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DIRCE AT THEBES*

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In Boeotian Thebes, the simplest thirst for topographical detail will turn up a reference to Dirce. Whether depicted as a nymph, a spring, a river, or simply as flowing water, the name represents an integral, perhaps indispensable, part of the Theban landscape. But of course it is more than that. A narrative surrounds this watery place, telling of Theban kings and queens, of founding twins, and of odd and cruel tortures and torments. It is my goal in this article to understand these varying traditions surrounding Dirce by means of an examination of the interplay between mythic narratives and Theban topography.[1] Narratives of Dirce grow and develop in relation to the physical landscape of the city, but this relationship is seldom reducible to a one-to-one correlation of story and place. The early Greek tradition has much to say about Dirce, some of it contradictory. But superficial contradiction is the norm in this realm, and some sense can be made of what we have with careful attention to the changing contexts surrounding appearances of Dirce as they are expressed and understood in early Greek literature, and to the changing ways the city of Thebes is described in the Greek mythic tradition.[2]

* A version of this article was presented at the Fifth International Congress of Boeotian Studies, held in Thebes in September 2005; I am grateful for the comments I received during and after that pleasant event, especially from Albert Schachter, Angela Kühr, Stephanie Larson and Karine Mackowiak. Gary Knoppers, Mark Munn and Marica Tacconi also offered helpful criticism, as did several anonymous readers, all of whom deserve warm thanks. Any infelicities that remain are mine alone.

[1] Much recent scholarship on Greek myth has stressed the importance of context, both broadly cultural and specifically literary (most prominently R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece. The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge, 1994); see in addition the many influential studies by the French critics of ancient myth and culture such as J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (Sussex, 1980), and M. Detienne, *The Creation of Mythology*, trans. M. Cook (Chicago, 1986); the studies of myth of C. Calame are also strongly based in a contextual approach, as is F. Graf's widely read *Greek Mythology. An Introduction*, trans. T. Marier (Baltimore, 1993)). The present article is situated within this general trend, though I wish to focus here on the mechanics of a specific cluster of mythic details rather than on broad questions of meaning.

[2] Studies of Dirce are not abundant; many focus on the artistic tradition. See R. Unger, *Thebana paradoxa* (Halis, 1839); O. Jahn, 'Antiope und Dirke', *Archäologische Zeitung* 11 (1853), 65ff.; C. Boetticher, *Dirke als Quelle und Heroine* (Berlin, 1864); C. Dilthey, 'Schleifung der Dirke', *Archäologische Zeitung* 36 (1878), 43ff.; E. Bethe, 'Dirke', *RE* V (1905), 1169f.; A. Rumpf, 'Dirke', in *Concordia decennalis: Deutsche Italienforschungen* (Köln, 1941); E. Coughanowr, 'Dirce and the Sun's Course in Sophocles' *Antigone*', *CQ* 23 (1973), 22f.; F. Heger, 'Dirce', in

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The study of the Theban landscape has been dominated, for the most part, by topographers and archaeologists.[3] Yet especially in the case of a city whose early history is based more upon myth, or handed-down tradition, than verifiable history, conventional topography can only present a partial picture. To reconstruct the significance of specific places, or even the locations of specific events, one can read the ancient texts, and compare them with what we know about the archaeology of the city. But this approach easily obscures the complexity of our narrative evidence. For example, while we know that there was a shrine dedicated to Athena Onka on the Cadmeia (the central, elevated portion of ancient Thebes), and even where it might have been,[4] this tells us little about why Aeschylus named a gate the Onkaiai in *Seven Against Thebes*, or what it might have meant to do so for an Athenian spectator of that play in 467 BCE. This is not to say that the meaning of topographical specificity in a mythic context is irrecoverable; only that it must be understood within that mythic context, not as support or background for it. Dirce, sometimes a river, sometimes a spring, but also a heroine in her own right, offers an excellent opportunity to examine this 'mythic topography' of Thebes. The development of traditions surrounding the place and persona of Dirce connects the name to a specific space (that is, the topographic reality of the Theban city), but also to a narrative tradition that extends beyond Thebes to the heroic stories that served as the cultural *koine* of Greek myth.

LIMC (1986); O. Taplin, 'Narrative Variation in Vase-Painting and Tragedy: The Example of Dirce', *AK* 41 (1998), 33ff.; L. B. Joyce, 'Dirce Disrobed', *CA* 20 (2001), 221ff. On the importance of springs as features of landscape in Greek myth, see Buxton (n. 1), 109ff.

[3] See especially S. Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times* (Princeton, 1985) and earlier A. Keramopoullos, 'Thebaika', *AD* 3 (1917), 1ff., the most comprehensive studies, along with the discussions of P. W. Forchhammer, *Topographia Thebarum Heptapylarum* (Kiel, 1854); E. Fabricius, *Theben. Eine Untersuchung über die Topographie und Geschichte der Hauptstadt Böotiens* (Freiburg i.B., 1890); G. Soteriades, *Περί τῆς τοπογραφίας τῶν ἀρχαίων Θηβῶν* (Athens, 1914); F. Schober, 'Thebai. A. Topographie', *RE* V.A2 (1934), 1423ff.; R. Stillwell (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (Princeton, 1976); S. Symeonoglou, 'On the Topography of Prehistoric Thebes', *Teiresias, Supplement 2* (1979), 3ff.; J. M. Fossey, *Topography and Population of Ancient Boiotia*, vol. I (Chicago, 1988). Philologists of the early twentieth century who tackled aspects of the issue include U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'Die sieben Thore Thebens', *Hermes* 26 (1891), 191ff., and A. W. Gomme, 'The Literary Evidence for the Topography of Thebes', *BSA* 18 (1910), 29ff.; see recently brief but useful comments in P. E. Easterling, 'The Image of the *Polis* in Greek Tragedy', in M. H. Hansen (ed.), *The Imaginary Polis* (Copenhagen, 2005), and earlier D. W. Berman, '"Seven-Gated" Thebes and Narrative Topography in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*', *QUCC* 71 (2002), 73ff.

[4] See Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985), 130 and 185, though even here conjectures are based primarily on evidence from the literary tradition, making more than tentative conclusions dangerously circular.

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Topographers and classicists have studied the landscape of Thebes, with literature in hand, since at least Pausanias. Most ancient geographers and commentators, as well as modern scholars interested in the city of Cadmus, devote at least a paragraph or two and sometimes much more to the springs and waterways of Thebes.[5] The site of Thebes is well irrigated; aside from one main river that flows to the east of the Cadmeia (ancient Ismenus or Hismenus,[6] called now the river of Agios Ioannis or Agianni), numerous rivulets, flowing south to north, run towards the Theban plain. In addition, there are many springs in the hills and crags surrounding the Cadmeia itself, some of which are sources for these rivulets. At least since the time Pausanias visited the city in the second century CE the multiplicity of springs and streams, as well as the varied names associated with them, has caused confusion for those wishing to organize or catalogue these features of the landscape. Descriptions of the ancient city often include the Dirce spring, the springs of Ares and of 'Cadmos' foot', and the rivers Dirce, Strophia and Ismenus, to name the most prominent. The identification of specific topographical features with these names, however, is never clear cut.

