

# Kings, Gods and Heroes in a Dynastic Perspective

## A Comparative Approach

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ABSTRACT – This paper focuses on divinity and heroization of kings and queens as strategies for the legitimation of the new hellenistic dynasties, underlining common patterns and local needs. The main questions are how public and private inputs influenced each other and how previous Greek models were re-worked and apted to the new situations.

KEYWORDS – Cults, dynasty, gods, heroes, kings. Culti, dei, dinastia, eroi, re.

### 1. DYNASTIC CONTINUITY IN THE CENTRALIZED CULT

The distinction between civic and centralized state-cults is traditionally accepted as the most important feature in every scholarly attempt at classifying *ruler cults*. Such interpretative model is generally completed by drawing attention to further distinctive characteristics concerning the main aspects of cult organization and the causes of the phenomenon. Besides explicit deification, assimilation between rulers and gods as well as cases of cult and temple sharing have also been investigated<sup>1</sup>. Concerning the beginning of centralized state-cults in the Seleukid and Ptolemaic kingdoms, the exact date is still under discussion. As we shall see below, chronological fluctuation depends on both the incertitude of the evidence and on the evaluation of what we define as dynastic cult: either, as a minimalist reading, a cult expressing a message of intergenerational continuity, or, as a maximalist interpretation, one related to an interrupted genealogical list of sovereigns including the dynastic line in its entirety<sup>2</sup>. Regarding civic honours, scholars have focused on the «euergetic discourse» expressed in epigraphy and

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<sup>1</sup> Cerfaux - Tondriau 1957; Taeger 1957; Habicht 1970<sup>2</sup>; Walbank 1984<sup>2</sup>, 87-99; Hauben 1989; Schmidt-Dounas 1993/94; Azeri 2005.

<sup>2</sup> As regards the Seleukids cf. Van Nuffelen 2004; as for the Ptolemies Fraser 1972, 213 ff.

on its underpinning principle of *do ut des* in justifying the establishment of *isotheoi timai* for the king by Greek cities. Here the importance of royal euergetism is made evident by honours bestowed upon the king as *euergetes* or *soter* and in the reasons that motivate such homage<sup>3</sup>. Queens too are deified by the Greek cities in similar ways and for similar reasons, among which religious merits and social solidarity stand out<sup>4</sup>. A famous example is provided by the Teian decrees for Antiochos III and Laodike, containing rich information on the honorary practice, the language and habits of communication between the cities and the king, and shedding light on the link between gender, spheres of royal action and corresponding cultic honour<sup>5</sup>.

In the Hellenistic period, theoretical reflections established a causal link between the divinity of kings and their beneficial actions, as stated in Hecateus and Euhemerus<sup>6</sup>. Already Aristotle, however, had pointed out in *Politics* that a person standing out from the mass thanks to his *arete* would be «like a god among men»<sup>7</sup>. According to the philosopher, kingship was based on *arete*, may it be personal or stemming from the *genos*, and on *euergesia* and *dynamis*<sup>8</sup>. Aristotle thus saw euergetism as a characteristic feature of kingship, one that would go along with a fundamental value such as *arete*. If displayed in high concentrations, *arete* would justify, at least at a moral level, the equation of a human being with a divine state. Aristotle also believed that *genos* was to be involved in public honours, suggesting that epideictic speeches of praise should always highlight things worthy of the ancestors, ἄξια τῶν προγόνων<sup>9</sup>. Evoking royal ancestors and continuity with them became a common formula during the Hellenistic age<sup>10</sup>, showing the importance of the connection between past and present and between kings

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<sup>3</sup> On euergetism accompanying the establishment of cultic honours for rulers, cf. Habicht 1970<sup>2</sup>; Gauthier 1985; Ma 2002<sup>2</sup>; Chaniotis 2003; Chankowski 2003; Wikander 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Bielman Sanchez 2003; Savalli Lestrade 2003; Kunst 2007; Caneva 2012; Caneva 2014a.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann 1965; Virgilio 2003<sup>2</sup>, 90; Ma 2002<sup>2</sup>, 220 ff.; Chaniotis 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Gauthier 1985, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Arist. *Pol.* III 13, 1284a 3-11. Aristotle's thought was probably influenced by the homeric adjective *antitheoi*, «similar to the gods», used for heroes; Alexander too is defined this way in an inscription from Epidauros (*IG* IV<sup>2</sup> 616, l. 6).

<sup>8</sup> Arist. *Pol.* III 10, 1310b 32-34. Cf. also III 17, 1288a 15-19.

<sup>9</sup> Arist. *Rb.* I 9, 1367b 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Van Nuffelen 2004. A typical example is provided by the Chremonides decree, where talk is about the continuity between King Ptolemy II's policy towards the Greeks and that of his sister (Arsinoe) and ancestors (l. 17): the context is not cult-oriented but the importance of referring to continuity with ancestors is clearly stated in a diplomatic context (cf. Caneva 2016, 176).

and their families. Dynastic continuity as expressed through cults for rulers can be seen as one aspect of this broad phenomenon.

