

HERO WARRIORS FROM CORINTH AND LAKONIA

(PLATES 63 and 64)

DURING EXCAVATIONS in the Corinthian Potters' Quarter by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, a terracotta relief plaque was found in a small votive deposit east of the so-called Circular South Shrine.¹ Although only the upper right corner of the plaque is preserved, a warrior, facing right, can be clearly seen (Pl. 63:a).² The man, preserved to the waist, has short curly hair and a small pointed beard. He wears a high-crested Corinthian helmet pushed back on his forehead and in his left hand carries a shield shown in perspective from the inside. Unless a corselet had originally been rendered solely in paint, the warrior is shown nude. The modeling of his upper body, shown in nearly frontal view, is quite competent, with close-knit musculature and a foreshortened left arm. The moldmade plaque, of local Corinthian clay, preserves traces of white slip and red color and a suspension hole in front of the crest of the helmet. It may be dated to the second half of the 5th century B.C.³

¹ *Corinth* XV, i, p. 32.

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Plate 63, photos Corinth Museum. Plate 64, photos by the author.

² *Corinth* XV, ii, no. 7, p. 153, pl. 32.

Corinth Museum KT27-7. P.L. 0.142 m; p.H. 0.119 m; Th. of the background 0.007 m; Th. including the relief 0.012 m. Fabric 10YR 8/3 (very pale brown); clay with soapy touch, well levigated with no mica; traces of a white wash on the front surface and red color on the hair of the warrior. One hole (Diam. 0.003 m) is preserved in front of the crest, and traces of another hole can be distinguished behind the crest; there are fingertip impressions and prints on the reverse side of the plaque; thin incised lines on the crest of the helmet were made after molding.

³ Most likely around 430–420 B.C. For a parallel to the Corinthian helmet, dated to the second half of the 5th century B.C., see Dintsis 1986, Beil. 6, no. 227, p. 89, pl. 37:9.

Another relief plaque depicting a warrior has been discovered in Corinth under the floor of a shop in the South Stoa: *Corinth* XII, no. 218, pp. 17, 40–41, pls. 17, 143:b. Although at first glance the pose seems very similar to that on the plaque from the Potters' Quarter, there are some small differences. On the plaque from the South Stoa the pose is more active, the sword is held lower, and the lower body is shown in profile. The left arm is extended, probably grasping an opponent, while the left leg is raised high. The man wears a cuirass rendered solely in color and has a scabbard hanging by his side. The foreshortening is not so successful (especially on the left shoulder) as that on the Potters' Quarter plaque. The South Stoa plaque should probably be dated somewhere in the first half of the 5th century B.C., a date that would account for the frontal rendering of the eye.

The plaque, part of a deposit of vases, figurines, and miniature vases, was most likely associated with the Circular South Shrine, which contained a stele with recessed panel. This typically Corinthian stele shrine was built over a ruined house to honor the family hero or god worshiped while the house was still in use. Dated to the late 5th century B.C., like other stele shrines it was not long in use.⁴

Three other mechanically related plaques depicting a warrior have been discovered in Lakonia; all were made of local clay. The first plaque was found during rescue excavations in 1973 in a votive deposit at Sparta located in the Chatzis plot on the east side of the city. The plaque (Pl. 64:a) preserves only the head of the warrior with a suspension hole in exactly the same place as that in the Corinthian plaque.⁵ The deposit, though only partially excavated for technical reasons, turned up several more plaques representing riders, banqueters, and seated and standing figures, as well as vases of regular and miniature size and figurines. These finds date from the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. An enclosure wall unearthed nearby and tiles found in the deposit point to the existence of a shrine that included a building of some kind.⁶

The other two Lakonian plaques were found in a large votive deposit excavated from 1956 to 1961 near the church of Agia Paraskevi in modern Amyklai. The deposit produced more than 10,000 objects, including vases of regular and miniature size, terracotta figurines, a disk akroterion, and hundreds of terracotta relief plaques representing mainly seated and standing figures, riders, and banqueters. The objects from the Amyklai deposit range in date from the 7th century B.C. to the Early Hellenistic period.⁷ The offerings have been securely associated with the sanctuary of Alexandra/Kassandra and Agamemnon mentioned by Pausanias (3.19.6) as located in that area.⁸ The identification is supported by 5th-century dedicatory inscriptions on vases from the deposit mentioning the names of Alexandra and Agamemnon⁹ and by the discovery of two Hellenistic monuments nearby: a marble throne with a dedication to Alexandra¹⁰ and a stele inscribed with an honorary decree that included a provision that the stele be set up at Alexandra's sanctuary.¹¹

The first Amyklaian warrior plaque preserves the warrior to the thighs (Pl. 64:b).¹² He is striding and holds a short dagger in his right hand. The stomach muscles are effectively rendered in three-quarter view. Just below the shield, which he holds in his left hand,

⁴ Williams 1981, p. 415, note 22, and pp. 418–419.

⁵ Sparta Museum, uncatalogued (given no. X1 by me). Fragment preserved from the upper edge; face of warrior chipped. P.L. 0.097 m; p.H. 0.064 m; Th. of the background 0.012 m; Th. including the relief 0.017 m. Fabric 5YR 6/6 (reddish yellow); clay with impurities and some mica. One hole (Diam. 0.005 m) is preserved just in front of the helmet crest.

