


THE OIKIST CULT: LITERARY TRADITION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE. MYTHICAL FOUNDERS AND HEROIC KINGS AS ΚΤΙΣΤΑΙ

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Abstract

The colonisation phenomenon and the oikist cult are topics that have been extensively investigated. Specific elaboration processes of narrative plots have contributed to the construction and dissemination of foundational narratives, that appear to be influenced by the mythical-legendary memories transmitted by literary traditions, eventually flowed into historical sources. Concerning the figure of the founders and their important symbolic role in the sphere of cultural memory and collective identity of a community, this contribution focuses on two case studies. The first refers to a legendary mythical founder of literary memory, the siren Parthenope, who helped define the memory and cultural identity of the two settlements linked to this foundation logos. The second case study focuses on some archaeological evidence, such as the mega tumulus of Macedonian royal tombs, that seems to echo some specific styles of “heroic” burials. These peculiar funerary customs of the burial context would seem to suggest that some heroic patterns were deliberately used at the service of the representation of dynastic power legitimacy, conforming to the heroic style of Homeric kings.

Keywords: Oikist cult, mythical founders, ktistai, heroic kings, Homeric kings, Parthenope, sirens, Neapolis, Macedonian dynasty, Aigai, Vergina, Tumulus, Sema, Philip II.

The foundation of cities in the ancient Greek World is a topic that has been analysed from a multipolar perspective.¹ Its influence is founded on several centres of interest converging in a sum of historical, religious, cultural and political factors—rooted in several poles of development, irradiation and impact—which have composed the complex framework of multicultural interactions of the ancient world.

¹ See Calame 1990; de Polignac 1995; Hall 2006; Malkin 2009; Mac Sweeney 2013; and the contributions on the Greek city in Flohr – Zuiderhoek 2024.

Nevertheless, in spite of historical sources—that offer the opportunity to deepen the complex process of Greeks and other populations' mobility—the foundation phenomenon appears to be firmly grounded on a collective memory that sometimes seems to take shape through myth and legendary traditions: the echo of ancient collective memory still survives in literary sources. The epical account is often considered by several studies as a mix of both historical and legendary traditions. In fact, it is possible to claim that the narrative device anchors the community to a dimension—that is distant in time—to create an instrumental background to the subsequent historical reality.

In this regard, it has been emphasised that: “Traditional approaches to foundation myths, therefore, have tended to consider them as a form of historiography, locating them at the intersection between myth and history.”² Thus, if we consider ancient literature as “a ritualised administration of memory,”³ it is possible to define myth as a sort of device that is capable of putting the words of its account together with the images evoked by its narrative thread, because—as it has already been stressed out—: “The myth anticipates the competition in mnemotechnics between writing and image. [...] With somewhat different accents, they both define mnemonics as imagination, as a combination of the experience of order and the invention of images. Images as representatives of things, *res*, and names, *verba*, to be remembered are registered in preordained spatial arrangements and deposited in imaginary spaces such as temples, public places, spacious rooms.”⁴

As a matter of fact, the elements of doubtful historical authenticity contained in the legendary and mythological tradition of foundation myths should be considered as cultural documents; their success determines the prevalence or extinction of the transmitted legendary tradition. As argued by Birgit Neumann: “[...] it becomes apparent that the appropriation of the past is also limited by conditions of medial dissemination and that the question as to whose memory versions will prevail in the fight for historical definitional power depends on the memory-cultural effectiveness of the specific medium of memory.”⁵

Therefore, it would not be so unreasonable to emphasise how in ancient Greece myth and literary tradition of collective memory should be considered as peculiar constituents of cultural identity.⁶ In this regard, it is worth recalling how the most recent studies on collective memory tend to define it as: “The interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts.”⁷

However, of equal importance are literary traditions that, according to the opinion of some scholars, were considered emblematic of the so-called colonisation phenomenon, such as foundational myths, that constituted a prehistory of contacts between Greeks and non-Greeks. Thus, it could be assumed that the narrative also supports the transition from myth to rituals. To quote Giuseppe Zanetto's beautiful expression: “In archaic society, myth is the compass of individual and collective behaviour: everything that is done in the *polis* acquires meaning and relevance to the extent that it finds correspondence—and thus confirmation—in a mythical tale; and this correspondence must be socially marked,

² Mac Sweeney 2015b, 4.

³ Zanetto 2019, 11.

⁴ Lachmann 2008, 302.

⁵ Neumann 2008, 339.

⁶ Fariello 2021a, 73.

⁷ Erll 2008, 2.

through ritualistic preaching mechanisms.”⁸ These legendary narratives may have contributed to the formation of a new hybridised identity along with the evolutionary path of transcultural relations and exchanges: these contacts took on an intercultural character in the context of concrete coexistence, in the same geographical area, with the indigenously substratum of the *apoikiai*.⁹ In this complex narrative, historical and social aspects of cultural interaction appear to be founded on a “legitimacy discourse.”¹⁰

In his studies dedicated to collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs brought under this label a wide variety of aspects, from myth to historiography, from rituals to monumental structures.¹¹ Moreover, collective and social aspects of cultural memory shape the relationship among human groups—within the framework of historical-mythical contents and their elaboration and transmission—in a field where different disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology and history of religions can interface.¹² It has been emphasised that, concerning the processes of formation and consolidation of human and social groups, collective memory can be considered as a device that can provide the possibility of constructing memories that are suitable for the continuation of collective history of a specific social reality, where the community bond that defines the peculiar identity of a political entity needs to be reinforced.¹³

Collective memory can be constituted by the sum of historical and mythical-legendary contents, often re-elaborated in literary tradition, that also becomes a fundamental identity symbol for a specific culture or civilisation. In fact, it could be possible to affirm that epical narrative represents the community: poems become an instrument to portray the significant moments of community life. It is a shared view that within the Homeric tradition, the *Odyssey* could be considered as a poem about colonisation, because it contains numerous references to the experiences of the *apoikiai*.¹⁴ Thus, the narrative tradition could be identified as a tool to capture the perception of the ancient world. These foundational tales—or explanations—somehow anticipate the later historical tradition that finds a grip in historical and archaeological sources. Explicit references in these literary narratives recall the history of city foundations. A prominent example can be found in Book 6 of the *Odyssey* describing the founding experience of Scheria: Phaeacian king Nausithoos led his people away from the areas inhabited by the dangerous Cyclops and settled in the new city. As a perfect οικιστής, he built the walls around the city, took care of land distribution and established the division between residential areas and sacred spaces, where he erected temples in honour of the gods (Hom. *Od.* 6. 7–10). In this regard, it is worth emphasising the peculiar function of narratology that links memory to identity through its powerful representational techniques, acting as independent agents capable of conveying meanings. The importance of these narrative communication techniques that express

⁸ Zanetto 2019, 8–9.