Divinization of kings appears to be a family matter as early as the age of the Successors. In this respect, it is worth recalling that the official promotion of cults on the direct initiative of royal houses seems to have happened rather late, with kings prudently preferring to accept or encourage the spontaneous establishment of honours by Greek cities. In Egypt, as elsewhere in the non-Greek East, interaction with the local (priestly) elite and consequent indigenous cults fulfilled a role otherwise played by public institutions and royal collaborators in the Greek world.

As for the beginning of the centralized cult for predecessors, it is generally assumed that in Egypt the model was established at the time of Ptolemy I, who founded the official cult of Alexander. This was part of a complex process by which Ptolemy advertised his special bond with the conquering king and consequently his right to first govern Egypt, then to bequeath it to his offspring<sup>11</sup>. Ptolemy II first extended this practice to members of the royal house, whether dead (the establishment of the *Ptolemaia* and the creation of the *Theoi Soterai*) or alive (the divine honours for himself and Arsinoe, the *Theoi Adelphoi*). The age of Ptolemy IV saw a turning point in the strengthening of the cult of royal ancestors together with Alexander, as testified by the reorganization of the so-called *Sema* and by the adding of the *Theoi Soterai* to the eponymous priesthood of Alexander and the Ptolemies, which thus turned for the first time into a full dynastic cult. The appearance of the element *Theos* (accompanied by *Epiphanes*) in the titulary of Ptolemy V, previously only used in the cultic denomination of the royal couples, marks one more step in the formalization of the divinity of Ptolemaic rulers<sup>12</sup>.

For the Seleukids, it is disputed whether the beginning of the state cult should be dated back to the honours for the deceased Seleukos I or to the organization, by Antiochos III, of the official cults and priesthoods, first for himself and his ancestors, later (in 193 BC) for his wife Laodike<sup>13</sup>. Antiochos III also issued the official list of his *progonoi*, where the omission of Alexander stands out in comparison with the contemporaneous Ptolemaic dynastic cult<sup>14</sup>. *Theos* (*Epiphanes*) is officially applied to the Seleukids starting with Antiochos IV, even though comparable formulae had already

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<sup>11</sup> Caneva 2016, chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ptolemy I: Fraser 1972, 213. Ptolemy II: Hölbl 1994, 87; Landucci 2013; Caneva 2016, chapter 4 (cf. chapter 5 for innovation under Ptolemy III). Ptolemy IV: Hauben 1989; Huss 2001, 452. For Ptolemy V cf. Muccioli 2013, 285-288.

<sup>13</sup> Van Nuffelen 2004. Perplexities are expressed in Bielman Sanchez 2003; Debord 2003; Iossif 2014, 139-140.

<sup>14</sup> Rostovzeff 1935.

been occasionally in use in the Greek cities: at Aigai, in Aiolis, Seleukos I and Antiochos were celebrated for their help as *theoi hoi e[pi]phane[nte]s*, while Antiochos II was given the title *Theos* by the Milesians<sup>15</sup>.

These episodes, which shed light on the beginning and early developments of the state cult, reveal the fundamental role assigned to the deceased members of the royal family. Innovation in the organization of the centralized cult is often linked with internal difficulties: in Egypt, problems for succession as a consequence of royal polygamy on the one hand, and endogamic wedding as a dynastic strategy on the other, constitute the background of the cultic initiatives of Ptolemy II; internal political instability also underlies innovative solutions in the centralized cult during the reign of Ptolemy IV and Ptolemy V<sup>16</sup>. In the Seleukid reign, Antiochos III probably established divine honours for himself and his ancestors and organized cults and priesthoods after the expedition to the Upper Regions, approximately in the same period when Ptolemy V was called *Theos*. He later established the same honours for his wife, when he was going to face the Romans<sup>17</sup>. The importance ascribed to legitimacy and dynastic continuity in the centralized state cult and its link with, as a response to, internal difficulties and the danger of military campaigns shows that official cult only partly responded to the need of providing a model to, or organizing spontaneous local devotion. Royal initiative was first and foremost a need intrinsically intertwined with royal propaganda in crucial moments for the history of a reign.

## 2. DYNASTIC CONTINUITY IN CIVIC CULTS

The practice of organizing cultic honours for members of the royal family in the form of a series of deified ruling pairs makes the connection between divinity and the royal lineage particularly evident. In Egypt, Ptolemy II deified Ptolemy I and Berenike as the couple of the *Theoi Soteres* and applied the same principle to himself and Arsinoe as the *Theoi Adelfhoi*.

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<sup>15</sup> *SEG* LIX 1406, ll. 4-5 (281 BC); Malay - Riel 2009, 36-47; App. *Syr.* 65; Muccioli 2013, 290.

<sup>16</sup> For Ptolemy II cf. Fraser 1972, 217. Ptolemy V was probably inspired by his tutor: Hazzard 2000, 122-124; Johnson 2002, 112-116.

<sup>17</sup> The date of the inscription for Laodike, *OGIS* 224, is 193. Sherwin White - Kuhrt 1993 date the cult for Antiochos III to the same year; however, Ma 2002<sup>2</sup>, 62-65, 356, prefers 204 (cf. also Robert - Robert 1983, 168, n. 40). Van Nuffelen 2004 suggests 209 (he also quotes further bibliography dating these honours in the age of Antiochos I). Cf. also Iossif 2014.