My goal is less to sort out that confusion than to understand how a topographical feature of a place can come to gain so many varied associations as its, or her, story is reworked and refashioned. Our methodology must be clean; I shall examine here only references to Dirce that appear in primary sources, in the hopes of excluding the many suppositions and impositions of both ancient and modern commentators. Careful attention to meaning and context of the appearances of Dirce in the early Greek material helps us understand how the topography of early Thebes is written into traditional mythic narratives. As the mythic tradition evolved, a topographic feature that, in poetic texts, maintains only a vague connection to the actual landscape of Thebes develops meaning and associations that extend into

[5] Pausanias spreads his comments on rivers and springs in Thebes throughout his description of the city, 9.8–9.18 and 9.23–9.25; Dirce is mentioned only in 9.25.3. The pseudo-Plutarchian *De Fluviis* also discusses rivers and streams in Thebes in some detail. Scholars in the modern era who treat aquatic features specifically include Unger (n. 2), 81ff. (81–103 specifically on Dirce), Forchhammer (n. 3), 7f.; Soteriades (n. 3), 17f. and 18 n. 1. Keramopoullos (n. 3) treats the rivers and springs primarily within his discussion of Pausanias' description of the city; see especially 426–34 on Dirce. Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985) follows Keramopoullos' lead.

[6] For the breathing, see D. J. Mastronarde (ed.), *Euripides. Phoenissae* (Cambridge, 1994), 182f. and G. O. Hutchinson (ed.), *Aeschylus. Seven Against Thebes* (Oxford, 1985), 87, both with further references. Both print the breathing as rough. Mastronarde notes that the Boiotian dialect retained the rough breathing until around 350. I print 'Ismenus' in translation throughout this article solely for the sake of consistency.

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the realm of heroic narrative, ultimately to reconnect with the mythic traditions and even topography of the city in new ways.[7]

The earliest references to Dirce in the Greek tradition are, perhaps surprisingly, post-Homeric. While it would seem natural that, if the epic *Thebaid* or the Hesiodic *Eoiai* survived, the name would figure in those works in some way, it does not appear in the fragments we have. In Pindar, as well as in Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dirce appears as a toponym, referring usually, it seems, to a river or spring; in fact there may be some reason to understand the name as an appellative of running water within either river or spring. There is no mention in these poets of what I shall call below the 'heroine narrative' of Dirce: no cruel queen, no husband Lycus, no Amphion or Zethus.

Of course, Theban topography and lore make occasional appearances in the songs of Pindar, Thebes' most famous native poet. In the victory odes, we find Dirce or words created from the name mentioned five times in what survives to us (*Ol.* 10.85; *Pyth.* 9.88; *Isthm.* 1.29, 6.74 and 8.20). Not all of these instances are certifiably earlier than the first mention of Dirce in extant tragedy (twice in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*; see below), but they comprise some of the earliest uses of the name, and show some consistency in reference.

Olympian 10, and *Isthmian* 1, 6 and 8, all use forms of the proper name *Δίρκα*.[8] In each case, it is clear that Pindar uses the name in reference to a topographical feature of the city.[9] In the tenth *Olympian*, the name is used in the dative with the preposition *παρά* ('beside') and the epithet *εὐκλής* ('famous'), and refers metonymically to the city of Thebes as a whole (10.85). Here, while there is no

[7] F. I. Zeitlin, 'Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama', in J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (Princeton, 1990), 130–67 offers a strong case for understanding representations of Thebes on the Athenian tragic stage as coloured by a variety of specifically Athenian concerns; Thebes becomes an alter-Athens where social and cultural issues problematic to the Athenian audience can find expression. With Zeitlin's argument in mind, I shall always attend to the provenance of representations of Thebes in what follows. Pindaric and tragic representations of Dirce can present a modest test case for Zeitlin's claims.

[8] All quotations of Greek are from standard editions as listed in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* unless otherwise noted. *Olympian* 10 seems certainly to have been composed soon after the victory it celebrates in 476 (see W. J. Verdenius, *Commentaries on Pindar* [Leiden, 1988], 53); for *Isthmian* 1, J. B. Bury, *The Isthmian Odes of Pindar* (London, 1892), 2 cites a date proposed by Mezger of 457; *Isthmian* 6 may also have been performed in the mid-450s (Bury, 120); *Isthmian* 8 is of uncertain date, but seems likely to have been early, perhaps performed soon after the battle of Plataea (see C. Carey, *A Commentary on Five Odes of Pindar* [New York, 1981], 184).

[9] Three of these instances (*Ol.* 10, *Isthm.* 6 and *Isthm.* 8) are cited by Heger (n. 2) as referring solely to Dirce as a spring- or river-heroine, but it should be clear from the discussion to follow that the reference is primarily to topography in these odes.

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specific locational reference, the preposition with the dative strongly implies that a particular location is imagined.[10] This usage is paralleled by two of the examples from the *Isthmian* odes: in *Isthmian* 1, we have an image of athletes winning prizes ῥεέθροισι . . . Δίρκας ('by the streams of Dirce', 1.29), and in 8, Zeus establishes the nymph Thebe παρὰ καλλιρόῳ Δίρκᾳ ('beside lovely-flowing Dirce', 8.19–20). These phrases are clearly meant to invoke the image of a water feature on the Theban landscape. *Isthmian* 6 offers the fullest picture (6.74–5):

πίσω σφε Δίρκας ἁγνὸν ὕ-
δωρ, τὸ βαθύζωνοι κόραι
χρυσοπέπλου Μναμοσύνας ἀνέτει-
λαν παρ' εὐτειχέσιν Κάδμου πύλαις.

I shall cause them to drink the sacred water of Dirce, which the deep-girdled maidens of golden-robed Memory sent forth beside the well-built gates of Cadmus.[11]

As in the two previous Isthmian passages, and arguably in *Olympian* 10, Dirce here is a topographic feature of Thebes. Pindar represents Dirce as supplying water that the Muses, daughters of Memory, have made flow from the earth beside Thebes' famous gates. The image is striking in several ways. Though it is not described with the specific vocabulary of a spring – an important distinction to keep in mind as we examine later representations – Dirce becomes a metaphorical source, and is connected directly to the Muses. It is Thebes' source of water, but also Pindar's own source of inspiration. In the passage, Dirce is not simply metonymic for the city, as in *Olympian* 10, but becomes Thebes' own Pieirian spring. We have simultaneously topographical metonymy and thematic metaphor: Dirce for Thebes and Dirce for spring of the Muses. The image of Dirce as source of both water and inspiration is not confined to Pindar, as we shall see. But in this original instance it carries meaning that would be lessened if composed by another poet. Thebes' greatest poet here elevates Dirce to a symbol representing his poetry and its power, a Theban source of inspiration divinely inspired by the 'maidens of Memory'. The source-analogy the passage evokes is an early association of Dirce with qualities of a spring. Though Pindar never explicitly represents Dirce

[10] The locational force of παρά with the dative is clear; see *LSJ* s.v. B. Though the preposition used this way need not imply location next to something linear, it is often used of beaches and rivers in Homer (*LSJ* s.v. B.I.).

[11] Translations here and throughout are my own.

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as an actual spring, the figuration here lays the foundation for portrayals of Dirce that move beyond the allusive to the more concretely topographical.