⁹ Fariello 2025a.

¹⁰ See Mac Sweeney 2015a.

¹¹ Halbwachs 1950.

¹² Erll 2008, 1–2.

¹³ Assmann 2008, 109.

¹⁴ Malkin 1998; Dougherty 2001. See also the most recent observations on the chronology of the *Odyssey* by Vincenzo Di Benedetto (2010, 73), for whom in the Homeric poem “the phenomenon of colonisation is presupposed.”

the great value of memory representation has led to the emergence of the concept of “se-manticization of literary forms.”¹⁵

The search for new lands and the foundation of new *poleis* were carried out performing a series of recurring ritual behaviours to give birth to symmetrical cultural contexts, aimed at reflecting the image of the Greek motherland in both cultural and cultic spheres.¹⁶ The foundation of the *polis* was determined *ab initio* by the first sacred act: the oikist was supposed to consult the oracle to be personally designated as “founder.” Consequently, the oikist was invested by a supreme religious authority over the future territorial space of the colony. The divinatory activity of *manteis* was a peculiar constituent of the foundation process, and the transfer of the sacred fire, from the public hearth of the mother city to the new colony, sanctioned a sacred and indestructible symbolic bond. In the foundation process, the religious aspect was absolutely fundamental: the *polis* identity was concretely and symbolically granted by a series of sacred elements such as sanctuaries, sacred spaces and cults associated with religious calendars. These components had a crucial importance, because the definition of cultic forms founded a new social order and a peculiar sense of citizenship. Foundations of new *apoikiai* were sometimes handed down through legendary narratives that spilled over into the dissemination of myths: the exploits of Heracles in Sicily or the Argonauts in the Black Sea provided further inspiration for the creation of sanctuaries and the calendrical regulation of cults. Memory had a central role: the link with the founding act of the colony was granted by the heroic cult of the oikist.¹⁷

Cults consecrated the *ktiseis* of new *poleis* ensuring their development. Boundary myths connected Greek *apoikoi* with the local cultures. The myth of Heracles is representative of the mythical *logos* relating to the creative processes responsible for the dissemination of legends that provided a historicised account of the Greeks’ encounters with other different local realities where they settled.¹⁸

Heroes like Heracles could be defined as cultural mediators, especially in the new territories of the *eschatia*, on the periphery of the anthropised world: the heroic protection of the guardian hero (*polissouchos*) was not only a historical symbol, but also a concrete expression of the colony identity appropriation process.¹⁹ Moreover, in the heart of the urban space, the community celebrated cults and erected monuments to the mythical and royal founders of the *polis*, while in the frontier spaces, extra-urban shrines were established to demarcate the distinction between the native inhabitants of the *chora* and the

¹⁵ Neumann 2008, 333.

¹⁶ Fariello 2025a.

¹⁷ Malkin 1987, 1.

¹⁸ On the figure of Heracles as bearer of Hellenic culture, see Martin 1979, where the characterising aspects of the cult of Heracles in Sicily are explored. On the socio-cultural interpretation of the myth of Heracles as a metaphor for Greek colonisation, with particular reference to his adventures in Sicily in the various mythographic variants, see Giangiulio 1983; Jourdain-Annequin 1988–1989; Capdeville 1999. On the figure of Heracles as a symbol of “acculturation” and as a “righteous murderer,” see Gentili 1977. Cf. finally the contributions in Congiu – Micciché – Modeo 2017.

¹⁹ Malkin 1987, 1. See also Lepore – Mele 1983. In this regard, François de Polignac already emphasised that the foundation myths of numerous sanctuaries and cities organised a veritable enactment of a kind of staging, in which heroes of Minoan-Mycenaean origin, Argonauts and Homeric heroes acted. See de Polignac 1995, 114–115.

citizens of the *polis*.²⁰ Therefore, in the Greek world, the oikist assumes traits and peculiarities that may differ depending on the specific case of foundation.

The oikist can be a historical or a mythical figure anchored in a legendary memory. However, in both cases, the founder acts as a cohesive element in the social sphere, because he reinforces the identity of the *polis*; his cult, as a commemorative ritual, accentuates the sacred character of political power and the ἀρχή of the city's rule.²¹ The *ktisis* memory becomes a narration at the service of local history, where legendary elements are mixed with historical reality: all becomes not only a collective cultural identity memory, but also a religious aspect. The religion operates as a cohesive element within the community relational sphere of the city: "The religion of the *polis* was a collective religion, a religion which unified and provided a bond which held the community together."²² Furthermore, the oikist cult is also an expression of a cultural memory and thus a "collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation."²³

As the scientific literature on the subject has already explored, precisely because a cult was dedicated to the oikist, the phenomenon of colonisation has often been analysed in connection to its relationship with religion. The community restores its bond with the oikist with his worship: he is not only celebrated as a founder, but he is also considered as a progenitor of the collective identity, at the top of the genealogical tree of the *polis*. Information on the rituality and cultic aspects closely linked to the city foundation can be found in a scholium to Pindar (*Ol.* 1. 149 [= 93]), which states that, according to customary rules (*ex ethous*), the oikist was buried in the centre of the *polis*.²⁴ Herodotus (6. 38) reports that sacrifices were offered and gymnastic *agones* were dedicated to Miltiades in the Chersonese, according to the custom of the Greek community for the heroic oikist cult, which was configured as a *nomos*, like a law.²⁵ The oikist could also be identified as a common ancestor: not only he defined the characteristic features of the *polis*' collective identity, but he also embodied a cohesive force consolidating the genealogical roots of the citizens; as a result, a bond was also established on a social level, where the *demos* was considered as a single lineage, represented by a multitude of the founder's direct descendants.²⁶ The dedication

²⁰ See the considerations in de Polignac 1995, 116. For an excellent overview of the relationship between Greeks and non-Greeks, see Nenci – Cataldi 1983. On the way literary sources considered the local cultural element of the *ktiseis*, see Moggi 1983.

²¹ Gasperini 1997; Bremmer 2001; Giangiulio 2001; Kreutz 2016.

²² Malkin 1987, 244. On the concept of "*polis* religion," see Sourvinou-Inwood 2000; Kindt 2009.

²³ Assmann 1995, 126.

²⁴ Malkin 1987, 193.

²⁵ Cf. Greco 2014, 40.