Nonetheless, stating that this message of dynastic continuity is an exclusive prerogative of the official state cult would be a mistake. In fact, such principle is fully recognized by the Greek cities too, where one may notice that the phenomenon dates to an even earlier stage than the establishment of the official royal cults discussed above. In Athens, Demetrios and Antigonos were honoured as the *Theoi Soteres*. They both were portrayed on Athena's *peplos*; the messengers sent to both of them were to be considered as *theoroi*<sup>18</sup>. Such dual homages worked as the local acceptance of an early message of inter-generational legitimation, which was promoted by the Successors and meant to open up their way to the creation of a dynasty replacing the Argeads on the Macedonian throne. While, as suggested by Landucci in this volume, later Antigonids do not seem to have actively tried to establish a centralized dynastic cult, it can be asked whether the exaggerated honours received by Antigonos and Demetrios in Athens responded to some precise royal requests of that time. In the famous ithyphallic hymn for Demetrios, a kind of poetic composition usually addressed to Dionysos, Demetrios is linked to Demeter, surely because of the assonance between the names but also in an attempt of deliberate association with the goddess. Demetrios' arrival in Athens during the Eleusinian mysteries, his initiation in an unusual period of the year and the promise of wheat to the city uttered in the sanctuary of Dionysos certainly were acts of a well-prepared performance<sup>19</sup>. In the poem, Demetrios is seen as a real, present god, and as the *pais* of Poseidon and Aphrodite: choosing the god of the sea must have gone along with the king's political propaganda after the naval victory of Salamis on Cyprus, Aphrodite's island, as testified by Poseidon being portrayed on Demetrios' coins<sup>20</sup>. The case of Athens suggests taking into account that, while acting spontaneously and in compliance with local religious traditions, cities would also make an effort to further strengthen the positive consequences of collaboration with dynasts and kings by adapting to, and integrating features of official court ideology in their own rhetoric messages.

### 3. HUMAN AND MYTHIC FOUNDERS

A well-known example of the connection between cults for predecessors and the legitimation of royal continuity is provided by the paramount importance of the body and image of Alexander, founder and patron of

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<sup>18</sup> Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 10, 4-6; Diod. XX 46, 2. Cf. also Landucci in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> Duris, *FGrHist* 76 F 13; Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 26; 34, 5; cf. Chaniotis 2011; Holton 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Demochares, *FGrHist* 75 F 2.

Alexandria, for the Ptolemies. Menelaus, the brother of Ptolemy I, is the first known eponymous priest of Alexander<sup>21</sup>. One generation later, one statue of Alexander was on display next to that of Ptolemy in the *Grand Procession* of Ptolemy II and another appeared on the scene on an elephant quadriga, evoking the Eastern campaigns of the king and his association with the exploits of Dionysos<sup>22</sup>. The internal decoration of the mysterious building called *Tychaion*, which occupied a place in the Palace area near Alexander's tomb, provides a concrete visual example of the link between Ptolemaic power and Alexander: the latter is represented in the moment of receiving a laurel wreath by a personification of Ge, who is in her turn crowned by Tyche, surrounded by two Nikai<sup>23</sup>. Another statue of Alexander stood in front of one of Charis, alluding to the king as benefactor. From an iconographic point of view, the dynastic Alexander is Aigiochos, being protected by, or associated with, Zeus Aigiochos. The *aegis* had the shape of the Macedonian *chlamys*, a form purportedly mirrored in the city plan of Alexandria; traits of Zeus, Ammon and Dionysos, the dynastic gods, appear in the iconography of the deified Alexander with *mitra* and *aegis* as documented in Ptolemaic coins. It has been suggested that the iconography of Alexander Aigiochos might also evoke the Egyptian figure of Horus as King, thus implying a further reference to dynastic continuity<sup>24</sup>. In *Idyll* 26, 31, Theocritus mentions Zeus Aigiochos together with the eagle, saying that the bird was honoured by the god: this particular might have alluded to local gossip, if we follow the common interpretation of a passage in *Suda*, where one Ptolemy is said to have been abandoned as an infant and adopted by an eagle, a story possibly referring to the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty<sup>25</sup>. The eagle was a major dynastic image<sup>26</sup>. Court literature often transmits official messages, but it is common opinion that it also gave space to voices circulating off the record, or simply not documented elsewhere. Because Theocritus' poem (entitled *Lenai* or *Bacchantes*) is particularly concerned with Dionysos and his worshippers, the poet might have alluded to the connection between Ptolemy, Zeus Aigiochos,

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<sup>21</sup> Hölbl 1994, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Athen. 201D, 202A; cf. Rice 1983, 102-108; Caneva 2016, 119.

<sup>23</sup> [Lib.], *Descript.* 25 (ed. R. Foerster, *Libanii Opera*, VIII, 529-531) = Ps.-Nicolaus, *Descript.* 8 (ed. Walz, I 408, 11 - 409, 29); Stewart 2003, 244 ff.; Kosmetatou 2004, 244-245; Gibson 2007; Caneva 2016, 43-46. Unfortunately, the date of this statue group is unknown.