In addition to this typically Pindaric layering of meaning, there is an added topographic detail in this passage. The Muses made the water of Dirce rush forth beside the well-built gates of Cadmus. Pindar locates the water feature near the famous walls of Thebes. We cannot draw a map from this type of poetic reference, but the detail is far from irrelevant. Dirce could just as easily have been depicted as running through the Theban plain, or from a nearby mountain. The topographic specificity gains force when we recognize the fact that Pindar himself must have been intimately familiar with his native city. Here Dirce is localized, but not located, near the city's renowned fortifications.[12]

All the Pindaric passages can, in fact, be understood as referring to flowing water, whether in a spring or river.[13] It is of course possible that the name referred at some point not to a distinct topographical feature but to a water nymph, indwelling in a stream or spring that bears her name. While the Pindaric references do not make this explicit, such an explanation does not do violence to the passages we have – especially those characterizing the water as 'Dircaean' – and fits well with several passages from tragedy I will discuss shortly. Our general understanding of early Greek local lore and religion might point to such an explanation, but it can be nothing more than speculative based on the evidence we have.[14] What we can conclude from the Pindaric passages is clear enough: there is no (at least explicitly told) *narrative* of Dirce in Pindar. If there is a goddess or heroine by the name, we know only that she is the namesake of a watery feature,

[12] The tradition of Dirce as situated beside gates of Thebes' famous walls begins here (if it was not present in the epic *Thebaid*); the modern name of the spring associated with Dirce is *Παραπόρτι*, which evokes a location along the walls. See below. On mythic topography and the walls and gates of Thebes, see Berman (n. 3).

[13] The last appearance of Dirce in Pindar is in *Pythian* 9, an ode most likely performed in 474, which refers to 'Dircaean waters' (*Διρκαίων ὑδάτων*, 9.88; the full passage [9.87f.] reads *κωφὸς ἀνήρ τις, ὅς Ἡρακλεῖ στόμα μὴ περιβάλλει, / μηδὲ Διρκαίων ὑδάτων ἀὲ μέμναται, τά νιν θρέψαντο καὶ Ἰφικλέα* 'A man is dumb, who does not cast his words about Heracles, nor remembers always Dircaean waters, which nourished him and Iphicles'). While this is not a use of the proper name *per se*, it functions in a similar way to the passages discussed above. The substance is the same in *Isthmian* 6: *Δίρκας ὕδωρ* and *Διρκαία ὕδατα* have equivalent force.

[14] Heger (n. 2), 635 identifies three of the Pindaric passages as representing 'die Tradition von D.[irke] als reiner Quell- oder Flußheroine' (*Isthm.* 6 and 8 and *Ol.* 10). I see no reason why he does not include *Isthm.* 1, as well, and even *Pyth.* 9. J. Larson, *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore* (Oxford, 2001), 6f. argues that Dirce is primarily a heroine, not a nymph, but calls her a 'hybrid type', with characteristics of both.

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or perhaps the waters flowing within such a feature, that Pindar mentions occasionally as a prominent location in his native city. Pindar appears to locate this near the walls of the city, but this must not be taken too literally.[15]

Our survey of early uses of the name now leaves lyric and enters the tragic corpus, and moves from Thebes to Athens. Aeschylus supplies us with three references to Dirce, two in *Seven Against Thebes* (273 and 308) and one in a fragment of unknown provenance (347 Radt). The *Seven* is an early play, produced in Athens in 467, roughly contemporary with several of the passages from Pindar discussed above. The first appearance of Dirce comes just after Eteocles gives orders to the chorus to pray to the appropriate gods as they stand in fear of the impending Argive attack. He follows with his own prayer, and among those he invokes are Dirce and Ismenus: *Δίρκης τε πηγαῖς ὕδατί θ' Ἰσμηνοῦ λέγω* (273, 'I call upon the springs of Dirce and the water of Ismenus'). As the text stands,[16] Eteocles names two features of the Theban landscape in his prayer, directly after calling upon the 'city-protecting gods' (*πολισσούχοις θεοῖς*, 271) of Thebes. Dirce and Ismenus, what will come to be considered the two main sources of water in Thebes, are grouped with the gods who protect the city in the leader's prayer for safety. The waters of Dirce and Ismenus are more than features of the topography of the city here; they are protective presences. In this passage we catch another glimpse of a personified Dirce – a source of water, but also a quintessentially Theban entity that can be invoked for protection. The term Eteocles uses with Dirce, *πηγαῖς*, can refer to springs or waters more generally.

The next appearance of Dirce comes in the mouths of the chorus only a few lines after Eteocles' prayer. Frightened of being driven

[15] Keramopoullos (n. 3), 430 argues that Pindar knows only a river Dirce, not a spring. While this is true on the level of lexicon (Dirce is never explicitly called a spring in Pindar) the poet does seem to allow the image of a spring to enter his verse on at least one occasion, the allusive passage in *Isthm.* 6 I have discussed above.

[16] The line is not entirely sound in the mss. The text of Aeschylus I supply is M. L. West (ed.), *Aeschyli tragoediae cum incerti poetae Prometheo* (Stuttgart, 1990). Most mss. read *πηγῆς* instead of the dative -*αῖς*, as well as *οὐδ' ἀπ'* where Geel (J. Geel, *Euripidis Phoenissae* [Leiden, 1846]) corrected to *ὕδατί τ'*, itself corrected in the text given here to *θ'* to account for the breathing of Hismenus (see n. 6 above). With *πηγῆς* the syntax of Eteocles' declaration would change, but – more significantly – so would the nature of the appellation of Dirce. The dative, with genitive *Δίρκης*, fits better with the usage of the name in early poetry traced here (it is exactly paralleled in Pindar's *Isthmian* 1, *ῥεέθροισι . . . Δίρκας*, mentioned above). The genitive *πηγῆς* with the genitive *Δίρκης* is harder to parallel, and implies more directly a specific spring by the name Dirce, less the aquatic concept I am tracing.

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from their homeland by the attacking Argives, they sing the following (304–11):

> *ποῖον δ' ἀμέψεσθε γαίας πέδον*
> *τᾶσδ' ἄρειον, ἐχθροῖς*
> *ἀφέντες τὰν βαθύχθον' αἶαν*
> *ὕδωρ τε Διρκαῖον, εὐ-*
> *τραφέστατον πωμάτων*
> *ὅσων ἵησιν Ποσειδὰν ὁ γαιάοχος*
> *Τηθύος τε παῖδες;*

What better place will you exchange for this land, having cast away to our enemies the deep soil and Dircaean water, the most nourishing of as many droughts as earth-upholding Poseidon and the children of Tethys send forth?