²⁶ A comparison can be made with the ancient Chinese World. From the earliest written records, dating back to the Shang dynasty 商朝 (16th century–1046 BCE), the ancestral cult constitutes one of the dominant features of classical Chinese civilisation. See Keightley 2004; Eno 2009. It represents a persistent connective element even after the end of the pre-imperial society, with the birth of the Qin 秦 empire (221 BCE), remaining at the heart of the hierarchical system founded on Confucianism. Evidence of a cult dedicated to the founder of a dynastic bloodline can already be found on the oracular bones of the Shang period that prove the existence of rituals involving meat and jade offerings, wine libations and human or animal sacrifices in honour of Cheng Tang 成汤 (the lord of the Shang feud) who founded the eponymous dynasty in the 16th century BCE. See Fracasso 2007. According to the ancestral cult of the Shang, genealogy (the definition of the ancestral link with the divinised ancestors) was an essential aspect in the determination of the relative ritual status, with

of the monument in his honour, the Heroon—whether it was a cenotaph or a proper burial—legitimised the political power of the *demos* over the territory.²⁷

In the context of *ktiseis*, the religious character of the founding expeditions was essential: the oracle guided the oikist with its hermetic and mysterious response and invested the mission with a sacred character, which transformed the *ktisis* into a legitimate act also on a religious level, empowering the founder with a supremacy that aligned him with the gods as an *axis mundi*. In this regard, on a concrete level, during the land appropriation process, the founder also assumed legitimate political power, which has been suggestively compared by Claude Bérard as an allegory of sovereignty.²⁸ However, it was often emphasised that his power could change in accordance with different situations, both as a matter of the specific nature of the foundation (even the number of oikists could change) and in relation to the geographical aspects, but also in relation to the particular historical period in which the new act of κτίσις was performed. The oikist, therefore, was also a lawgiver when he established with his authority common laws for the *demos*. He was responsible for maintaining the social order of the *polis* in regulating internal conflicts and in the relationship with the local populations where the new settlement

repercussions on social functions, and ultimately on political power. The migration of a member of the royal aristocracy to new territories with the purpose of establishing new settlements (a phenomenon that bears some similarities to the foundation of *apoikiai*) involved the assignment to the founder – conferred by the Shang ruler at the head of the other clans – of a distinctive surname and a set of ritual objects, status symbols, and, finally, also the erection of an ancestral temple containing the ancestral tablet of the founder “oikist,” that would become the object of a new local cult after the death of the founder (Chang 1983, 16). The Shang ruler was the head of political and spiritual power, also responsible for the mantic rituals performed on the oracular bones (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文). Royal divinations were carved or inscribed on plastrons of tortoises or bovine scapulae. The king made use of divination for political affairs and to establish new settlements officiating the prescribed rites to align his rule with the divine will, like an oikist or a founding ruler of the Greek world. The oracular responses legitimised his political power. Thus, he was a sort of progenitor, as well as *archegetes* and highest priest, in the same way as Homeric kings. At least until the later Western Zhou 西周 period (1046–771 BCE), the new political center was often in the frontier areas to facilitate military expansion. Once control over these territories was secured, the construction of the new settlement was centred on two fundamental cultic structures: the shrine of the ancestors and the *genius loci* (*she* 社), the altar mound of the Earth. The structure was set in open air; it was covered by a roof only if the fiefdom had been conquered: this act had the purpose to break the connection between this ὀμφαλός and Heaven, the residence of the divinised ancestor. See Kominami 2009. The role of ancestral sacrifice as social unification factor is reaffirmed in later classical sources, such as *Liji* 禮記 (3rd–2nd century BCE). According to *Liji*, the hierarchy that sets the sovereign at the top of the social pyramid finds correspondence in the world of the ancestors; the sovereign (*wang* 王), “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi* 天子), is consequently represented as people’s “father and mother.” The *wang* is the only element capable of “centering” the realm, ensuring the cosmic order that unites ancestors and descendants. The organisation of society into a series of lineages is a direct consequence of rituals, but the proper use of ritual by the sages led the people to consider themselves as a single family, under the father-sovereign, who represents the apex of the distinct lineages. See Puett 2021.

²⁷ The founders of cities in the West (Magna Graecia and Sicily) are often historical figures: see for example Donnellan 2015 for the narratives on the foundation of Naxos. For a comparison with Theseus’ different role as a synecist in Athens and the different narratives about his semi-divine or historical pedigree, see Turner 2015. Other heroes could be honoured in the ἄγορά; but the founder in the Greek ἀποικία was the hero (ἥρωες) *par excellence*, hence, the *heros ktistes* (ἥρωες κτίστης) (as remarked by Greco 2014, 40). For references to Greek foundation narratives, see footnote 1, and also Malkin 1987; Dougherty 1993; Malkin 1998; Osborne 1998; Giangiulio 2001; Calame 2003. For a well-articulated *caveat* against generalisation, see Greco 2006.

²⁸ Bérard 1990, 98. See also the similar conclusions in de Polignac 1995, 155–156.

was established. Thus, the oikist's supremacy, reinforced by the possession of sacred objects, could be seen as a cohesive element of the new κτήμα, and ultimately represents the root—deeply connected to the motherland—of a cult that identifies the community with the founder himself.²⁹ The founder of the new *polis* was a leader who planned the city, even programming the concrete spaces of the *chora*; he was also the supreme military commander. For this reason, the oikist cult was interpreted as a projection of aristocratic power in the political context of the new city.³⁰ In this regard, the constitutive process of the city has been defined by François de Polignac as a *mise en place* of a new cultic organisation, which finds concrete expression in the foundation or monumentalisation of sanctuaries as a concrete sign of the new community identity.³¹ The oikist became simultaneously founder, progenitor and object of worship of the *polis*: three aspects reflected in the definition of Ἀρχηγέτης.³²

The mythical-legendary memories constitute an important vehicle of ancient cities collective cultural memory. However, it is also possible to explore this subject on a material level, with particular reference to archaeological sources, which have left scholars wondering about interpretations of some monuments that may be considered as material traces of a possible cult.