<sup>24</sup> Lorber 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Suda*, s.v. Λάγος.

<sup>26</sup> For the image of the eagle in Ptolemaic propaganda, cf. Thompson - Buraselis 2013, 10.

Alexander and Dionysos as well. Unfortunately, because too little of non-Ptolemaic court poetry has been transmitted to us, we are deprived of the possibility of a systematic comparison with other Hellenistic contexts.

Evidence concerning the denomination of the Alexandrian eponymous priest from Ptolemaic contracts testifies the association of the cults of Alexander and the *Theoi Adelphoi* (Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II) in Alexandria, during the joint reign of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe<sup>27</sup>. Here the dynastic link is clear, although the question usually raised is why Ptolemy I and his wife Berenike I were excluded from this association with Alexander. In theory, the integration of the deified *Theoi Soteres* in the eponymous cult would have been perfectly reasonable, as the couple was honoured as the founders of the dynasty and the predecessors of the living king<sup>28</sup>. In a famous passage from the *Encomium of Ptolemy*, Theocritus shows the first Ptolemy in heaven, sitting together with, and next to, Alexander and Heracles<sup>29</sup>. However, a plausible explanation is that the Sibling Gods associated themselves with Alexander because they wanted to ensure an especially strong legitimacy to their own cult, the first for a living royal pair: by making themselves cult-sharing gods of Alexander, whose divine status was already well established, they would have better ensured this legitimacy than through the association with the previous ruling couple. Conversely the cult of the *Theoi Soteres*, which had been recently established by Ptolemy II, had already achieved its function by stressing Ptolemy II's legitimate role as a royal heir<sup>30</sup>. As seen above, Ptolemy I and Berenike I were added to the eponymous cult only by Ptolemy IV, perhaps because the turbulent situation of his reign forced him to seek further legitimation by stressing the ideological motif of dynastic continuity. Ptolemy IV is also known for including Alexander's tomb in a memorial building dedicated to all the Ptolemies. Later on, at the end of the dynasty, Octavian would disdain all of them, addressing his homage to Alexander only and stating that he intended to visit a king, not some dead people. A king, we might add, not a god.

Outside Egypt, the use of the memory of Alexander and, more broadly, of the Argeads, with the purpose of stressing continuity with Macedonian royal history is well documented for the Antigonid dynasty<sup>31</sup>. To provide an example, Demetrios Poliorketes attended a festival for the goddess Hera at Argos; on this occasion he married Deidamia of Epirus. Creating

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<sup>27</sup> Caneva 2016, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Habicht 1970<sup>2</sup>, 36; Fraser 1972, 217-218; Huss 2001, 325, n. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Theoc. XVII 18-20; cf. also XV 47, 106.

<sup>30</sup> Caneva 2016, 167-168.

<sup>31</sup> Billows 1995, 41-44.



a dynastic link with another royal house was a normal practice for Hellenistic kings, but in this case Demetrios was also emphasizing his connection with the Argeads by means of their alleged Argive origins. He probably also intended to allude to the hierogamy of Zeus and Hera<sup>32</sup>. According to Livius, his descendant Philip V still attended the festival for Hera and Zeus Nemeus to stress his Argive and Argead origins<sup>33</sup>.

Honours bestowed by successors upon dynastic founders involved worship and displayed evident dynastic intentions. The eponymous festivals, the *Ptolemaia* above all, provide a clear example of this. The so called Nikouria decree, attesting the acceptance of the *Ptolemaia* by the Islanders, mentions Ptolemy II's benevolence for his father and ancestors and his piety towards the gods. It also refers that honours «similar to those for the gods» had already been decreed by the Islanders for Ptolemy I<sup>34</sup>. The dynastic link is thus established by referring to *pietas* as a factor of continuity within the royal *genos* and by stressing the commonality of intention between the living king honouring his deceased father and the attitude of the Islanders towards the founder of the dynasty, who had already proved himself worthy of divine worship<sup>35</sup>.

The foundation of cities is another activity combining religious and dynastic implications. As a city founder, the king could be worshipped as a hero, according to a well-known practice of the Greek world, but also as a god<sup>36</sup>. The Ptolemies and the Seleukids founded cities named after their fathers, wives and daughters<sup>37</sup>. In the same place where Alexander had sacrificed to Zeus Bottiaios, Seleukos founded Antiochia on the Orontes, which had already been established as Antigoneia by Antigonos Monophthalmos. While Seleukos was celebrating his foundation rites, an eagle brought the victims' thighs to the altar of Alexander, showing the place where the city was to be founded. As Libanios states, through this marvel Zeus appeared as the founder, but Seleukos was too<sup>38</sup>.

The foundation of Seleukeia of Pieria is also particularly significant from a dynastic point of view. The city was defined in ancient sources

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<sup>32</sup> Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 25, 2; Bringmann 2000, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Liv. XXVII 30, 9.

