreading the mysterious rites elsewhere. The rites were returned, however, to their original sanctuary, the Kabeirion, by survivors, says Pausanias. Once the rites were re-established, worshipers were instructed to pay homage to a woman named Pelarge, who had successfully instituted the rites at a location known as Alexiarous.[204] The mystery rites

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[200] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.25.5 – 9.26.1.
[201] Pausanias, 9.25.6.
[202] Pausanias, *Description of Greece,* 9.25.5; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281; Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes*, 200.
[203] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.5.
[204] This location is lost to us today, as it is not the same site we are aware of today. See: Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 362; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 134. They were instructed to do this by the Oracle at Dodona, and the sacrificed consisted of a pregnant animal victim, see: Pausanias, *Description* of Greece, 9.25.7.

performed at the sanctuary at Thebes, including its homage to Pelarge, were to the Kabeiroi, the divine figures Kabeiros and Pais, under the cultic authority of Kabeirian Demeter and Kore/Persephone.[205]

According to Pausanias, the Thebans passed on stories not only about the sanctuary's origins but also regarding the ongoing protection of the holy grounds and its rites. A large part of this narrative includes the consequences of dishonoring the chthonic gods in various ways. For example, Pausanias states that there had been individuals who attempted to mimic the rites of the Kabeiroi in other locations and thus faced punishment by the Kabeiroi themselves.[206] Pausanias says that the Thebans also told him that soldiers of Xerxes in the sixth century BCE were driven mad after they had disturbed the site, and they ended their own lives by jumping from the cliffs into the sea.[207] Similarly, the soldiers of Macedon, after Alexander's conquest of Thebes in 335 BCE, had entered the sanctuary, and were immediately struck down by lightning.[208]

This is essential to understanding the significance of the Kabeirion in Thebes over time. The Thebans, according to Pausanias, still lived in fear of the consequences that befell those who disrespected the Kabeiroi. While Pausanias simply refers to the half-statue at the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros and the bronze shields that was said to exist in its stores and tells no further stories, he is clear that the Kabeiroi, on the other hand, still held a compelling presence on the Theban landscape and its people.[209] Nothing demonstrates this more than the fact that he swears himself to silence on the nature of the Kabeiroi themselves and the rites that were practiced in their honor: "I must ask the curious to forgive me if I keep silence as to who the

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[205] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.5-6.
[206] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.8.
[207] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.9
[208] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.10.
[209] Pausanias acts as the central reference for this site in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes: Wall text, *The Sanctuary of the Kabiroi,* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

Kabeiri are, and what is the nature of the ritual performed in honor of them and of the Mother."[210]

Material Evidence for the Kabeiroi at Thebes

The votive offerings associated with the Theban Kabeirion on display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes are almost exclusively vessels, with some figurines and toys, largely found at the site of the sanctuary. The collection consists of votive offerings, including two black-glazed *kantharoi*, two cups, six *skyphoi*, *skyphoi* sherds, spinning tops, and animal figurines, all dating between during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. One other item, called a nuptial *lebes*, is included in the collection, yet is was found as a grave good not on site but in the Kabeirion valley. These votive offerings would have been functional in a ritualistic setting, but it is their dedications and their decorations that provide the most significant amount of information with regards to the rites practiced here.

The Sanctuary and its Deities

The site of the Kabeirion at Thebes is located five miles to the west of the city, situated in a valley with a stream on its own western border.[211] The sanctuary experienced multiple phases of construction, with the earliest construction being dated around the late archaic period, or the 6th century BCE, and the

Figure 3.1 The Cavea of the Kabeirion. Photo Credits: Dr. Glenn Bugh.

[210] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.5.
[211] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 115.

latest occurring in the first century CE.[212] Additional votive offerings found at the Kabeirion, not shown in the collection currently on display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, date worship at the site to at least one or two centuries before there were any permanent structures were built at this location.[213] During the Classical age, the sanctuary consisted of four *tholoi*, laid out from north to south in haphazard pattern. Two of these *tholoi,* the lower and middle, are the oldest on the site. One rectangular *tholos* was added and the waters of a neighboring stream were channeled underground down the middle of the site.[214] Many of the votive offerings were found in the sacrificial pits, one located at the north of the site and the other on the opposite side of the *tholoi*.