Mythical or divine founders: the case of Parthenope

A particular case of a *ktisis* that seems to be linked to a mythological account is Parthenope: the eponymous siren takes on the peculiar features of a mythical oikist. The ancient Cumaean foundation of this *epineion* is associated with the mythical memory of the siren venerated and commemorated in the collective identity of the *polis*. Parthenope was founded between the second half of the 8th and the first half of the 7th century BCE, earlier than the subsequent re-foundation of the city, renamed as Neapolis.³³

Mythos and *topos* seem to be perfectly aligned in the case of Parthenope, and if we identify it as the *ónoma* of the archaic *ktēma*, the adaptation of the foundation narrative *logos* is even more evocative. The *ktisis* of Parthenope is an illustrative case study of what has already been mentioned in this contribution about the mythical-literary tradition that—thanks to narrative techniques—becomes the memory of the collective identity of the *apoikia*: the literary mythical element is connected to the cultural identity and flows into the historiographical tradition of the foundation. In this context, myth becomes a ritual and a cultic activity, restoring the link between the *demos* and the *ktisis* narrative tradition through the celebration of the cult dedicated to the siren and the performance of

²⁹ On the oikist and the oikist cult, see Malkin 1987, 199–220, 261–266; Antonaccio 1999; Ekroth 2002; Boffa 2019 focuses on the extremely scarce epigraphic evidence concerning the cult of colonial founders; Giangiulio 2021 offers a very interesting analysis of a fragment of Callimachus' *Aitia* that provides evidence of founder worship in the colonies of ancient Sicily.

³⁰ Malkin 1987, 250–251.

³¹ de Polignac 1995, 180.

³² See Malkin 1987, 241–248.

³³ On the foundation of Parthenope, see Pugliese Carratelli 1976; Raviola 1990; Mele 2014; Giampaola – Greco 2022; Fariello 2023a.

gymnastic *agones* in her honour, the λαμπαδηδρομία: the torch race. The legendary tradition is closely linked to historical sources concerning the foundation of Parthenope: its territory became the chosen theatre where the act of *ktisis* took place. In fact, according to the epic of the myth, with her *katapontismos*, a suicidal leap into the sea, the siren was washed up on the shores of the gulf. This act marked the start of a transformation process of the legendary discourse: from the mythographic realm we move on to the ritual sphere, through the cult that transforms the siren into a mother goddess of this ancient city, that—especially in the context of the next re-foundation of Neapolis—contributed to the historical continuity with the older Cumaean settlement.³⁴

Historical sources on the foundation of the earliest settlement of Parthenope are relatively meagre and they refer to the later Cumaean re-foundation of the new city: Neapolis. Parthenope is mentioned as the *palaia polis* and appears to be chronologically older and significantly detached from the *ktisis* of Neapolis. For the identification of the earliest and oldest *ktema* of Parthenope, a fragment dating from the 2nd century BCE of the *Comunes historiae* by Lutatius Daphnis—quoted by Philargyrius in his comment to Virgil (*ad Georg.*, 4.564 = fr. Peter 7)—seems to be particularly significant. According to this account, “The inhabitants of the territory of Cumae, after leaving their families, founded the city of Parthenope, named after the siren Parthenope, whose body also [was buried there] (*Dicit Cumanos incolas a parentibus digressos Parthenopem urbem constituisse, dictam a Parthenope sirena, cuius corpus etiam [...]*).”³⁵ However, it is later reported in the fragment that, after the city began to be popular due to its fertility and beauty, the Cumaeans decided to destroy Parthenope, because they feared that Cumae might be abandoned. Subsequently, the destroyers were struck by a plague; following the oracular response they decided to rebuild the city by welcoming with great devotion the cult of the siren Parthenope, and by virtue of this new foundation they named the city Neapolis.³⁶ From the passage we learn of the existence of a Cumaean foundation, more ancient than Neapolis, and of its destruction, again by the Cumaeans. In this regard, Livy (8.22.5; 8.23.10) confirms the existence of Parthenope and Neapolis at the same time. The Roman historian

³⁴ On the next *ktisis* of Neapolis, see Mertens 2006; Giampaola – Greco 2022, in particular 66–113.

³⁵ See Cerchiai 2020.

³⁶ Lutatius Daphnis’ account about the richness achieved by Parthenope (which allegedly led to its destruction by the Cumaeans) can be supported by archaeological records. The topographical reconstruction proposed by Daniela Giampaola has already highlighted the opulence of the eastern plain of the ancient settlement (Giampaola et al. 2005, 47–54; chapter IV in Giampaola – Greco 2022, 42–53); in the light of the latest archaeological discoveries, it seems clear that the economy of the early settlement received a strong development from the profits of this *epineion* derived from maritime trade. Archaeological investigation on the finds from the ancient harbour of Parthenope – which seems to have been located in the same area where the harbour of Neapolis later developed – has revealed an increase in ceramic finds and, in particular, trade amphorae of both Greek and Etruscan import. According to Daniela Giampaola, the archaeological data collected from the harbour area of the first *ktisis* (Parthenope) would show an increase of the maritime traffic suggesting the inclusion of this *epineion* in the routes connecting the Greek world with the Etruscan and indigenous areas. In the second quarter of the 5th century BCE there was a trade contraction, as suggested by the sudden decrease of the archaeological evidence, and then a considerable increase in the chronological phase of the 4th–3rd century BCE: this has been interpreted as a concrete confirmation of the narrative of the historical sources, referring to the period when Parthenope coexisted as a *palaia polis* with Neapolis. Perhaps in the decrease of data it could be possible to detect a period of time when Parthenope was destroyed by the “envious” Cumaeans for its economic wealth. See Giampaola 2017; Giampaola 2020; Giampaola – Carsana 2021.

reports that the old settlement was located at a short distance from Neapolis and that both cities were inhabited by people “of equal lineage from Cumae.”³⁷

The Siren Parthenope is portrayed as a pre-existing entity of the local *pantheon*. The Athenian navarchus Diotimos transformed the myth of the Sirens into an actual body of faith with his ritual act, specifically, with the institution of the Lampadedromia on the shores of the *Kymaion Kòlpos*. Timaeus (4th–3rd c. BCE) says that “according to an oracle,” approaching Neapolis, Diotimos offered a sacrifice to Parthenope; he established an annual torch race and officiated the cult at the *sema*—the tomb—of the siren.³⁸

Consequently, from the mythical tradition, the siren becomes an object of worship and the centre of ritual elaboration that contributes to balance collective society. If the *epos* constitutes our systematisation of myths by incorporating them into the narrative tradition, the mythological oikist becomes the “body of faith.” Moreover, in this foundation case study we can find the use of *archegetes* in its dual meaning: Parthenope is the mythical founder and the progenitor of the political order.