<sup>34</sup> *IG XII 7*, 506 (*Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 390), ll. 20, 25, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Ptolemy II himself was later associated with this cult, as Sostratos' decree attests: *IG XI 4*, 1038, l. 25.

<sup>36</sup> This is also the case of two *strategoï*, Aratus and Philopoemen, somehow «founders» of the the Achean League. For these and earlier examples, cf. Lenschhorn 1984. Cf. also Boddez in this volume.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Müller 2006, 9-38; Cohen 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Buraselis 2010. For parallels between Seleukos and Alexander about the sacrifice of the bull cf. Hoover 2011, 197-223.



as «founder» and «hearth» of the kingdom<sup>39</sup>. The foundation itself was accompanied by miracles justifying the heroization of the founder, Seleukos, who was buried there like a *ktistes*, with a *neon* and a *temenos* (the so-called *Nikatorion*). This passage has been interpreted by some scholars as the beginning of the official cult of the royal house.

Lysimachos refounded Ephesus by calling it Arsinoeia in honour of his wife and a late inscription seems to suggest that he was honoured there as its founder. He also founded Lysimacheia, where he was later buried by his son; there the citizens put his remains in a temple and called it *Lysimacheion*<sup>40</sup>. Similarly, Demetrios Poliorketes refounded Demetrias-Sikyon and was celebrated as its founder, with games and annual sacrifices. He was also the founder of Demetrias-Iolkos, where his son Antigonos buried him after moving his mortal remains by sea from Asia, in a spectacular funeral procession meant to emphasize his own succession rights. Cults are known in Demetrias for *archagetai kai ktistai*, which are now attested by the remains of a *heroon* (one might wonder if the cult of Demetrios as a founder, like that of Lysimachos at Ephesus, had already started while he was alive)<sup>41</sup>.

All of these are examples of filial love but, above all, they show a tendency to turn funeral practices and traditional heroization into an opportunity to spread a dynastic message<sup>42</sup>. To end with, euergetic interventions could also justify the bestowal of heroic status on kings by means of their insertion in the number of the eponymous patrons of the city tribes. This too could be exploited to express a message of dynastic continuity. In Athens, for instance, Antigonos and Demetrios became the new eponymous heroes of the city tribes: a practice which would be repeated later on for other benefactors. Father and son thus shared in the same honour, by which the honouring city once again accepted and recognized the importance of their message of dynastic link<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> App. Syr. 10; Buraselis 2010. Van Nuffelen 2004 denies that the *Nikatorion* should mean the beginning of a dynastic cult, assuming that it only shows filial respect. For Seleukeia, Plb. V 58, 4. Cf. also Ma 2002<sup>2</sup>, 229.

<sup>40</sup> OGIS 480 = *I.Ephesos* 29 (104 AD). On Ephesos, cf. Landucci 1992, 238. For Lysimachos' tomb, App. Syr. 64.

<sup>41</sup> IG IX 2, 1299b. Sikyon is an interesting case of continuity, because its citizens honoured the tyrant Euphorion *post mortem* as a hero (X. *H.G.* VII 3, 12) and later Demetrios as the founder of Demetrias (cf. also, later, Aratus as *soter* and *euergetes*). For Demetrias-Iolkos and Demetrios' funeral, cf. Str. IX 436; Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 53; IG IX 2, 1099. For the *heroon* cf. Marzollf 1987.

<sup>42</sup> Lysimachos' son from Arsinoe, called Ptolemy, did not succeed him in Macedon but had a personal dominion in Lykia; he made dedications for his father and mother (Arsinoe) in important shrines: Bringmann 2000, 88; Schmidt-Dounas 1993/1994, 174.

<sup>43</sup> Plut. *Vit. Dem.* 10, 6.

#### 4. HEROES AND GODS AS ANCESTORS AND PATRONS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

Mythic heroes are commonly chosen as dynastic founders. Herakles is a paramount example of this trend and his figure played a significant role both in relation to the Argive origins of the Argeads and to the destiny of conquest and immortality associated with this hero. Hellenistic rulers liked to represent themselves on the side of these mythic ancestors. In the Antigonid monument dedicated in Delos, one statue remarkably stood out from the rest because of its size, representing either Apollo or Heracles as the dynastic ancestor of the Antigonids. Similarly, the bronze «ancestors» portrayed by the statues dedicated by Antigonos Gonatas in Delos can be conceptually compared with the inscriptions of Antiochos III referring to the *progonoi* of the dynasty<sup>44</sup>. As for Egypt, Theocritus, in the *Encomium of Ptolemy II*, describes the founder of the dynasty happily banqueting among the gods and the ancestors Herakles and Alexander<sup>45</sup>.

Royal propaganda used the traditional features and stories of ancient heroes to convey messages of dynastic continuity. In Theocritus' *Encomium*, both Achilles, Thetis' son, and Diomedes, the son of the Argive Deipyle, are compared to the king. Their mothers are remembered in order to celebrate Berenike, but what matters the most with regard to the king's representation is the reference itself to the Homeric heroes. It is also worth recalling that Achilles had already been Alexander's favourite model. The emphasis on Diomedes' origins also highlights the role of Argos, the alleged original land of the Argeads, whose descendants the Ptolemies claimed to be<sup>46</sup>.