According to the significant amount of *kantharoi* and *skyphoi* in the material evidence, wine appears to have been a central part of the rites conducted at the Kabeirion. It is not clear from the vessels exactly why the wine is essential to the Kabeiroi, but depictions of the eldest god, Kabiros, on *skyphoi* in other museums, such as a sherd of a Kabirian *skyphos* depicting the god Kabiros in a reclining position and Pais serving wine from the Kabeirion in 500 BCE housed at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, suggest that Kabiros is often modeled on Dionysos.[215] These s*kyphoi* have been housed in various museums due to the various digs that have occurred at this site over the past two centuries. *Kantharoi* and *skyphoi* were used in many ritualistic activities in the ancient worlds; here, on items found at the site of the Kabeirion, the vessels are specifically associated with Kabiros and his perceived nature as a deity.

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[212] Most of these builds occurred during times of peace and prosperity of Thebes, see: Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126.
[213] P. Roesch, "Appendix: Epigraphica*," Teiresias* 15 (1985), E. 88. 29; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126.
[214] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi, 126.
[215] Object label, *Sherd of Kabirian skyphos depicting god Kabiros in reclining position and Pais serving wine. From Kabirion, 500 BC.* National Archaeological Museum, Athens; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 122-125; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281.

A fifth century BCE terracotta *kantharos* with a black glaze was found at the sanctuary as a votive offering (Fig. 3.2). This *kantharos* is the only one of its kind currently on display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, with an inscription reading "KABIRO," which means "to Kabiros" (a dative form of the name).[216] Such a direct dedication solidifies Kabiros' position as the more primary deity worshiped during the mystery rites held at the sanctuary. Further, the breadth of the collection from the Kabeirion supports the possibility that drinking was a central aspect of the initiation rites performed at this sanctuary in honor of Kabiros. The remaining vessels found at the archaeological site of the Kabeirion vary by color, size, and shape; however, they were all associated with the drinking of wine.

Figure 3.2 *Black-glaze kantharos with incised inscription "KABIRO" (to Kabiros), 5th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.*

Figure 3.3 *Black-glaze kantharos with inscription "ΗΙΑΡΟΣ " (sacred), 5th c. BCE and Black-glaze small handleless skyphos, 4th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece*

Another black-glazed *kantharos* from the Kabeirion simply has "ΗΙΑΡΟΣ" or "sacred" inscribed across the front (Fig. 3.3). Although an aversion to using a deity's title does not appear to apply at the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi, it is apparent that a dedicator offering this *kantharos* to the sanctuary felt the need to distinguish his offering while not calling the deities by name. In

[216] Object label, *Votive offerings from the sanctuary of the Kabiroi in Thebes,* Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

his overview of the archaeological site, Albert Schachter argues that vessels that only have "ΗΙΑΡΟΣ" inscribed across the front suggest that these deities were considered to be attendant *daimones*, or less than gods.[217] This distinction may fit well with their association with chthonic deities, which include figures such as the Furies, but it also supports the position of Kabiros and Pais under the umbrella of Demeter's cult.

Figure 3.4 *One-handled cup, 4th c. BCE, and Kantharos shaped cup cup, mid-4th c. BCE.* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

Three terracotta cups (Fig. 3.2 & 3.4) were left uninscribed as well as all five *skyphoi* present in the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes (Fig. 3.5, 3.6, 3.10). Although lacking a dedicatory inscription, the Kabeirian terracotta *skyphoi* in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes all are decorated, some with scenes from rituals while others are simply ornamented with natural element patterns and geometric designs. Two of the 4th century BCE *skyphoi* (Fig. 3.5) depict ivy leaves and olives leaves encircling the body of their vessels. These natural elements are closely associated with the sacred groves dedicated to various deities across the Greek world, such as the Furies and the chthonic gods at Orchomenos, but the vines and leaves also have specific associations with Dionysos, who is also a patron of vegetation.[218]

Figure 3.5 Kabirian skyphoi with decorations of dots, olive leaves, and ivy leaves, 4th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

[217] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126.
[218] Examples of these grove includes the Kabeirion as well as a sanctuary in Orchomenos, about 31 miles northwest of Thebes. There were countless sacred groves on the landscape of Ancient Greece; Sources on Dionysos as patron of vegetation. See: Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 123.