A literary source from the Hellenistic period reconstructs the mythical-legendary genesis of the siren mentioned by Lutatius: the Hellenistic poem *Alexandra* (Lycoph. *Alex.* 712–737) by Lycophron tells that the body of Parthenope—one of the three sirens he mentions—had washed up on the shores, next to the tower of Phaleros, in correspondence with the cape of Mount Echia on the hill of Pizzofalcone. Her suicide was caused by Odysseus’ resistance to the seduction of her singing. Following that tragic episode, the inhabitants of the place built a monument in her honour.³⁹ The *aition* of the cult is concentrated in verses 712–721 of the *Alexandra*: the suicide leap (*katapontismos*) is presented as an integral part of the cultic narrative and it is a constitutive element of the birth of the ritual that anticipates the foundation myth.⁴⁰ The siren becomes a deity at the same time as her cult is established: “The inhabitants will build the tomb of the maiden on that specific location and there will be annual libations and oxen sacrificed to the glory of Parthenope, bird goddess” (Lycoph. *Alex.* 719–721).

From mythical to ritual sphere: the siren becomes a polyad divinity in the context of the re-foundation of Neapolis; the location of the cult dedicated to Parthenope is her *sema* and, according to an ancient oracle, gymnastic *agones* are customarily practised in the *polis*. This important information converges in Strabo’s *Geography* (5.4.7). The mythical cultural memory becomes an instrument of legitimacy and a Neapolitan symbol of collective identity, creating a legendary prehistory that flows into the historiography

³⁷ See Giampaola – Greco 2022, 66–67.

³⁸ Timaeus *FGrHist* 566 F98 = *schol.* ad Lycoph. 717–721. Lampadedromia were typical Athenian celebrations: see Shear 2021, 106–108. On the chronology of Diotimos’ arrival, see Giampaola – Greco 2022, 72–76. The narration of the *ktisis* of Diotimos sanctioned by the oracular response combines the religious and political aspects as remarked by Malkin 1987, 85: “Diotimos son of Strombichos, after having commanded the Athenian fleet which was sent to aid Korkyra in 433/2 BC, later led Athenian colonists to Neapolis and as their oikist received some sort of foundation oracle about honouring Parthenope.” A passage by Strabo (5.246) remarks that the Athenians were part of the groups that founded Neapolis; the geographer also mentions the presence of a *mnema* dedicated to Parthenope and the athletic competition prescribed by an oracle (*kata manteian*), maybe the same oracular response cited by Timaeus. See Gallo 2023, 28.

³⁹ On the Sirens in Lycophron, see Raviola 2006; Biffis 2016.

⁴⁰ On the suicide act by the Sirens in other literary sources, see at least Strab. 6.1.1; *Orph. Arg.* 1284–1291; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 7.19.

of Neapolis. The affirmation of the new *polis* identity is perpetuated in the local cult and is remarked in the Lampadedromia dedicated to Parthenope. These collective celebrations were naturally anchored to the figure of this mythological oikist. Nevertheless, the worship relevance of the siren is emphasised by Timaeus and Lycophron and is closely associated with the Greek foundation experience in the West. The predisposition to deification of these sea Muses makes them venerable objects of worship, goddesses, *theai* (Alcm. fr. 86).⁴¹ From the status of *parthenos*, the siren becomes a goddess: the eponymous divinity, the original progenitor of the *polis* and also a symbol of fertility.⁴²

The tower of Phaleros where the siren's body lied could be considered as a further clue of the ancient connection of Neapolis with the Greek homeland.⁴³ Moreover, the Siren Parthenope mentioned by Lycophron—who is subordinate to Timaeus as a primary source—is related to the oldest myth of the Sirens: primarily the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Od.* 12.39–52, 166–191) and Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*.⁴⁴

The myth of the Sirens was geographically located by Strabo (5.4.8) in the Sorrentine context: the toponym Parthenope is mentioned in reference to the smallest of the three islets defined as Sirēnoussai (today Li Galli) in the open sea off Positano.⁴⁵ Probably, Strabo's primary source is the *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* (*Mir. ausc.* 839 a) by Pseudo-Aristotle.⁴⁶ These hybrid entities are portrayed as ornithomorphic creatures with the head of a woman.⁴⁷

It is necessary to point out that there is no specific mention in *Geography* that refers to the toponym Parthenope as a Cumaean foundation more ancient than Neapolis: the geographer states that there was an older Cumaean colony before Neapolis, but he does not mention its name. Elsewhere, Strabo records a foundation named Parthenope (14.2.10): probably relying on a Rhodian source, he mentions a series of cities that were allegedly founded in the West by the Rhodians many years before the establishment of the Olympiads. As part of his review of foundations, it appears a city named Parthenope that was founded in the land of the Opici. This foundation tradition was also summarised by Stephanus of Byzantium, who evidently used Strabo's work as a source.⁴⁸

As Lorenzo Braccesi also pointed out, the toponyms identified by Strabo (5.4.8) could also be considered as a legacy of that mythical geographical memory that was plausibly inherited by the Euboic colonists, who located Odysseus' circumnavigation in the West.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Giangiulio 1986, 125; Giangiulio 1991; Taylor 2015; Moro 2019; Fariello 2023b.

⁴² See Mele 2016, 315.

⁴³ Paus. 1. 2. For the problem of the interpretation of the expression *Phaleroi tyrsis* in Lycophron, see Giampaola – Greco 2022, 69–72.

⁴⁴ On Sirens in the *Catalogue of Women*, Breglia Pulci Doria 1990; De Sanctis 2003.

⁴⁵ For the identification of the Sirens with the three islets off the coast of Sorrento, traditionally called “Li Galli,” see Federico 2010. For an in-depth analysis, Senatore 2014; Senatore 2020.

⁴⁶ Raviola 1990, 48–49.

⁴⁷ The most famous of these iconographic evidence appear on an Attic *stamnos* from Vulci, dated 480–470 BCE and preserved in the British Museum (n. 1843,1103.31). See Walters 1927, III Ic Pl. 20, 1; and the image in the British Museum website (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1843-1103-31).

⁴⁸ In this regard, theories that attributed to Rhodians the foundation of Parthenope have not been confirmed by archaeological data. On Parthenope as a Rhodian foundation, see Pugliese Carratelli 1976, 182 n. 3. On the problematic aspects of this theory, see Mele 2014, 147–149; Giampaola – Greco 2022, 20–23.

⁴⁹ Braccesi 1994, 3–4.