The mythic, Homeric background of court poetry might shed further light on the contemporaneous representation of power in the third book of the *Argonautica*, where Apollonios compares the splendour of Jason appearing to Medea to the brightness of Sirius rising up from the ocean. Similarly, in *Iliad*, Diomedes' helmet shines like the autumn star rising from the ocean, and the splendour of Achilles' weapons is likened to the brightness of Sirius<sup>47</sup>. These Homeric lines are certainly Apollonius' source, and

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<sup>44</sup> Bringmann 2000, 79-80; Schmidt-Dounas 1993/1994, 172; Hintzen-Bohlen 1992, 227, nr. 15; IG IX 4, 1096. For Antiochos' *progonoi* cf. *supra*, n. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Theoc. XVII 16-25.

<sup>46</sup> Theoc. XVII 53-54. Callimachus also evokes Diomedes and Argos in the *Hymn to Athena*, recalling an Argive ritual for Pallas which included the display of Diomedes' shield. Many members of the royal family won prizes in Argive contests and were celebrated by Posidippus (Kosmetatou 2004; Thompson 2005). The Danaids myth too connected Egypt with Argos: cf. Stephens 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* III 957-961; Hom. *Il.* XI 62-63, XXII 26-31; James 1981, 70-71.

the double allusion to verses related to Diomedes and others related to Achilles in describing Jason is significant with regard to the construction of a model of leadership that can speak for the present public. Jason himself is associated with ideas of light and splendor, like the god Apollo and the king-pharaoh, the son of Helios-Re<sup>48</sup>.

Continuity between father and son, as it appears in Hellenistic royal propaganda, finds a fitting domain of expression in literary mythic precedents. After naming Diomedes and Achilles, Theocritus describes Ptolemy as a warrior and the son of a warrior. This connotation recalls *Iliad* IV 405, where the Homeric heroes are said to be «better than their fathers», in a confrontation between Sthenelos and Agamemnon regarding the exploits of Tydeus and Diomedes. Similarly, Apollonius Rhodius (IV 801-802) has Hera tell Thetis that it was fate that she should beget a son «better than his father». The topic of dynastic continuity as it unfolds through the motif of the royal son being worth of, and even better than the father, seems to be the hidden meaning of Theocritus' lines regarding the kings, Achilles and Diomedes<sup>49</sup>. We can notice in passing that a similar pattern is adopted by Ovid, *Met.* XV 855 ff., where Agamemnon, Theseus and Achilles are referred to as «better than their father» (thus alluding to Augustus in relation to Caesar), and by Horace, *Carm.* I 15, 28, where Diomedes too is said to be «better than his father».

Ancient heroes could also serve the purpose of strengthening the link between royal houses and their territories. In the famous dedication of Attalos I in Delos, the local heroes Midios (the son of Halisarne and Gynos), Teuthras and Phaleros are put next to the statues of Attalos and Eumenes I. These heroes, representing regions and myths related to the kingdom, were also descendants of Telephos and Heracles, the main official forefathers of the Attalids<sup>50</sup>.

In Delphi, the location of Attalos' *Stoa* near the monument dedicated to Neoptolemos underscored the Attalids' link with the hero Pergamon, connected with Epirus and Neoptolemos, Achilles' son<sup>51</sup>. Perhaps like the Attalids, Gelon and Nereis of Syracuse seem to have chosen this area of the sanctuary to place their offerings for the same reasons: Nereis was a princess of Epirus, the daughter of Pyrrhus' son, whose genealogy could be traced back to Neoptolemos<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Mori 2008, 18-19; Stephens 2003, 214-215.

<sup>49</sup> Gerber 1981; *contra* Hunter 2003, 138-139.

<sup>50</sup> *IG* XI 4, 1206-1208; Robert 1973; Schalles 1985, 127-133; Étienne 2003.

<sup>51</sup> On Neoptolemos and Pergamos, cf. Scheer 1993. On Attalos' and Neoptolemos' monuments, cf. Jacquemin - Laroche 1992, 246 ff.; Hintzen-Bohlen 1992, 212, nr. 29.

<sup>52</sup> Bringmann 2000, 87-88; Schmidt-Dounas 1993/1994, 183.

Gods often accompany the kings, who share their worship in temples or are associated with them by means of other elements and attributes. In some special cases, however, as for Apollo and Dionysos, this relationship was further developed into divine ancestorship in relation to the royal house, as is attested for the Seleukids and the Ptolemies, respectively. Apollo was chosen by the Seleukids as their founder (*archegetes*)<sup>53</sup>, thus bestowing legitimation and nobility upon their origins. He was above all an archer, a figure whose special link with kings has been pointed out by recent scholarship with regard to the Near Eastern regions of the kingdom. Such iconography was not, however, exclusive. The dynastic Apollo of Daphne was *kitharodos*, holding a lyre<sup>54</sup>.

The Ptolemaic Apollo was the god of Delos, as attested by Callimachus, who also provides the official iconography: a god with a bow in one hand and the Graces in the other, a punishing and a forgiving deity at once. In describing the god, the poet also provides an allusive representation of the king. This particular ideology showing a fighting but benevolent king would be inherited by Augustus' propaganda<sup>55</sup>.