The natural elements presented on *skyphoi* in the context of the Theban Kabeirion suggest that fertility was also an important feature of this cult. This feature is not surprising due to the links of the Kabeiroi with Dionysos and Demeter, two deities known for their association with fertility rites. This focus on the natural falls directly in line with Kabiros' and Pais' positions as chthonic deities under Demeter. They are associated with the growth of new life and the celebration of fertility. Yet, as chthonic deity, they are also fierce, mysterious powers associated with the dead.

Figure 3.6 Detail of a large Kabirian skyphos. Caricature scene of a symposium on one side and two birds on the other, 4th quarter of 5th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

The natural elements and the fertility rites are directly intertwined on a large Kabeirian *skyphos* found at the sanctuary (Fig. 3.6). The fifth century BCE vessel depicts vines along the top of the vessel bearing fruit that significantly resemble the male reproductive organ. Under the shelter of the vines are three cartoon-like figures: a nude female playing a flute, a male standing behind her to the left, and another male lounging to the right. The figures and their surroundings represent fertility and risqué sexual acts through these caricatured characters, suggesting that the artistic works are based in comedy.[219]

The depiction of fertility, more particularly sexuality, on this *skyphos* differs significantly from those depictions associated the festival of the Thesmophoria in Thebes. Even though fertility was a central aspect in both rites, the statuettes at the location of the Thesmophoria are much more subtle in their references to the goddess they serve. Here, the focus is on sexually explicit activity and portraying those figures in a way that might have provoked humor.

[219] Erin Louisa Thompson, "Images of Ritual Mockery on Greek Vases," Phd diss. (Columbia University, 2008), 115-117; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 283.

Who participated in the rites of the Kabeiroi at Thebes?

The participants in the rites of the Kabeiroi at Thebes seem to be varied, unlike those associated with the Thesmophoria, which included only free married women. The collection of material goods includes 5th and 4th century BCE *skyphoi* that depict both men and women taking part in different aspects of the rites. Further items, such as undated spinning tops, suggest the sanctuary may have had an additional role in the lives of the Theban children, possibly only boys, beyond the primary rites to Kabiros.

The fourth century BCE black-figure nuptial *lebes*, included in the Kabeiroi section of the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, depicts women in the process of gathering a type of vegetation, possibly olive branches (Fig. 3.7). Although the *lebes*, a grave good, was not found at the archaeological site of the Kabeirion, the museum designated this *lebes* as a representation of female initiates to the Mysteries of the Kabeiroi.[220] The branches which the women are holding would may have been used to create crowns and other ornamentations, as suggested by their own heads as well as from the depictions present on potsherds found at the site of the Kabeirion. The same wreaths are also present on the heads of the female flautist depicted on the large Kabeirian *skyphos* mentioned earlier and the *skyphoi* sherds (Fig. 3.6, 3.8, & 3.12) in the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Only depictions of female initiates are currently on display in the items at the museum's collection; however, depictions of male

Figure 3.7 *Nuptial lebes with representation of female worshippers, deposited as a grave good, 4th c. BCE.* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

[220] Wall text, *The Sanctuary of the Kabiroi,* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes, Thiva, Greece.

initiates wearing the headbands as well as Kabiros, himself, have been found at the site of the sanctuary.[221] This further suggests that personal adornment with wreaths was a part of the rites for all initiates and participants within the rites practiced here.

The woman on the right on the *lebes* is also carrying other fruits and a *lekythos*, possibly containing olive oil. *Lekythoi* were oil vessels, and they were often made specifically for placement within the grave.[222] Therefore, the depiction of the woman carrying a lekythos may refer to funerary rites due to its location at a grave site, as well as the relationship of the chthonic deities with death.

Figure 3.8 Sherds of Kabirian skyphoi depicting female flute-players, 4th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

In the museum's collection on display, women were also depicted three times as musicians in the rites to the Kabeiroi, on the black-figure *skyphos* previously mentioned (Fig 3.6), and two sherds of Kabeirian *skyphoi* (Fig 3.8). In these scenes, women were depicted as flute players in varying scenes, whether in possible procession or in the midst of men at a symposium. No sherd nor other votive offerings associated with the Kabeirion show male flute-players. The museum does house, however, sherds that depict male flute-players, such as from the sanctuary of Herakles in Thebes.[223]

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[221] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 124-125; P. Wolters and G. Bruns, *Das Kabirenheiligtum bei Theben* 1, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1940), pla. 44.1, fig. 5.
[222] The most famous of the lekythoi are the white lekythoi found in Athens. These lekythoi were often found as grave goods and they depict funerary rites on them, see: John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Lekythoi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[223] Vassilis Aravantinos, *The Archaeological Museum of Thebes* (Athens, Greece: John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, 2010), 151.