Concerning the above-mentioned passages from Strabo, Eduardo Federico has postulated the presence and the reflection of a contrast between two political orientations: “philo-Cumaean” and “philo-Neapolitan.”⁵⁰ The “philo-Neapolitan” perspective considered the siren a constitutive element of the *polis* cultural identity and cults. Remarking the presence of the siren’s tomb, the Neapolitans reinforced the legitimacy *logos* of the political power of Neapolis. Cults, monuments, collective and religious practices of the *polis*—last but not least, the possession of the siren’s relics, i.e. the body of faith—reinforced the collective identity and the strength of the *demos*. The same term *mnema* adopted by the geographer (Strab. 5.4.7) had the purpose to confirm the presence of the mythical oikist’s cenotaph, which was also an emblem of the cultural memory of the *polis* emphasising the legitimacy discourse. In conclusion, the monumental programme of the civic space of Neapolis emphasised these symbols of political power legitimated by the religion and also reflected in the cultic sphere.⁵¹ This aspect probably mirrored the antagonisms aroused between the two cities of Cumae and Neapolis, especially in the light of the growing importance that Neapolis was gaining. However, in another section of his work, Strabo explicitly identifies the location of the three sirens in the bay of Sorrento (Strab. 5.4.8), suggesting the probable presence of a “Philo-Cumaean” perspective: perhaps, in order to question the discourse of Neapolitan legitimacy, he proposed a substitutive or at least an alternative version to the tradition that localised the siren’s relics on the shores of the Neapolitan Bay.

Landmarks of heroic kings as *ktistai*

As already affirmed by François de Polignac, the oikist cult could be portrayed as a hero worship. It has a specific location: the Heroon, a monument dedicated to the oikist, that was generally localised in the *ἀγορά* (the political heart of the city), and sometimes it was hidden from the eyes of the citizens.⁵²

The source that appears to be the most comprehensive evidence of the oikist cult is Thucydides. He reports on the burial of Brasidas at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.11.1). The Amphipolitans initiated the burial ritual of the Spartan general in front of the *agorà*. Considering him as an oikist, they surrounded his monument with a wall. During the ceremony, rituals and sacrifices were performed as a typical heroic cult. Thereafter, every year gymnastic *agones* and sacrifices were dedicated to him.⁵³ Focusing on the earliest

⁵⁰ Federico 2010.

⁵¹ Concerning the presence of temple structures dating back to the settlement of Parthenope, archaeological excavations have brought to light in Piazza S. Maria degli Angeli some *louteria* with painted decorations and some polychrome architectural terracottas, which in terms of type and style could be compared with other fragments found in architectural contexts related to the Campanian roof system (descending from the original style of the Cumaean roof system). These fragments may have constituted a small part of a larger monumental programme, which could refer to the presence of a possible sanctuary structure. Cf. Giampaola 2017, 209.

⁵² de Polignac 1995, 151. The author affirms that Erwin Rohde was the first to point out that the city foundation is associated with the oikist’s heroization; the founder has the privilege to be commemorated by the erection of a monument dedicated to him in the centre of the *agorà*. See Rohde 2006.

⁵³ See Mari 2012; Mari 2015a. Of particular interest in this regard are the archaeological excavations of the Heroon of Amphipolis, in which the cremated remains of the oikist together with a wreath of gold olive

case studies that were also analysed by François de Polignac,⁵⁴ the heroic character inherited by the oikist cult seems to appear during the Dark Age (as in the case of Lefkandi) and persists even during the 8th–7th centuries BCE in funerary contexts where the heroised sovereigns were buried in a specific Homeric custom. In the context of dynastic frameworks, and especially in the case of the necropolis of Lefkandi, libation rituals represented the probable evidence of cults reserved for the restricted élite of the *aristoi*.⁵⁵ The proliferation of legendary or eponymous founders could be considered as a late phenomenon emulating the colonial founder tradition, but it does not constitute a precedent for it. Whether the development of heroic cults has to be seen as a phenomenon of continuity with previous centuries or as an innovation, it is however clear that in the 8th century some new developments also occurred in the cult and funerary customs of the aristocracy.⁵⁶

During the second half of the 8th century BCE, the heroic burials of the “warriors” of Argos seem to suggest a sort of revindication of the authority and superlative prestige, that—in the framework of an affirmation of direct descentance discourse—probably aimed at the assertion of their assimilation with the Homeric heroes.⁵⁷ Competing aristocratic groups built their own funerary monuments near the Heraion, in the heart of the *chora*, which were eloquent signs of a specific heroic status set on an equal level with Homeric rulers: kings of Argos tried to consolidate their position in competition with the other dynasties of the plane. The warrior king was constantly compared to Heracles and to animals such as the lion that emphasised his courage: this was meant to assert a kind of superiority in a context of competition among monarchies. The heroic character became an instrument of a political power legitimisation extended to the successors. The *sema*, as a sign recognisable by the entire community, represented a landmark, a metaphor for a status of heroisation equivalent to a new collective awareness of the specific ancestor role assumed by the founding hero.⁵⁸ The kings were cremated emulating the Homeric style and their tombs were filled with rich grave goods and with the presence of iconography patterns related to heroic imagery. Further symbolisms enriched the λόγος of a kingship legitimised by the ἀρετή: the battle prowess of the warrior aristocracies became the main motif of the legitimacy discourse. The unprecedented lavishness of the funerary offerings and other archaeological finds suggesting the presence of horse sacrificial rituals seem to emulate the same funerary custom and honours dedicated to heroes like Patroclus (Hom. *Il.* 23.252–257) and Achilles (Hom. *Od.* 24.63–84).⁵⁹

Moreover, it could be not entirely unreasonable to suggest that the Homeric-inspired burials of Argos may have constituted a model of inspiration that was voluntarily employed

leaves were preserved in a silver *larnax*. The building brought to light has been dated to the 5th century BCE. Concerning the foundation episode narrated by Thucydides, it should be noted that the passage emphasises that the vestiges of the commemorative monument in honour of the first oikist Hagnon were removed to replace them with the new structure dedicated to Brasidas. See Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 2015.

⁵⁴ de Polignac 1995, 159–160.

⁵⁵ Gallou 2005. For the “Homeric” connotations of the Toumba building at Lefkandi, see Kourkoulakos 2023. See also Antonaccio 2002; Giamakis 2023.

⁵⁶ See Malkin 1987, 261–266.

⁵⁷ de Polignac 1995, 156–157.

⁵⁸ On the tumuli of Argos, see Duplouy 2021.