Graces are a common symbol of the generosity of kings and queens<sup>56</sup>. At Teos, Antiochos was officially commemorated with rituals putting him in relationship with *Mneme* and *Charis*, Memory and Gratitude<sup>57</sup>. In Egypt, Berenike was transformed into a Grace, as Callimachus states, and her statue was ritually anointed<sup>58</sup>. Again according to Callimachus<sup>59</sup>, Minos learned about the death of his son Androgeus when he was about to make a sacrifice to the Graces at Paros. He continued the sacrifice but he silenced the *aulos*, thus giving rise to the ritual which would later be typical of the island. Here too, the poet refers to anointed statues, dressed in purple. He asks the Graces to help him in his poetic task, as he had done with the Muses in the *incipit*, possibly alluding here to Berenike (one might wonder whether Minos himself, the famous master of the sea, could allude to the king). Callimachus also says that although many alternative genealogies of the Graces existed, they actually were the daughters of Dionysos and the

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<sup>53</sup> Diod. XIX 90; App. *Syr.* 56; Just. *Epit.* XV 4, 3. But in *I.Erythrai* 205, 74-75, referred to Seleukos, Iossif 2011, 246, thinks that *pais* means Apollo's «servant», not «son».

<sup>54</sup> Iossif 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Callim. *Aet.* I aut III, fr. 64 Massimilla (= 114 b Pfeiffer). Cf. Jackson 1996; Lechi 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Prioux 2011, 209-211; Levin 2012.

<sup>57</sup> *SEG* XII 1003, l. 34; Hermann 1965; Ma 2002<sup>2</sup>, 311-317.

<sup>58</sup> Callim. *Epigr.* 51.

<sup>59</sup> Callim. *Aet.* I 5-918 Massimilla (fr. 3-7 Pfeiffer).

nymph of Naxos Koronis<sup>60</sup>. According to Apollonius Rhodius, in Naxos, the Graces wove a peplos for Dionysos, which was then used by Jason to deceive and kill Absyrtos<sup>61</sup>. Dionysos was a dynastic god for the Ptolemies, a point clearly emerging from the procession of Ptolemy II, the inscription of Adulis and the inclinations of Ptolemy IV and Ptolemy XII, the new Dionysos<sup>62</sup>. It is therefore worth noting that Ptolemaic court poetry established a special link between the Graces, a symbol of the generosity of kings and queens, and the most representative deities of the royal figure, Apollo and Dionysos.

Dionysos was also a god of conquest, mainly in the East: in this sense, in Egypt he was comparable to Sesostrius, the pharaoh already described by Herodotus as a great conqueror having subdued the lands from Egypt to Colchis. Both the stories of Dionysos and Sesostrius recalled the Eastern campaign of Alexander. Their figures influenced each other in providing a fitting model for the Ptolemies' destiny of universal dominion. Apollonius Rhodius' geography virtually integrated Jason into the number of Ptolemaic heroes, as he visited the same regions as Sesostrius during his journey to Colchis, and because his deeds too easily alluded to Alexander's campaign<sup>63</sup>.

A necessary methodological question one should ask at this point is to what extent court poetry was conditioned by the will of the prince, and how much, in turn, it would contribute to the fashioning of the royal message. Be that as it may, court poetry failed to provide a comprehensive image of the complexity of the contemporaneous religious and political life. One instructive example of this is provided by the history of the god Sarapis. While the absence of a Greek mythic tradition makes Sarapis almost entirely absent from Ptolemaic court poetry, this new god with a new cult can be seen as the actual rising star of third-century Ptolemaic history. The religious features of Sarapis were shaped through a syncretistic mix of existing elements and thought for a public of Greeks of Egypt as early as the reign of Ptolemy I. The god was then brought from Memphis to Alexandria, where a sanctuary at Rhakotis must have already existed under Ptolemy II, and achieved his highest peak of royal support under Ptolemy III, who dedicated the great Serapeum of Alexandria and introduced the god in the royal oath, and Ptolemy IV, who continued the build-

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<sup>60</sup> Fr. 384, 45 Pfeiffer: talking about Sosibios' offerings at Argos, Callimachus says that the Graces were Eurinomes' daughters, according to Hes. *Tb.* 907.

<sup>61</sup> Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* IV 424-434.

<sup>62</sup> Fraser 1972, 203 ff. Dionysos played a particular role among the Attalids too, but cannot be properly considered as a dynastic god: cf. Schalles 1985, 114, n. 680.

<sup>63</sup> Coppola 2002, 11-29; Stephens 2003, 176-178.

ing policy of his father and portrayed the couple Sarapis-Isis in his coins<sup>64</sup>. This short sketch shows that the dynastic implications of Sarapis were not inherent in the features of the god, but stemmed from the role that the Ptolemies acknowledged to him during the third century.