The Theban women lament the prospect of being forced to leave the Theban plain, the fertile land of Thebes and the nourishing water of Dirce. Dirce is again used metonymically, here in a list of attributes that make Thebes an amenable homeland. This passage is significant for our discussion primarily due to its striking similarity to several of the Pindaric references to Dirce discussed above. Of course, *ὕδωρ Διρκαῖον* invites comparison with similar constructions in Pindar, such as *Δίρκας ὕδωρ* in *Isthmian* 6 and *ὕδατα Διρκαῖα* in *Pythian* 9. But the affinity with Pindar goes beyond phraseology. In representing the water of Dirce as being 'sent forth' by Poseidon and the children of Tethys, this passage in *Seven* is also very close in imagery to *Isthmian* 6. In the Isthmian ode the 'maidens of golden-robed Memory' cause the water of Dirce 'to spring forth'. Just as in the passage from *Seven* here, children of a goddess cause the water to appear (*ἀνατέλλειν* in Pindar; *ἱέναι* in Aeschylus). The object of the divine children's action is, in the Isthmian ode, *Δίρκας ὕδωρ* and in Aeschylus *ὕδωρ Διρκαῖον* – phrases with no discernible semantic difference. One might even take the parallel further, noting that for Pindar what was a source of poetic inspiration and a symbol for his Theban-composed victory songs, is similarly for the chorus a substance specifically called *εὐτραφέστατον*, 'most nourishing'. The water of Dirce is divinely inspired, and drinking it can bring both health and poetic inspiration, depending on the poetic context. Pindaric and Aeschylean, Theban and Athenian: these representations of Dirce show strong and definite resemblances.[17]

[17] The passage in *Seven* and the parallel of Pindar's *Isthm.* 6 together offer the most striking instance of similarity between an Athenian and a Theban representation of Dirce. Though this is

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There is one further reference to Dirce in the verses of Aeschylus. A line from an unknown play quoted first in the Photius lexicon seems to have contained the phrase *ναρᾶς τε Δίρκης* (347 Radt). The gloss the lexicon gives for this entry is *ῥευστικῆς. Αἰσχύλος* ('flowing; Aeschylus'). The term *ναρός* thus seems to mean 'flow' or 'flowing', related most probably to the verb *νάω*.[18] It is difficult to draw much from this two-word fragment, but even here it is clear that Dirce is represented in a manner concordant with what we have seen so far in Pindar and *Seven Against Thebes*. Dirce is a name for a spring or stream, or perhaps the water flowing within these. Though Aeschylus uses a rare word to describe Dirce here (thus supplying motivation for the citation of this line in Photius and other lexica), the force of the reference is anything but anomalous.[19]

The five instances in Pindar and three in Aeschylus are complemented by two in the surviving works of Sophocles. Both appear in *Antigone* (104 and 844). The latter presents the simpler of the two, so I shall start with it. Antigone laments her fate and apostrophizes the Theban landscape as she heads towards her death on the outskirts of the city. She calls upon Thebes, and the citizens of Thebes (842–3), then calls on the 'Dirkaian springs' and the 'grove of well-equipped Thebes', *Διρκαῖαι κρῆναι Θή- / βας τ' εὐαρμάτου ἄλσος*, to be witnesses to her maltreatment. As in the Pindaric and Aeschylean passages, Dirce is here mentioned as a recognizable landmark of the city, here coupled with a standard word for spring (*κρῆναι*). Again, Dirce's water appears as part of an invocation of the city, with very similar intent and effect to invocations of this landmark in the verses I have discussed above, whether of Theban or Athenian origin.

The earlier appearance of Dirce in *Antigone* is fuller, and it supplies us with a hint of topographic detail. The chorus' first words in the parodos are as follows (100–5):

> *ἀκτὶς ἀελίου, τὸ κάλ-*
> *λιστον ἑπταπύλῳ φανὲν*
> *Θήβᾳ τῶν προτέρων φάος,*

a single detail on the vast and variegated landscape of Thebes, it points to a concordance of representations of the city in poetry that crosses the boundaries of the *polis* – and perhaps it diminishes the strength of, or at least complicates, Zeitlin's (n. 7) argument that Thebes as constructed on the Athenian stage is the product of predominantly Athenian predilections.

[18] See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots* (Paris, 1968–80), s.v. *ναρός*, e.g.

[19] Indeed, at least one editor (H. Weil, in 1862) printed it as the first half of line 273 of the *Seven*. Others have suggested that the fragment comes from the lost *Laius* or *Argeias* (see *apparatus* in Radt).

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ἐφάνθης ποτ', ὦ χρυσέας
ἁμέρας βλέφαρον, Διρκαί-
ων ὑπὲρ ῥεέθρων μολοῦσα . . .

Beam of the sun, most beautiful light of any that have come before over seven-gated Thebes, you appeared then, eye of golden day, moving over the Dircaian streams . . .

Of course, the 'Dircaean streams' of line 104 are by now familiar. They echo both Pindaric and Aeschylean uses of the proper name in its genitive or adjectival form modifying a water-word (we have now seen ὕδωρ, ὕδατα and ῥέεθρα). The apostrophe here is to the 'beam of the sun', not a physical feature of the Theban landscape, but Dirce is included as a representative spot over which the sun travels as it makes its way across the sky. Some commentators have seen a topographic reference here: as the glint of the morning sun appears, it casts light on Dirce, and this must mean, it is argued, that Sophocles envisions Dirce on the east of the Cadmeia, since the Cadmeia itself would obscure early morning sunlight over a spring or river directly below and to the west of it. Thus it is often concluded that Sophocles must have been in error, since later tradition, up to and including our modern topographic scholarship, almost unanimously places Dirce to the west of Thebes' acropolis.[20] I shall have something to say below on this placement of Dirce on the landscape. My discussion thus far has, I hope, made it clear that this passage, one of the few with anything remotely resembling topographical detail, does not beg to be read with map in hand.[21] Still, it is significant that Sophocles seems to preserve the Pindaric localization of Dirce near the Cadmeian walls – whether to the east or west of the city's acropolis.

The above survey covers every surviving appearance of Dirce in the literature of ancient Greece previous to the plays of Euripides. The picture is fairly consistent: in Pindar, Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dirce is represented as a spring or stream. But when we have topographical details offered, we are left with an incomplete picture. Dirce seems to be close to the walls, but its location in relation to the Cadmeia is left open. It should be clear that the early evidence – not counting Euripides, to whom I shall turn presently – gives a moderately consistent picture. In these representations Dirce is not a heroine – at least not

[20] M. Griffith (ed.), *Sophocles. Antigone* (Cambridge, 1999), 144 summarizes well; see also older references in Coughanowr (n. 2), 22 n. 1.

[21] It is typical of the use of such quasi-topographic details by modern scholars, however, that the contradiction here can be argued away. Coughanowr in 1973 (n. 2) offered a feasible (though perhaps overly literal) interpretation of the passage that preserves Dirce to the west of the Cadmeia.

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one with an explicitly referenced story. The name Dirce is most significant for its metonymic and metaphorical value. Any specific topographical referent is difficult, perhaps impossible, to locate on a map of Thebes. And we hear nothing of torture, Lycus, the twins Amphion and Zethus, Cadmus, or other acts or personages associated with many subsequent traditional stories of Dirce. This is not to say that such a tradition is necessarily absent at this stage, but it is certainly not apparent. I wish to call the representation of Dirce in this body of material, up to but not including the plays of Euripides, Dirce's 'topographic' tradition – fully aware that topographical *specifics* are sparse, but seeking to distinguish this locality of Dirce from the heroine we shall discuss in a moment.[22] It is significant that the texts that contribute to this topographic tradition are not solely Athenian in origin; there is some consistency here between Athenian and Theban representations.