⁵⁹ de Polignac 1995, 153. See also Ekroth 2002, and the considerations in Pavlides 2023, 11–27.

in later periods. Thus, it is probable that this paradigm also became a useful tool for asserting the legitimacy of a dynastic power: the Homeric style, for instance, is a recognisable language of the royal representation code adopted by the Macedonian kings. In this regard, the Macedonian royal tombs of Vergina (Aigai, the ceremonial capital of the dynasty) could be considered as a tangible sign of a legitimacy discourse founded on the mythological dynastic descentance λόγος from Heracles.⁶⁰

The rich funerary customs of Tomb II—the presumed burial of Philip II—seem to emphasise opulence and luxury as reminders of the rich funerary items belonging to Homeric rulers.⁶¹ Probably, in my opinion, the evidence of these languages—that could be identified as traces of a clear emulation of Homeric sovereignty—could be interpreted as a specific paradigm of legitimacy and as a symbol of the bond of the deceased sovereigns of the dynasty, heroic ancestors, with the legitimised rulers of the Hellenistic era. The great burial mound—located near the northern area of the ancient city where the royal palace of Aigai was built—was excavated in 1980 and it has been interpreted not only as a symbol of wealth but also as an emblem of authority and power.⁶² The tumulus could be identified as a true *sema*, especially with reference to its connotations as a commemorative monument. Its symbolism suggests that Macedonian aristocratic deceased members continued to play a sufficiently crucial role to deserve the valorisation of their presence and the commemoration of their memory.⁶³

According to Manolis Andronikos, the remains of the Macedonian ruler in Tomb II underwent a special procedure: the bones had been soaked in wine and then wrapped in a very precious textile inside a golden *larnax*. The wreath of oak leaves on the head of the ruler, the panoply of precious weapons, the libation vessels together with the amphorae filled with honey and olive oil and other items like unguentaries containing perfumed oils were burnt into the flames of the funeral pyre. With this specific burial ritual, the ruler of Tomb II was reunited through funerary tradition with the Homeric rulers, but especially with his ancestral progenitor: Heracles. Through the flames of the pyre, the ruler left his mortal existence as a hero, like Heracles in the world of the immortals.⁶⁴ The heroic character of Macedonian kingship was also emphasised in the sphere of religious practices, and, in particular, in the specific cult officiated by the Macedonian rulers in honour of Heracles Πατρῶς, a cult in which Heracles was honoured as an ancestor, *Propator*. Moreover, epigraphic evidence has also suggested that the practice of this specific cult was not confined to the aristocratic circle but was also practised on the popular level.⁶⁵ Similarly, the Macedonian cult of Athena Ἀλκίδημος in Pella⁶⁶ could clearly express those Homeric aristocratic values. Evidence of Athena's importance

⁶⁰ Herodotus gives shape to the genealogy of the Macedonian dynasty: in 8.137–138 he affirms that the Macedonian kings through Perdiccas descended from Temenos, the Argive descent of Heracles. According to his account, Perdiccas I escaped with his brothers from the Peloponnese. See Mari 2015b, 81.

⁶¹ Cf. Fariello 2025b. On royal “Homeric” burial practice, see Andronikos 1991, 170; Kottaridi 2011.

⁶² Drougou 2015, 245.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of the historical evolution and role of tumuli in Macedonian territory, see Schmidt-Dounas 2016.

⁶⁴ Andronikos 1991; Kottaridi 2011, 62–63.

⁶⁵ Cf. Mari 2015c, 455 and related bibliography.

⁶⁶ Brett 1950; Voutiras 1998, 120–121. On the epithet attributed to Athena, see Liv. 42.51.1–2.

in Macedonian royal burials is represented by the ritual helmet from Tomb II with the bust of Athena in relief.⁶⁷

Even more important for a new reinterpretation of the tumulus is the monument that has been identified as a Heroon, at the south end of the tomb cluster of Tomb II, inserted in part in the fill of the burial pit of Tomb I.⁶⁸ There is no space here to dwell on whether a regular cult was actually performed at the monument identified as Heroon within the tumulus of Vergina. However, with reference to the entire mound of the Macedonian dynasty and to the Homeric-style funerary ceremonial dedicated to the ruler buried in Tomb II, it would not be so far-fetched to claim that the mound itself might have been considered by the Hellenistic successors not only as a *sema*, a memorial monument dedicated to the ancestral rulers, heroes descended by Heracles—legitimised in the same way as the Homeric warrior aristocracies—but also as a cultural and identity symbol. This specific symbolism was not only recognisable on a local level, but also in the broader geographical context of the Hellenistic Greek world, where Hellenistic kings represented themselves as direct successors of the Macedonian dynasty.⁶⁹

Thus, in the contest of dynastic legitimisation patterns of the great tumulus, I would like to add a few personal remarks. The Macedonian rulers, with their specific burial customs adopted in the funerary context of the “mega tumulus,” stand out for their Homeric emulative philological care. In the same way as the 8th–7th centuries kings of Argos (from which they pretended to descend) who emulated the greatness of Homeric heroic kings, the funerary context of Vergina—with its rich grave goods, bronze cauldrons, *alabastra* with protomes of Heracles, hunting friezes, and the sovereign’s panoply of tomb II burned in the pyre—constitutes a continuity for this heroic funerary custom.

In my opinion, the monument identified as a Heroon could be considered as a monument dedicated to the victory of the dynasty. At the same time, the mega tumulus could represent a kind of “mega-heroon” with the purpose of affirming a succession of legitimacy of the royal Macedonian power. According to this interpretation, the Macedonian rulers buried in the tumulus were commemorated by their successors as *ktistai* of a new political order, as progenitors of a new era, the *archegetai* of the Hellenistic world. However, the first progenitor-hero of the lineage was the quintessential hero, the semi-divine Heracles.

In fact, the particular reference to Heracles detectable in the iconographic patterns of the libation vessels with leonine protomes, and also traceable among other decorative items of the trousseau, not only had the purpose of perpetuating the cultic practices celebrated by the dynasty in the ceremonial capital in honour of the semi-divine hero and ancestor. Perhaps, like in other contexts where the heroic character appeared in relation with the commemorative monuments and practices of the oikist cult, the presence of Heracles, explicit in iconography symbolism and in aniconic form, in the context of the *apotheosis* and ascension processes of deceased kings to Olympus by means of the flames of the funeral pyre, indicated the passage of the dead semi-divine heroes to a posthumous divine status. Moreover, the presence of Heracles could even recall, on a general level, king’s heroisation, typical of the funerary custom practised by kings of Argos. Additionally, we

⁶⁷ On the helmet of the panoply of tomb II, see Kottaridi 2011, 66.

⁶⁸ Kottaridi 2011, 24.