If the pieces of material evidence which we have already seen are understood to depict the rites performed at the sanctuary, they suggest that there were specific roles set for women and men. The roles of the women would have included preparation of ritualistic materials, the creation of ritualistic adornments, such as crowns, and musical entertainment. The roles of the men, in comparison, seems to have been mainly enjoying the festivities, as seen in the black-figure Kabeirian *skyphos* (Fig. 3.6 & 3.15). One 5th century BCE sherd in this collection depicts a man holding a branch and guiding a donkey, suggesting that men may have had some role in the preparation for the rites (Fig. 3.9).

Figure 3.9 *Man and ass in vineyard, late 5th c. BCE.* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

Another 5th century BCE black-figure *skyphos* found at the sanctuary depicts worshippers in a procession around the body of the vase following a horse (Fig. 3.10). Although they are significantly caricatured, the individuals appear to be an elderly man, an older woman, and an adolescent boy. This *skyphos* might indicate the varied age range and gender of individuals who were eligible to be initiated into the Mysteries performed at this location. It is also possible that this *skyphos* represents a comedic scene, due to the caricaturizing of the characters. Such a depiction of the figures of this religious practice suggests the intention

Figure 3.10 Kabirian skyphos depicting a procession of worshippers, 4th quarter of 5th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

of humor in these scenes as well as the incorporation of humor into the rites of the Kabeiroi as a whole.[224]

In this procession, the young boy is the only one carrying any type of offering. It is possible that his ownership of an offering plus the fact that spinning tops were found at the site may be related to rites of passage of youth or puberty initiation practices completed in honor of the wine-bearer, Pais, the younger deity worshiped here. The two spinning tops in the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes could have been given to the sanctuary with Pais in mind (Fig. 3.11).[225] The presence of puberty initiation rites would have celebrated the transition of a child to an adult, and the initiations throughout the ancient Greek world usually consisted of the child bringing their toys or childhood clothing the altars of the gods in order to go forward with their divine approval and the approval of the surrounding community.[226] The spinning tops could very well be a remnant of the toys which were brought to the sanctuary during an initiation ceremony.

Figure 3.11 Stone and marble models of spinning top. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

How did they worship?

Since processions were standard parts of religious festivals, the procession on the 5th century BCE *skyphos* (Fig. 3.10) is one of the most easily identified aspects of the rites that

[224] Erin Louisa Thompson, "Images of Ritual Mockery on Greek Vases," 13; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 283.
[225] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281.
[226] Cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 261-261.

would have taken place here.[227] Nonetheless, the final pieces of the collection from the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, included potsherds, decorated *skyphoi*, and figurines, can tell us about certain aspects of the rites that would have taken place at the Mysteries.

Figure 3.12 Sherds of a Kabirian skyphoi: ass in vineyard, pygmy fighting a crane, 4th c. BCE, The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

Most of the vessels found in the sanctuary were found in pieces, known as potsherds. The large deposits of potsherds found at the site suggests that this breakage was an intentional part of the rites to the Kabeiroi (Fig. 3.8, 3.9, 3.12). In the collection at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, alone, there are a total of twelve potsherds, making up almost a third of the collection.

Burkert posits that the Theban Kabeirian *skyphoi*, including those present as whole in the collection as well as those that are now only sherds, were used once to carry libations or other liquids during the rituals, after which they were broken and left in deposits around the sanctuary or in the sacrificial pits.[228] The purpose of the breaking of the pots is unclear. This breakage of ritualistic vessels is also interesting due to the possibility that these *skyphoi* were made within the walls of the sanctuary at Thebes.[229]

In addition to the potential purposeful breaking of pots, there were central ritual sacrifices made at the mysteries conducted here. Like the Thesmophoria, the rites here may have included the sacrifice of boars or pigs. This is suggested by the presence of a 4th century BCE terracotta

[227] Cf. Jana Kubatzki, "Processions and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece: Some Iconographical Considerations," *Approaching the Sacred. Pilgrimage in Historical and Intercultural Perspective*, vol. 49 (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2018): 129-157; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 55, 99-102; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 135.
[228] Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 130-132; Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 252-254; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 282.
[229] Parker, *On Greek Religion*, 252; Schachter, *Cults*, vol. 2, 110.

boar figurine included in the animal figurines that were deposited at the sanctuary (Fig. 3.13).