In the tragedies of Euripides, Dirce becomes a far more common, and complex, figure. The Dirce we encounter is not consistent across the Euripidean corpus; in fact it can be shown that representations of Dirce vary in significant ways even within a single play. I wish to trace here both the persistence of the representation of Dirce as we have seen it so far, and simultaneously to identify a new representation of Dirce as a queen of Thebes and as the namesake of a specific – though still difficult to locate – spring. This second representation, which I term the Euripidean 'heroine narrative', finds its most developed expression in *Antiope*, a play that survives only in fragments, and is variously dated to either 427–419 or 410–407.[23] The presence in

[22] The 'topographic' tradition's lack of actual topographical specificity is underscored by a brief but telling passage in Plutarch. *De genio Socratis* 5 (578b) describes a Theban rite in which the outgoing and newly chosen hipparchs met at the site of Dirce's tomb (*τὸν Δίρκης . . . τάφον*), the location of which remained unknown to all other Thebans (see A. Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia*, vol. I (London, 1981), 198, and F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes. Cadmos et les Spartes* (Paris, 1963), 104ff.). Vian, citing *Oedipus at Colonus* as a parallel, has argued for the great antiquity of this practice. The non-Euripidean tradition, however, does not seem to have room for Dirce's grave; rivers, springs and even nymphs generally do not need them. We are left with the impression that Plutarch tells of a ritual that just might evoke a persona of Dirce, and direct associations with the Pindaric or early tragic tradition remain difficult. Plutarch's story, if it is indeed based on an early tradition, offers, in effect, a neat narrative cover for the fact that Dirce's location was not established at an early date.

[23] The traditional date for *Antiope* is the later one, based primarily on a scholion to Aristophanes' *Frogs* 53 stating that the play was performed between 412 and 405. See Taplin (n. 2), 33f. and 34 n. 5; Mastronarde (n. 6), 11ff.; S. Rubatto, 'L'*Antiope* di Euripide: proposta di ricostruzione', *Quaderni del Dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica, Bologna* 9 (1998), 73ff; F. Jouan and H. Van Looy (eds.), *Euripides. Fragments*, tome VIII, vol. I (Paris, 1998), 220f.; C. Collard *et al.* (eds.), *Euripides. Selected Fragmentary Plays*, vol. II (Oxford, 2004), 269. M. Cropp and G. Fick, *Resolutions and Chronology in Euripides. The Fragmentary Tragedies* (*BICS Supplement* 43, London, 1985), 74ff. have argued for the earlier date based on

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Euripides of these two representations affords us a glance at the interplay of tradition and originality in the poetry of Euripides, and also allows us to trace how the map of Thebes develops in relation to literary representations of the city.

The familiar topographic tradition of Dirce as a water feature of indistinguishable location on the Theban landscape is present in the plays of Euripides. Passages of this type show no sign of the heroine narrative of *Antiope*, and seem to have no connection to a particular spring. Good examples of the appearance of Dirce as such occur in *Phoenissae* 826, where Dirce is explicitly called a ποταμός ('river'), or *Bacchae* 5, in which the waters of Dirce are called Δίρκης νάματα ('flows of Dirce').[24]

The three appearances in *Bacchae* are exemplary of these references as a whole. In the fifth line of the prologue Dionysus uses the name to situate himself, and thus the dramatic action, within the Theban landscape: πάρειμι Δίρκης νάματ' Ἰσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ ('I stand beside the flows of Dirce and the water of Ismenus'). The language of Dirce here is familiar from earlier tragedy and lyric, and the coupling of Dirce and Ismenus locates Dionysus squarely in Thebes, even if a specific location is difficult to pinpoint. The two other appearances of the name in this play appear within the second choral stasimon. Both are vocatives, addressed by the chorus to Dirce, who is described as possessing πηγαί (521), in which she bathed the babe Dionysus (522) upon his extraction from Semele, his first mother. Dirce here is perhaps a river or perhaps a spring (πηγαί may be ambiguous on this point), but clearly still imagined as an aquatic feature of the Theban landscape. When the chorus goes on to sing (530–2):

σὺ δέ μ', ὦ μάκαιρα Δίρκα,
στεφανηφόρους ἀπωθῇ
θιάσους ἔχουσαν ἐν σοί

blessed Dirce, you are thrusting me away when I hold wreath-bearing revelries in you

patterns of metrical resolution. My discussion here fits well with this earlier date, and it is perhaps not so disconcerting to side with metrical analysis over the scholiast's remarks.

[24] There are quite a few passages in the plays that similarly represent Dirce: *Heracles* 573 and 784, *Suppliants* 637, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 401, *Phoenissae* 102, 131, 238, 368, 730, 1026, and *Bacchae* 520 and 530. In every one of these, the name Dirce is associated primarily with water (coupled with words such as νᾶμα, πόρος or ὕδωρ), often metonymically associated with the topography or monumental space of the city (νᾶμα: *HF* 573, *Phoen.* 102; ῥεῦμα: *Supp.* 637, *IT* 401; ὕδωρ: *Phoen.* 131, 368; πόρος: *Phoen.* 730; Dirce is also called καλλιρρέεθρος in *HF* 784, and *Phoen.* 1026–7 has the interesting phrase Διρκάιων . . . ἐκ τόπων).

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there is little question that they treat Dirce as symbolically representative of the city of Thebes as a whole.

What appears to be an alternate tradition, Dirce's heroine narrative, is expressed most clearly in the fragmentary drama *Antiope*. Fortunately, a significant portion of the conclusion of this play was found on a papyrus in the late nineteenth century, known now as the Flinders Petrie papyrus after its discoverer.[25] The plot of *Antiope* as it can be reconstructed is complex, and the play must have been a long one.[26] What primarily concerns us here appears very near the end of the drama. The twins Amphion and Zethus, sons of Antiope, are threatening to kill Lycus, the king of Thebes. They have already tortured and dispatched his wife, Dirce, in response to her maltreatment of their mother, by tying her to a crazed bull. At the moment when Lycus seems also to be about to meet his fate, Hermes appears *ex machina* and commands the twins to abandon their plan. Hermes then instructs Lycus (F 223.109–14 Kannicht):

> ὅταν δὲ θάπτηις ἄλοχον εἰς πυρὰν τιθείς,
> σαρκῶν ἀθροίσας τῆς ταλαιπώρου φύσιν,
> ὀστᾶ πυρώσας Ἄρεος εἰς κρήνην βαλεῖν,
> ὡς ἂν τὸ Δίρκης ὄνομ' ἔπώνυμον λάβηι
> κρήνης [ἀπό]ρρους, ὃς δίεισιν ἄστεως
> πεδία τ[ὰ Θή]βης ὕδασιν ἐξάρδων ἀεί.

But when you set your wife on the pyre and bury her, having collected the form of the poor woman's flesh and burned the bones, cast them into the spring of Ares, so that the name 'Dirce' may be the eponymous name of the spring that flows out and passes through the city, irrigating the Theban plain with its waters in perpetuity.

This, of course, is an aetiology, and common practice for Euripides, especially in plays that conclude with a *deus ex machina*.[27] Dirce,

[25] First published in J. P. Mahaffy, *The Flinders Petrie Papyri*, vol. I (Dublin, 1891); see the editions of D. L. Page, *Select Papyri, III: Literary Papyri, Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, 1941); J. Kambitsis (ed.), *L'Antiope d'Euripide* (Athens, 1972); J. Diggle, 'P. Petrie 1.12: Euripides, *Antiope* (fr. 223 (Nauck) Kannicht, LXVIII Kambitsis)', *PCPS* 42 (1996–7), 106ff. and *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta selecta* (Oxford, 1998); and most recently R. Kannicht (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta (TrGF)*, vol. 5: *Euripides* (Göttingen, 2004). I cite all text of the play from Kannicht's edition.