⁶⁹ On the ruler-cults during the following period of development of the Hellenistic culture, see Coppola 2016.

can also find other examples of heroic cults at Mycenae, and also in Sparta at the Menelaion and Helenaion, erected in ancient Therapne.⁷⁰

Regardless of whether or not a heroic cult was officiated at Vergina, in the Hellenistic context the *sema*-tumulus was an important symbol of cultural belonging: the expression of Hero cults to Hellenistic rulers finds evidence in some specific contexts that would constitute the ramifications of the original symbolism of Macedonian founding rulers, the Original Macedonian kings from the “Old Kingdom.” We find an example of this role representation code in the epigraphic reference of Philip *soter ktistes*, founder of a new order.⁷¹

This Hero cult and the heroisation symbolism of the oikist can also be found in the context of *apoikiai*.⁷²

In conclusion, the burial style of Tomb II could be described as a Homeric triumph,⁷³ but perhaps it could be also interpreted as a kind of “revival of Heracles’ apotheosis” experienced by the ruler, who was reunited with his semi-divine ancestor, the mythical founder of the Argead dynasty.

Nevertheless, it could be also remarked that in the Macedonian context, the presence of Heracles as iconographic and symbolic motif seems to suggest that this reference should be interpreted not only as a theme exclusively related to the Macedonian *logos* of legitimacy: the funeral pyre could also be regarded as a symbolism of an ultimate rite of passage experienced by the heroic king who made his transition to a divine status. In this specific case, the burial symbolic elements of Tomb II—for example the golden wreath with oak leaves, metonymical symbol of the sacred tree of Zeus—could be interpreted as a sign of the ruler’s transition into divine status in the context of an apotheosis process where the semi-divine hero king becomes in the afterlife a sovereign legitimated by the king of the gods.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ On the Menelaion, see Pavlides 2023, 103–120.

⁷¹ Identified as Philip V, see Mari 2008, 263.

⁷² An eloquent example is Poseidonia (Paestum), a sub-colony in Magna Graecia founded by the Sybarites ca. 650–625 BCE (Longo 1999; Greco 2000, 2019). The Heroon of Poseidonia, discovered in 1954 by Pellegrino Claudio Sestieri, is still today the subject of ongoing investigations. The monument, originally a hypogeum, has been dated to ca. 510 BCE. In the 1980s, excavation campaigns proved that the “sacellum hypogeum” was originally covered by a tumulus: a structure strikingly similar to the tomb of Battos, founder of Cyrene. Emanuele Greco assumed that the “sacellum” was a cenotaph dedicated to the founding hero of Poseidonia, identifiable with a Megyllos or Megyllis thanks to a silver coin already known in the early 20th century (Greco 2014, 40–43). The heroisation of this historical figure can be deduced from one of the clay artefacts (six *hydriai* and two amphorae) of the sumptuous trousseau found in 1954 inside the “sacellum” and now preserved in the Museum of Paestum: it is an Attic amphora, ascribed to the so-called “Chiusi painter” and dating from 520–510 BCE, with an eloquent iconographic language. The amphora’s foot broke off but was restored using lead grappling hooks: this proves that the iconography on the main vessel surface was fundamental for the cenotaph setting, and made its inclusion necessary, despite the damage it suffered. It depicts Heracles’ entrance to Olympus (*apotheosis*), i.e. a scene of heroisation *par excellence*, of a mortal becoming god. This iconographic image, together with the evidence of a sacrifice of roasted meat and the remains of honey within a *hydria* (a typical element of heroic funerals), found within the “sacellum,” are elements that would indeed appear to support the existence of a heroic cult dedicated to the founder.

⁷³ Fariello 2025b, 268.

⁷⁴ Cf. Kottaridi 2011, 63. With regard to the golden wreath with oak leaves as a royal emblem of legitimacy bestowed by Zeus, it could be reminded—admitting that the occupant of Tomb II is Philip II—the prominent

In addition, the symbolism of the funerary ritual, the constant references to the semi-divine hero and also the presence of honey in the amphorae can also be found in archaeological contexts of other monumental dynastic burials of heroised rulers or even in some grave goods preserved in certain *Heroa* from the *apoikiai* world.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, ancient sources already highlighted peculiar traits in the style of representation of royal power adopted by the Macedonian kings, especially Philip II, who portrayed himself as a typical Homeric king. In this regard, Robin J. Lane Fox pointed out that according to an interpretation that adopts an anthropological approach the attitudes and the kingship promoted by Philip II could be framed as “pseudo-Homeric.” Even in battle, Philip II fought like a Homeric hero; the importance of his *hetairoi*, the offerings in honour of the gods and the ritual culture of gift-giving that he practised could be interpreted as constant reminders of the world celebrated by Homer.⁷⁶ The same role assumed by the Macedonian sovereigns as “High Priests” suggested by the sources may constitute evidence of this desire to represent their power in a Homeric style.⁷⁷ The tumulus could perform the same symbolic function of a *sema*, a memorial monument dedicated to the ancestral Macedonian rulers and also a landmark of the dynasty’s victory. In this regard, after 323 BCE, the kings of the Hellenistic oecumene legitimised themselves as successors of the Macedonian dynasty: the effigy of an Alexander-Heracles on their coins legitimised their political power. The Macedonian ancestor heroic king, who descended from Heracles, was a paradigm with endless references to the heroic past, even echoing the mythical-legendary memories preserved in the Homeric corpus.⁷⁸ Alexander, who had legitimised himself as an emulation of Heracles and Achilles, took his personal edition of the *Iliad* always with him to every place where his military conquest stretched out (Strab. 13.1.27; Pliny, *HN* 7.28; 29; Plut. *Alex.* 8.2). Thus, even in the Hellenistic era, the re-enactment of heroic values in the collective memory was reincarnated in the faces of the rulers who succeeded one after the other on the thrones of the kingdoms of the Greek-Hellenistic world.

In conclusion, it is possible that the mound-*sema* of Vergina represented—in the same way as a mega-heroon—cultural-historical values of a royal identity that legitimised the new generations of Hellenistic rulers. As a funerary monument, not only it was an element of continuity for dynastic legitimacy, but maybe was also a landmark representing the Macedonian ancestor sovereigns, founders of a new political order, progenitors, law-givers, basically *ktistai*.

symbolism adopted by Philip in 352 BCE, during the Third Sacred War: the use of laurel wreath on the battlefield at Crocus Field as an emblem of his role as avenger on behalf of Apollo against the sacrilegious Phocidians (Just. 8.2.1–4). Cf. Fariello 2021b. On the oak wreath as a symbol of highest divinity of the Macedonian royal family, see Santagati 2023.

⁷⁵ See the considerations on Poseidonia and the relative references in footnote 72.

⁷⁶ Lane Fox 2015b, 358–359; Fariello 2025b, 259.

⁷⁷ Mari 2015c, 455.

⁷⁸ See Fariello – Gallo 2023, 93.

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