The issue of the relationship between rulers and other agents in the spread of propaganda bearing a dynastic content can also be examined with concern to visual arts. The relationship between kings and sanctuaries is documented by votive offerings. These would not only include the kings' active initiative of building religious monuments or representations of themselves, but also offerings dedicated by other agents and for which kings and queens were the recipients of such initiative. Regardless of the actor of the dedication, religious and dynastic legitimation is implied by statues organized as family groups and dedicated in the main shrines, as in the case of the monument for Ptolemy III in the sanctuary of Apollo at Thermos, where the king's family was represented by statues offered by the Aetolian Koinon<sup>65</sup>. A similar group stood at Delphi (*IG IX 12, 202*), also dedicated by an Aetolian. Philetaerus, the creator of the Attalid dynasty, dedicated a temple to Demeter for (*hyper*) his mother Boa in Pergamon, already showing a precise awareness of the importance of the dynastic meaning of this homage<sup>66</sup>.

Universal feelings such as love and affection could also be turned into bearers of a dynastic message. Among others, honours for the Attalid queen Apollonis stress the importance of the royal family, united by feelings of love and harmony (*homonoia*)<sup>67</sup>. Even in the official rites established by Antiochus III for Laodike, the motivations explicitly relate to marital love<sup>68</sup>. As the goddess of love and marriage, Aphrodite was unsurprisingly used everywhere as a fitting image for queens, in compliance with a message stressing the role of love in ensuring the unity of the royal house. Demeter too, as a goddess of fertility and life, could be evoked for a similar use, and in Egypt she would also provide a useful Greek correspondent to Isis<sup>69</sup>.

In Theocritus' *Encomium of Ptolemy II*, the pious king has erected temples to his parents and the bond with his sibling-wife is based on perfect harmony and affection<sup>70</sup>. Evidence shows that the idea of *homonoia*

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<sup>64</sup> Huss 2001, 378-379, 453. Pfeiffer 2008, 56.

<sup>65</sup> Bennet 2000, 141-145. As for Arsinoe III cf. Gorrini 2008.

<sup>66</sup> *MDAI(A)* 35, 1910, 437-438; Schalles 1985, 23; Virgilio 1993, 45; Étienne 2003, 364.

<sup>67</sup> Virgilio 1993, 44-45; Virgilio 2003<sup>2</sup>, 96-97.

<sup>68</sup> *OGIS* 224, 16-17, 20. Caneva 2014b, 44-45.

<sup>69</sup> Fraser 1972, 199.

<sup>70</sup> Theoc. XVII 36-44, 121-130.

was taken in particular consideration at the Egyptian court, where its significance as a private value combined with its function as a political concept. In the final section of the *Hymn to Demeter*, Callimachus calls on *homonoia* for the sake of his city, recalling the first part of the XIII *Homeric Hymn* and intentionally adding the request for *homonoia*<sup>71</sup>. The political ramification of the concept can be seized in the above mentioned Chremonides' decree, where *homonoia* characterizes the foreign policy of the royal couple, Ptolemy II and Arsinoe.

## 5. SURVIVALS AND CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

If politics can be seen as the main motivation for ruler cults, the role of religious piety should not be overlooked as it provides some insight into the survival of cults after the death of kings or queens and even, in some cases, after the extinction of their dynasties<sup>72</sup>. In 180 AD, for instance, in Dura Europos there is evidence of a priest of the *progonoï* and Seleukos Nicator<sup>73</sup>. Royal names becoming epicleses of gods also provide an interesting case. Zeus *Seleukios*, for instance, is attested in Roman times and whatever the origin of the connection, the epithet speaks for the long-accepted tie between the god and the king<sup>74</sup>.

Elevating royal predecessors first, living sovereigns later, to the divine sphere was a solution similarly exploited by Hellenistic courts for dynastic purposes, that is, to enhance legitimacy and to spread a comforting message of continuity and steadiness of power. Heroes too, as forefathers or as models, played a role in the construction of the dynastic message. This, however, happened in a more traditional way, in compliance with long-established patterns in Greek religion. In the Greek world, religious traditions were appealed to, and used to give shape to new cults and integrate them in the religious life of local communities. On the other hand, contacts with non-Greeks are evident in Egypt as everywhere else in the Hellenistic East, where religious negotiations provided a valuable tool for enhancing the legitimacy of the foreign rule. When the focus moves to Greek cities, we may surmise that, besides a benevolent attitude towards the flattering initiatives of the Greek cities, in some cases royal courts may have taken

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<sup>71</sup> Call. *Cer.* 134. In Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* II 718 the Argonauts erect a shrine to *Homonoia*.

<sup>72</sup> This is the case of Arsinoe II, worshipped after her death in connection with Aphrodite: Aneziri 2005; Caneva 2015, 110-112.

<sup>73</sup> Chankowski 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Debord 2003.



up an active role by suggesting messages fitting with elements of the royal self-representation. The kings' personal organization of their own cults and priesthoods was intended to support local choices, but also to communicate the strength and control of central power over the definition of the royal figure, the celebration of the royal family and the general legitimacy of monarchic power. The construction of the message of dynastic continuity therefore transversally embraced both the civic and the centralized cults, although they of course unfolded in different contexts and responded to the strategic interests of different social agents.

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