[26] While some details are obscure, we have a sound idea of the plot from summaries of Hyginus (*Fab.* 8), Apollodoros (*Bibl.* 3.5.5), and the scholia on Apollonius of Rhodes (on 4.1090). For reconstruction, see T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), 205ff.; Kambitsis (n. 25), I–XXI, A. J. Podlecki, 'Had the *Antiope* of Euripides Political Overtones?', *AncW* 27 (1996), 131ff.; Rubatto (n. 23); Van Looy in Jouan and Van Looy (n. 23), 223ff.; Taplin (n. 2), 34f.; Collard in Collard, Cropp, and Gilbert (n. 23), 262ff.

[27] Good parallels often involve Athena *ex machina*; cf. *Suppliants* (produced in 423–421), in which Athena offers an aetiology for the alliance between Thebes and Athens; *Ion* (around 414), where she orders Ion to return to Athens as ancestor of the Ionian race; *IT* (also around 414),

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queen of Thebes and wife of Lycus, will give her name to the spring of Ares, where Cadmus killed the dragon of Ares when he founded Thebes.[28] Dirce is, from now on (at least as this play portrays it), a spring – and not just any spring, but a spring of foundational importance for the city.[29]

The heroine narrative of Dirce is not attested in Greek literature before Euripides. In addition, if the earlier dating of *Antiope* to 427–419 is correct, it is almost certain that this play represents the first appearance of it.[30] Its implications are far-reaching. By developing Dirce as a heroine, with her own story, and connecting her to the spring of Ares, this play also associates Dirce with a host of other stories and personages in traditional Theban myth. As the wife of Lycus, she is a queen of Thebes. She is Antiope's aunt and thus the great-aunt of Amphion and Zethus. Amphion and Zethus, of course, are two of the traditional founders of Thebes – in the *Odyssey* they are credited with having built the walls of Thebes, and this foundation story may be the oldest Theban foundation narrative.[31] But Dirce's association with the spring of Ares in *Antiope* connects her with the other, perhaps better known, Theban foundation narrative, as well, that of Cadmus. Cadmus, upon searching for water on the future site of Thebes, slew the dragon of Ares who guarded the spring that will from now on be known as 'Dirce'. Thus the heroine narrative is inserted into a broader tradition of Theban stories, through both the genealogical and aetiological connections forged with Dirce.

where again Athena appears and directs Orestes to establish a cult to Artemis with the image he rescues from Tauris.

[28] Lycus follows with lines that reinforce the aetiology, as well (F 223.141–4). Note that Euripides identifies the spot defended by the Theban dragon as the spring of Ares without comment. On this location as 'Dirce' in *Phoenissae*, see Mastronarde (n. 6), 649 and 649 n. 1. It should be stressed that there is no early evidence identifying the 'spring of Ares' with the dragon's cave, and nothing explicitly equating these two to Dirce, before Euripides.

[29] Scholars have split on the topographical validity of this aetiology; those who have insisted, *contra* Euripides, on the distinction between Dirce and the spring of Ares include Fabricius (n. 3), 21 (who follows Pausanias 9.10.3 with some modifications, arguing that Dirce and Ismenus should be identified); Keramopoullos (n. 3), 426ff.; and Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985), 9, 11 and 181 who follows Keramopoullos with slight modifications. Those who have followed Euripides, to a greater or lesser extent, in identifying Dirce with the spring of Ares include Bethe (n. 2), 1170; Soteriades (n. 3); U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Pindaros* (Berlin, 1922), 26 n. 2 and 32; Schober (n. 3), 1426; Rumpf (n. 2), 42; Vian (n. 22), 104ff.; Mastronarde (n. 6), 649; J. Diggle, *Euripidea. Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1994), 72 n. 47.

[30] This may even be true if the later dating (410–407) is right, though in that case *HF*, usually dated to c. 417, may present an inconsistency; see below.

[31] *Odyssey* 11.263–5. On the multiple foundation narratives of Thebes, see D. W. Berman, 'The Double Foundation of Boiotian Thebes', *TAPA* 134 (2004), 1ff., who argues that the foundation of the twins represents an older Greek tradition than that of Cadmus.

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There are a few passages in two other extant plays of Euripides, *Heracles* and *Phoenissae*, that also appear to show familiarity with this heroine narrative. The prologue to *Heracles*, spoken by Amphitryon, touches on the family history of Dirce and Lycus. Due to some manipulation of details of the story's early stages, in this play a younger Lycus, according to Amphitryon, the son of the husband of Dirce of the same name, desires to expel the children of Heracles, along with Heracles' wife, Megara, from the city. This genealogical modification is a necessary precursor to the plot Euripides puts in motion, but it also indicates some awareness of the Dirce of *Antiope*.[32] By creating another Lycus as a foil to Heracles, Euripides is able to situate his drama without doing violence to the end of the *Antiope*, in fact (if, that is, *Antiope* is an earlier play than *Heracles*). In *Antiope*, Hermes commands Lycus to hand over the power in Thebes to the twins Amphion and Zethos, but the action of this play seems to occur before the twins take over. The presence of Dirce as the elder Lycus' wife, but also the very need for the younger Lycus, thus both point toward the existence of, at the very least, the idea of the heroine-Dirce of *Antiope* at this stage.

The story Amphitryon alludes to, in recounting the history necessary for the plot of *Heracles* to take place, seems, with these slight generational complications, to be that of the Dirce of *Antiope* – queen of Thebes, and presumably eponymous heroine of the spring. But the very same play mentions Dirce twice in what could be references to the topographic tradition: 573 (*Δίρκης τε νᾶμα*, 'the flow of Dirce') and 784 (*Δίρκα θ' ἁ καλλιρρέεθρος*, 'lovely-flowing Dirce'). Of course, these need not, on the surface, be inconsistent with the heroine narrative as it is recounted in the prologue. In this play Dirce was wife of the elder Lycus, and might have met her doom already when *Heracles* opens. But we feel the presence of both traditions on closer examination. In fact the heroine narrative cannot stand in *Heracles* without a slight anachronism, one that exposes the underpinnings of the Euripidean innovation. Dirce's narrative, as told in *Antiope*, is inconsistent with the story here because of the role of the twins Amphion and Zethus. Yes, Dirce may be the wife of the elder Lycus. But without her torture and violent death at the hands of Amphion and Zethus, and the subsequent renaming of the spring 'Dirce' as her ashes' place of rest, the name ought not to be used by

[32] See Webster (n. 26), 188, who, in commenting on Lycus the younger in the opening scene of *Heracles*, states 'Euripides perhaps foresaw already his own *Antiope*'.

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Amphitryon, Heracles himself, or the chorus to refer both to the heroine and a body of water in the same play. To do so implies that Dirce has already met her end, and thus puts the rule of the younger Lycus, the king who persecutes the children of Herakles, in question. He can only be king, presumably, within a generation or so of his father, and Amphitryon tells us both that Lycus the elder ruled before Amphion and Zethus (29–30) and that Lycus the younger usurped the kingship from Creon (31–4). These details make it quite difficult to place a rule of Lycus the younger chronologically in a position in which Dirce has already met her end as understood in the heroine narrative. Thus when the younger Lycus, or Amphitryon, or Heracles, refers to the spring Dirce in this play, we have a type of anachronism.[33] A plausible explanation for its presence is the fact that some passages in this drama show the topographical tradition standing side by side with the heroine narrative.