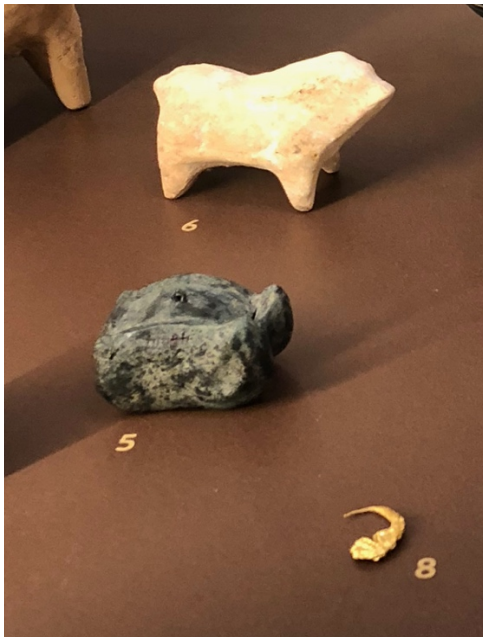

Figure 3.13 *Boar figurine, 4th c. BCE, Bronze model of bovine talus bone, and Gold earring, 3rd c. BCE.* The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

Other votive offerings found at the site of the Kabeirion include a ram and a model of a talus bone from a cow as well (3.14).

In the rites to the Kabeiroi at Thebes, the bull might have played a significant role, possibly as the subject of the primary sacrifice. Although it is not reflected in this collection on display, bull figurines are the most numerous finds in relation to the sanctuaries of the Kabeiroi at both Thebes and Lemnos.[230] Here, in the Archaeological Museum of Thebes, the animal is simply represented by a singular model of a bovine talus bone (3.13). Walter Burkert believed that these remains suggested that the sacrifice of a bull was the central event of the rites.[231] Schachter posits that the bulls says less about the sanctuary to the Kabeiroi and its divine associations and more about those who dedicated the figurines. As bulls were expensive in the ancient world in addition to the large amount of land it took to raise them, the bull dedication of bull figurines could be seen as a symbol of the dedicator's wealth and status within the

Figure 3.14 Ram figurine, 4th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

[230] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 281; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126-127.
[231] F. T. Van Straten, *Hiera Kala: Images of Animal Sacrifice in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 1995), 54-55; Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126-127.

community.[232] Even though bull figurines are not presently on display in the collection at the Theban Museum, there are bovine figures and statuettes associated with this sanctuary housed in museum collections elsewhere.[233]

It is also worth noting that the representations of boars and rams are items that have been found at sanctuaries to other gods throughout Boeotia**.** The models are understood to represent the animals that would have been sacrificed within the local ceremony. It is difficult to assign, however, particular meaning to each ritualistic item without knowing the rites that took place inside the sanctuary or the myths on which the rites build their foundations. It is possible that the boars and the ram reflect the Mother, Kabeirian Demeter, as the founder of the cult due to her close ties with these particular animals.

The symposium suggests an occasion that was significantly joyous and imbued with humor. As mentioned before, the caricaturizing of the individuals on the black-figure *skyphos* seem to denote rites that were intertwined with fertility, yet more Dionysian in their worship (Fig. 3.15). The symposium was an event in which wealthy men came together to drink wine and take part in lively discussions with one another, often accompanied by dancers, music, and other kinds of entertainment.[234] While the symposium was

Figure 3.15 Large Kabirian skyphos. Caricature scene of a symposium on one side and two birds on the other, 4th quarter of 5th c. BCE. The Archaeological Museum of Thebes. Thiva, Greece.