A similar relationship between the two traditions can be seen in *Phoenissae*. In this play, Dirce seems exclusively to be a feature of the Theban terrain. But one passage (931–5), spoken by Teiresias, indicates recognition of the heroine narrative. Teiresias calls the serpent of Ares that Cadmus kills *Δίρκης ναμάτων ἐπίσκοπος* ('overseer of the flows of Dirce'). Of course, this implies an equation of Dirce with the spring of Ares, and thus may point to the presence of the heroine narrative of Dirce. In this play, probably performed between 411 and 409,[34] Dirce is never called the wife of Lycus nor named as the victim of violent torture at the hands of the twins. In such a context, the version present in *Antiope* can be recognized even when not immediately apparent, and Dirce's name is naturally associated with the spring guarded by Ares' serpent, even though the full heroine narrative is not expressed. Our conclusion can be that the heroine narrative is not exclusive; Euripides uses the topographic language of Dirce freely, without jarring contradiction.[35]

The contention that Euripides created, or significantly developed, the heroine narrative of Dirce is supported by the scant genealogical information we find about her. She is the wife of Lycus, of course, in

[33] Not exactly the type of anachronism Easterling discusses fruitfully (in 'Anachronism in Greek Tragedy', *JHS* 105 [1985], 1ff. and 'Constructing the Heroic', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* [Oxford 1997]); this is more a mythic anachronism, which it should be added is even more common, both on the tragic stage and in other genres of Greek mythic poetry.

[34] See Mastronarde (n. 6), 11ff.

[35] Even, possibly, within the same trilogy, if the later date of *Antiope* is correct and it was performed in the same year as *Phoenissae* (though this seems less likely than the earlier date for *Antiope*; see above). See Mastronarde's discussion (n. 6), 13f.

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Antiope. Her father is not mentioned in the fragments that remain, however. She has no children in the play. In fact, we know precious little about her other than her husband's name and her actions as persecutor of Antiope and victim of the twins Amphion and Zethus. Such a scanty background alone should lead to the suspicion that she is a mythic insertion. Indeed, only one Euripidean drama offers a significant detail concerning her family. In the choral passage of *Bacchae* I discussed above, her father is named as Acheloüs (519). The appearance of Acheloüs is striking, but consonant with its context. It comes within a play that adopts the topographic Dirce tradition, and it solidifies that tradition by giving Dirce a riverine father. *Bacchae*, as we have seen, especially the choral passage in which Acheloüs appears, is an excellent example of the topographic tradition's life in Euripides, and shows that even the non-narrative details that make up this tradition can be inserted into the matrix of mythic genealogy, if not concrete topology.

The Euripidean heroine narrative becomes the primary narrative of Dirce for later generations, in antiquity and beyond. But even in later times it is not exclusively dominant. Significantly, Callimachus in his *Hymn to Delos* (4.75–7) refers to Dirce as a river and personifies the river as a nymph (in describing the places Leto must travel before finding Delos as a suitable place for Apollo's birth):

> φεῦγε καὶ Ἀονίη τὸν ἕνα δρόμον, αἱ δ' ἐφέποντο
> Δίρκη τε Στροφίη τε μελαμψήφιδος ἔχουσαι
> Ἰσμηνοῦ χέρα πατρός.

Aonie fled too along the same path, and Dirce and Strophie followed, holding the hand of their father Ismenus, with his dark pebbles.

These lines are very much in concord with the Pindaric and early tragic tradition. Dirce is a river, and just as naturally also the name of a nymph. In addition, the fact that she is identified here as the daughter of Ismenus, the major river in Thebes, may call into question whether it is correct to recognize the Dirce of the Euripidean heroine tradition, at least, as the daughter of the same.[36] Instead, this looks like a typically Alexandrian reference to the more obscure (at least by the time of Callimachus) topographic tradition.

[36] As is commonly done, especially in mythological handbooks and encyclopedia entries, such as the *Neue Pauly* or the popular online *Greek Mythology Link* [http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/OCEANIDS.html]. This passage in Callimachus and the *Bacchae* passage noted above are the sole ancient witnesses to Dirce's paternity as far as I am aware.

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Pausanias presents an intermediary position between the two traditions. In his description of the city of Thebes he mentions that the Dirce 'river' is named after the wife of Lycus (9.25.3). River, not spring, might indicate that Pausanias does not accept the Euripidean heroine narrative and aetiology whole, but the presence of Lycus speaks otherwise. Pausanias' at least partial independence is confirmed when we read more broadly in his description of Thebes. Earlier (9.10.3–5), he has located the spring of Ares near the Temple of Apollo Ismenius, not, according to him, on the side of the Cadmeia where the Dirce river flows. Pausanias, perhaps independently or influenced by his informants, aligns himself with the heroine narrative only partially, repeating the association of Dirce the wife of Lycus with a water feature but not the aetiology of the changed name of the spring of Ares. It appears as if the travel writer is attempting to reconcile what he was aware were multiple strands of topographical and mythic material.[37]

Other later writers, both in Greek and Latin, generally accept the Euripidean heroine tradition. This is perhaps natural enough, since it offers an exciting narrative in place of a topographic tradition based not on narrative at all. Apollodorus and Hyginus both retell the story of Dirce from *Antiope* as if it were the only set of details concerning her.[38] Nonnus, several centuries later, refers to Dirce occasionally with epithets that show his acceptance, or at least recognition, of the heroine narrative: she is called δρακοντόβοτος ('serpent-nourishing', 4.356, 46.142) and ἐχιδνόκομος ('snake-haired', 8.239), both names alluding, presumably, to Dirce's association with the spring and serpent of Ares. Of course, Nonnus makes a concerted effort to incorporate mythic details from a wide variety of texts and contexts, and thus his allusion to the dragon of Ares should not indicate ignorance of earlier representations. It does, however, show the persistence of Euripides' reformulation, and its attractiveness for poets who wrote Theban narratives in later times.

I wish, at this point, to step back and return to the questions outlined at the beginning of this article. It should be clear that Dirce's existence in the Greek tradition does not remain static over time or even within particular poetic works. But under what circumstances,

[37] The treatment causes some confusion in Symeonoglou's discussion of these passages (n. 3 [1985], 199): 'It is curious that Pausanias says nothing about the *spring* of Dirce . . . Perhaps he thought it sufficient to mention the *river* Dirce and the fact that it was named for the wife of Lycus' (italics mine).

[38] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.5; Hyg. *Fab.* 8.

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and how, do the various Dircae (if I may) appear? In offering some preliminary answers to these questions, I hope also to shed light on the way topography and mythic narrative intersect, and, once intersected, germinate to produce such fertile traditions as those surrounding Dirce in particular and Thebes in general.

Dirce becomes, after Euripides, one of a number of springs dotting the Theban landscape. Symeonoglou counts no fewer than seven in the area surrounding the Cadmeia, all with different modern names.[39] In addition, we have ancient attestation to rivers called Dirce, Ismenus and Strophie.[40] These names seem almost to cycle through our later literature. As for Dirce specifically, the topographical tradition offers little evidence of actual location. Instead, we are left with a consistent picture of a river or spring flowing with water that has both real and metaphorical benefits for those who live within Thebes' great walls. This is a tradition of place without an accompanying narrative, and it is nearly impossible to recover locational specificity from it. Nothing in early epic, Pindar, Aeschylus or Sophocles gives more than a hint of where we might actually place Dirce, other than the detail from Pindar of its situation near the Theban walls. Mapmaking based on *Antigone* 100–5 is mere guesswork. Thus (and somewhat paradoxically) our topographic tradition is not specific as to where, exactly, the spring and/or river was, only that it exists as an identifiable feature of the Theban landscape.