[232] Schachter references other collections, stating that over 54 percent of bronze figurines of animals found at Olympia were bulls, as were the majority of 570 animal figurines excavated at the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Syme on Crete, see: Schachter, "The Theban Kabiroi," 126.
[233] *Bronze Statuette of a Bull, late 6th century BC, inscribed with a dedication to the Kabiroi*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; *Votive Bull*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.
[234] Department of Greek and Roman Art. "The Symposium in Ancient Greece." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.

not specifically associated with Dionysos on every occasion, much of the material evidence, especially wine vessels, were decorated with representations of the god and his followers, including *maenads* and satyrs.[235] In addition, written sources reflect a connection between the event and the god, especially in Xenophon's *Symposium* written in the mid-fourth century BCE. In this work, the entire festivities are concluded with a celebration of the wedding between Dionysos and Ariadne.[236]

The symposium seemed to have been a central aspect of the rites practiced at the Kabeirion during the Classical age in Thebes. Such joy and frivolity in relation to fertility symbols functions in a different manner than the items found at the sanctuary of Demeter on the Kadmeia. While the women participants of the Thesmophoria were more restrained with intermittent joyous acts, in intense respect to the loss of Demeter and reconciliation with her daughter, the statuettes and figures associated with the festival of the Thesmophoria are much more realistic than the caricatured figures represented on the material evidence found at the Kabeirion.

These comedic caricatures, in combination with the Kabeiroi's roots with Demeter and Dionysos, also present the possibility that the participants took part in *aischrologia*, or the ritualistic process of insulting other and using suggestive language.[237] These acts took place in multiple festivals made to Demeter, particularly the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria.[238] The jokes and jeers amongst women and men had specific mythical ties to the goddess, Demeter and her interaction with Iambe. Due to the Kabeirion's foundation through

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[235] *Terracotta column-krater (bowl for mixing wine and water),ca. 550 B.C. Attributed to Lydos,* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
[236] Xenophon, *Symposium*, 9.1-9.7.
[237] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 282.
[238] Burkert, *Greek Religion,* 282; Dillon, *Girls and Women in the Classical Greek Religion,* 109, 113.

Demeter and the mystery shrouding the Kabeiroi, it is possible that the rites were a part of the *aischrologia* are at least partly associated with the goddess and her daughter and celebrated here at the Kabeirion.

Conclusion

The Kabeiroi were a significant part of the local religious practices at Thebes. While deities of the same name were worshipped in the location of Lemnos, it is apparent that the gods worshipped at Thebes were significantly different from the six divine figures and Hephaistos worshipped at Lemnos. The cults are similar, however, in a secondary attachment to a deity that was more central to the pantheon of Greek gods. While the cult at Lemnos was attached to Hephaistos, the foundation of the rites at Thebes was considered related to Kabeirian Demeter, as told by Pausanias. The Kabeiroi were very much like the goddess, with a chthonic nature and a focus on the natural fertility of the earth. These Olympian ties continue to the celebration of wine and vulgarity often attributed to Bacchic rites and their patron, Dionysos. Such ties complicated the origins and significance of the rites, but this did not affect the sanctuary's use and significance to the local Theban population.

The written evidence allows us to not only see the origin of the rites, but the way in which the gods were perceived. The Kabeiroi were feared and their sanctuary was held at the utmost respect. While the Thebans clung to stories of the gods' wrath in the second century CE, the Classical Thebans may have taken pleasure to participate in the Mysteries provided by Demeter and dedicated to the "Lord" and the "Son." Even Pausanias' refusal to expound on the nature and rites of the Kabeiroi suggests that he was able to find this information somehow, to which he reacted with a reverence for these gods that have affected his narrative. The way in

which gathered this particular information is unclear. It is possible that he was told by local Thebans, but his knowledge could also have been gained by his own participation at these rites, especially due to his own knowledge of the rites.[239]

The material evidence attempts to fill in the lacunae created in Pausanias' text. The items on display in the Archaeological Museum at Thebes can be pieced together to give a picture Kabeiroi through votive offerings and dedications. They emphasize the importance of the god Kabiros in comparison to his servant or son, Pais. They show a sanctuary that was well-developed and a story of the rites to those gods that is focused on wine, music, and dancing. These rites were similar to other mysteries of the ancient world, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, but they were specifically developed on the Theban landscape of religion. These rites were not Panhellenic like the Thesmophoria of Thebes, with specific local ties to gods and goddesses with their own rites. These rites created deposits of votive offerings and a story, passed on to Pausanias, that was all their own.

[239] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.25.5.