Euripides forges an enduring connection between local topography – however nonspecific – and the world of tragic myth. He places on stage the story of the queen Dirce, and through the concluding aetiology in *Antiope* connects her story with the topographical tradition I have just discussed. In doing so, he creates connections with other Theban narratives: the foundation by Cadmus, but also the foundation by the twins Amphion and Zethus. In addition, a third primordial founder of the city – Ares – is invoked, as well. When the spring of Ares becomes Dirce, Thebes' complicated foundational and genealogical tradition is intertwined with her story, and with Theban topography, in new ways. The redefinition of Dirce as a specific spring

[39] See Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985), 10f. The names Chlevino, Kati, Moschopodi, Mpouka, Oidipodia, Psamathe, Pyri and Vranezi are listed by Symeonoglou in his index, along with Dirce, Ismenus and Ares. Some of these names are ancient, and still in use; others are modern names for ancient springs with different original appellations. Several of these springs (Chlevino, Mpouka) are probably the result of an Iron Age aqueduct that channelled older sources; see Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985), 10 and 143.

[40] Now usually identified with the modern Plakiotissa, Agios Ioannis (Agianni) and Chrysorroas, respectively.

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allows a new level of topographic identification to enter the discourse. Here is where myth and topography intersect: over time, the most prominent spring in Thebes, just off the southwest corner of the Cadmeia and now known as Parapórti ('by the gate'), becomes the obvious location for Euripides' Dirce.[41] Pindar's association of Dirce with the gates of Thebes (*Isthm.* 6.74–5) is strengthened and focused by the Euripidean aetiology, which allows what was vague localization to become a specific location; it is underscored further by the modern toponym.[42]

The bifurcation of the Euripidean Dirce illuminates the machinery underpinning the Euripidean creation of the heroine narrative. It shows how the poet, for his part, so effectively creates something new from an existent, but non-narrative, tradition. I have examined in some detail two dramas (aside, of course, from *Antiope*), *Heracles* and *Bacchae*. In *Heracles* especially we find that the heroine narrative of Dirce is able to exist side by side with the topographic tradition with little difficulty. In addition, even a play that seems to eschew entirely the heroine narrative (e.g. *Bacchae*) may be a significantly later production than *Antiope*, in which the heroine narrative is on full display. The *Antiope*'s narrative of Dirce becomes her standard story, however, so much so that commentators, handbooks and summaries (from Pausanias and Apollodorus to the modern day) confuse, or combine, to some extent, the traditions. This is possible – perhaps even predictably normal – because (a) the heroine narrative implicates many other Theban stories while not doing so much violence to the tradition that it would be rejected or dismissed outright, and (b) it is, upon its creation, seemingly supported by the actual Theban landscape. 'That spring must be Dirce', one might imagine an audience member or Hellenistic-era reader thinking upon reaching *Antiope*'s concluding aetiology.

[41] The Paraporti spring was most recently studied in 1965 (published report in *ArchDelt* 21B [1966], 202 f., figs. 21–2, pl. 207B); see Symeonoglou (n. 3, 1985), 257. The present structure dates to the Turkish period. It is identified presently as Dirce by a sign posted by the city of Thebes. Keramopoullos (n. 3), 430f. discusses the modern identification and concludes that it stems from the Pindaric passage that places it near the gates (*Isthm.* 6.74–5, discussed above). The identification appears as early as Forchhammer in modern scholarship (n. 3), 7, who associates Dirce with several modern springs including Paraporti. Fabricius (n. 3) resists the impulse to label a point on his map Dirce, instead calling the stream to the west of the Cadmeia by the name. Soteriades (n. 3) does the same, distinguishing between Paraporti (which he labels also 'spring of Ares') and the Dirce stream (which he also calls Paraporti).

[42] Thus Keramopoullos (n. 3), 430f. is only partially right to pinpoint Pindar as the source of the identification of modern Paraporti with ancient Dirce; he neglects the important role *Antiope* plays.

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Why does the heroine Dirce appear on the Euripidean stage and engage this interconnected development of myth and topography? Euripides is fond of fabricating stories, sub-stories and even cult aetiologies.[43] Perhaps the more interesting question, then, is not *why* this is so, but *how*. In this case, a plausible explanation comes from the notion of distance. Though Greek Thebes is not far from Athens, and it is likely that some Athenians were aware of the general contours of the actual Theban city, Theban and Athenian representations of Theban urban space could of course differ. The Theban poet Pindar need not give precise locational details about Dirce. The name as metonym carries poetic power, and a fleeting detail here or there (e.g. it is by the gates) would hardly obscure its force or confuse a listener. The Athenian stage's distance from Thebes, however, would not be so far that earlier tragic representations of Dirce can show close concordance to Pindaric ones, but just far enough to allow Euripides room to play with the tradition to the point of conflating two details of Theban space into one, creating a plausible aetiology in the process.[44] It is common enough to recognize far-fetched or particularly improbable details in mythic stories that are set in distant locales (portions of the *Odyssey* or *Prometheus Bound* come immediately to mind); in this case, a bit of distance produces just a sliver of the same mythic creativity seen in abundance, for instance, in the *Odyssey*'s cyclops-episode.

The heroine Dirce becomes a permanent fixture in the tradition – protestations of Callimachus notwithstanding. The aetiology that concludes *Antiope* is the point of contact. It creates the opportunity to map what was only a vaguely localized spot in the earlier topographic tradition onto a specific location in the Theban landscape, and it binds narratives that surround these places to a wider set of Theban traditions. Dirce, once an appellation for flowing water, a common metonym, and perhaps nymph, as heroine serves to connect a location in Thebes to a set of stories that implicates the broad tradition of Theban mythic narratives that includes Cadmus, Amphion and Zethos, and even Ares. The Euripidean Dirce thus focuses an indistinct topographic tradition in the process of expanding a narrative one.

[43] On cult aetiologies in particular, see S. Scullion, 'Tradition and Invention in Euripidean Aitiology', *ICS* 24–5 (1999–2000), 217ff.

[44] Physical distance, of course, is a familiar catalyst for mythic imagination in the Greek world; on a much larger scale, see the discussion by J. S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton, 1992), 17ff. on the limits of Ocean and early *periplous*-narratives, and 45ff. on the classical age.

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Euripides' representation of the heroine narrative of Dirce also creates the opportunity – for a listener, and certainly for a commentator – actually to *locate* Dirce, with the help of Pindar, on the Theban map. Thus the Athenian dramatic narrativization has the paradoxical effect, in the long term, of placing Dirce permanently on the Theban landscape, something the topographic tradition never explicitly did. The prominent spring just to the southwest of the Kadmeia bears the name, but this may not be – in fact probably is not – where the original Dirce, whatever it was, was actually located. The Euripidean, Athenian, heroine-Dirce story, in time, exerts a powerful influence, and in effect colonizes the Theban landscape. Scholars, tour-guides, and even the city of Thebes have followed suit: to this day, a sign identifies Paraporti as Dirce, attesting to the power of narrative to affect the understanding of topography in tangible, and if not permanent, at least enduring, ways.

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