Conclusion

The religious landscape of Classical Thebes was much more than the temples and statues that scattered the physical grounds. It was a landscape described through the rich tradition of Greek tragedy and the literary sources of a Greek historian and traveler. The authors of these sources, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Xenophon, and Pausanias, provide a useful, yet limited, view of Theban religion as it was practiced on the ground. While they show the ways in which the Thebans may have served their gods, they fail to show the particular religious practices of the individuals living and worshipping in Classical Thebes. We can build on and expand the literary sources through the use of the material evidence, largely consisting of votive offerings from the sites of the Thesmophorion and the Kabeirion, found on display at the Archaeological Museum of Thebes. These two sites were exceptional on the Theban religious landscape in that they stand apart from the religious practices of all individuals in Thebes.

The plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus provide a view of Theban religion from the outside. Sophocles' Oedipus play, especially *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*, focus on the practice of religion through a deep loyalty to the gods, characterized by devotion even in the face of death. They revolve around rites to the gods central to their stories, such as Apollo and his prophecies surrounding the life of Oedipus and his people. Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* provided a model of group prayer, and suggests that, though religious practice could vary, there were certain aspects of religious practice that were absolutely unacceptable to the gods. Such acts, as the fevered calling to the gods in panic, could push them further away than garner their favor. In addition, the rites practiced by the characters were extremely varied, from Teiresias reading the signs of the gods, to local festivals to honor the gods as well as Oedipus, and the quiet prayer of

Iocaste for her husband. These dramatic works give indications of the religious experiences of men and women throughout the royal family and the *polis*.

The Theban Thesmophoria expands the narrative of women's religious practice within the bounds of the single *polis*. While women had limited rights throughout the *poleis* of Greece, women participants were provided opportunities during the days of the Thesmophoria that allowed them to move past the constraints of their gender in order to serve the goddess, Demeter. They were able to commune together, worship away from the household of their families without an escort, and they would be able to participate in all aspects of the festival without male assistance. For a few days, the women of Thebes were able to inhabit the Kadmeia and take the place of the governing body of men. The women participants, young and old, became the central practitioners of the rites to Demeter and her daughter, Kore/Persephone. It also was during their roles during the Thesmophoria that they could share their experience as daughters, wives, and mothers. The women of Thebes were able to relate to the happiness and sadness of the goddess and her daughter during this time, and they could use their stories to make sense of the sacrifices and hardships which they had endured throughout their own lives. These women could insure that the city would remain fruitful in the coming year, not only in harvest but also in their own families and families throughout the community.

A study of the votive offerings at the Kabeirion provides a view of chthonic gods who existed outside the traditional religious pantheon. The Kabeiroi, possibly originating from Asian Minor, were gods brought into the area and incorporated into the Theban landscape. They were unique in their association with the goddess Demeter in Thebes and the elder god's possible relation to the god, Dionysos. The rites were kept a mystery, but the material evidence provides a picture of the varied participants who were eligible to attend. The multitude of decorated

kantharoi and *skyphoi* attest to the possibility that the rites in which the participants may have taken part contained drinking, dancing, and the playing of music, during which they would have worn headbands of branches. It is interesting to note the humorous tone created by artwork on the many of the vessels and sherds, as they present a view of the gods and the participants that is a direct opposite to the ways in which the Thebans considered these gods during their daily lives. Although the rites were full of joyous activities, the reputation for the Kabeiroi was their fierceness and their lack of mercy when it came to those individuals who dared cross their sacred boundaries unwelcomed. These rites were outside of the Thebes, but the secret rites of the initiates created a community, of sorts, all on its own.

The study of Theban religion in the Classical age presents a religious landscape that was remarkably varied, even within the boundaries of a single *polis*. As portrayed by the Theban tragedies, the men and women participants would have had the ability to practice their rites daily to the gods. The same women would have served Thebes by worshipping Demeter, and would have also reflected on their own experiences as daughters, wives, and mothers. Both Theban men and women could have ventured outside central duties to the *polis* by becoming initiates to the mysteries of the Kabeiroi, outside of the traditional pantheon as well as outside the Theban walls. The study of local Theban religion as a case study, through both the written and material sources, demonstrates that Greek religion was an experience of the ancient world which could create boundaries between certain sections of the community while simultaneously building up bonds between individuals based on experience and participation in religious rites. This study also serves as a reminder that ancient Greek religion operated on a variety of layers, some of which are apparent to us through different media, some of which will certainly remain opaque and mysterious. By the cross-pollination of evidence of different times and types, we can hope to

make our picture richer and our understanding on religious experience, ancient and modern, more nuanced and complex.

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