⁶ Steinhauer 1979, pp. 291–292.

⁷ Έργον 1956, pp. 100–104; Christou 1956, 1960, 1961, and 1962, pp. 102–103; Stibbe 1991; Salapata 1992 and 1993.

⁸ Salapata 1992, pp. 73–158; Salapata 1993, pp. 189–190.

⁹ Christou 1960, p. 230, pl. 171:β, γ; Christou 1962, p. 102, pl. 81:β.

¹⁰ Delivorrias 1968, p. 44, fig. 8.

¹¹ Stiglitz 1953, pp. 75–77, fig. 21.

¹² Sparta Museum A6225/1 (currently on display). All corners are missing; right and left edges partly preserved. P.L. 0.158 m; p.H. 0.125 m; Th. of the background 0.01 m; Th. including the relief 0.015 m. Fabric 5YR 6/6 (reddish yellow); quite well levigated clay with mica; well fired. A slip most likely covers the surface: 7.5 YR 6/4 (light brown); traces of a white wash on the background and on the figure; incrustation. No holes are preserved; palm impression on the reverse.

appears the head of a snake facing right with slightly open mouth. The snake, as seen clearly on the second, smaller Amyklaian plaque (Pl. 64:c),¹³ coils between the legs of the warrior with its tail just below his right hand.

Detailed on-site examination and accurate measurements of the one Corinthian and the three Lakonian plaques have proved beyond doubt that they all derived from the same archetype. The plaques from Corinth and Sparta were cast in the same mold, which was very likely the first-generation mold;¹⁴ the plaques from Amyklai, which are of smaller dimensions, were made in molds of the second and third generation.

We thus have two plaques, both cast in the first-generation mold: one from Corinth, made in the local Corinthian clay; one from Sparta, made in the local Lakonian clay. One may conclude that these plaques most likely represent a case of mold sharing, the first-generation mold having traveled between Corinth and Lakonia.¹⁵ The sharing of molds between two centers of terracotta production, as a result of sale or export, was not very common in the ancient world.¹⁶ A more widespread practice was the import of a finished piece to a center and the subsequent local manufacture from that piece of a second-generation mold. The second-generation mold and casts would have been of smaller dimensions due to the shrinkage of clay. In this way, later generations of terracottas from the same series would be made in the local clay of the new center.¹⁷

The question that immediately arises in the case of the warrior plaques concerns the origin of the mold: was it made in Corinth or Lakonia? Since there are almost no imports in the Potters' Quarter, it seems more likely that the series was created in a Corinthian workshop;¹⁸ the first-generation mold must have then been taken to Lakonia, where it was used by a local craftsman to produce several plaques of the first generation and, from derivative molds, plaques of the second and third generations.¹⁹ A significant implication of this transfer is that warrior imagery was considered appropriate for cults in both Corinth and Lakonia.²⁰

THE FIGHTING WARRIOR

Proceeding now to the iconography of the warrior, it may be noticed that the pose is a common one for an attacking fighter. The type seems to have originated in large-scale

¹³ Sparta Museum A6225/3. Two adjoining pieces from the lower right corner preserved with part of the left edge. P.L. 0.124 m; p.H. 0.097 m; Th. of the background 0.01 m; Th. including the relief: 0.015 m. Fabric 5YR 6/6 (reddish yellow); clay with some impurities and mica. No holes are preserved; small impressions from tool on reverse; very worn mold; relief edge frames plaque.

¹⁴ See the cautious remarks of Miller (1985, p. 12) regarding the identification of the largest surviving piece of a series with the first generation of terracottas.

¹⁵ It is also possible that two or more molds were taken from the same archetype and that one of them was exported.

¹⁶ Nicholls 1952, p. 220; Higgins 1967, pp. 5, 9; Miller 1985, p. 11.

¹⁷ On derivative foreign production see Nicholls 1952, pp. 221, 226; Miller 1985, pp. 5–14.

¹⁸ *Corinth* XV, ii, p. 13. I would like to thank Ronald Stroud, who pointed this out to me.

¹⁹ Keith DeVries suggested to me another possibility: that a craftsman migrating from Corinth to Lakonia may have taken the mold with him.

²⁰ Cf. Miller 1985, pp. 13–14.

painting of around 470–460 B.C. and was immediately adopted by vase painters.²¹ The fighting warrior became a popular motif for heroes depicted in both vase painting and sculpture of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. The Attic hero Theseus is very often shown in this pose, although he appropriately wears an Attic helmet.²² In the sculptured friezes from Bassai and Gjölbасchi-Trysa, similar warriors fight the Amazons.²³ Late-5th-century coins of Syracuse represent the hero Leukaspis holding sword and shield and again wearing an Attic helmet.²⁴ (Leukaspis was a mythical Sicilian warrior who died fighting for his country and was worshiped thereafter as a hero.²⁵) The type of the fighting warrior with Corinthian helmet was employed for Aias, son of Oileus, represented on 4th-century coins of Opuntian Lokroi.²⁶ A stone relief found in the area of Alea-Tegea represents a similar warrior. The work is dated to the second half of the 4th century B.C., but its inscription, with the name EXEMOΣ, is much later, of the 1st or 2nd century after Christ.²⁷ Echemos was a local hero of Tegea, and Pausanias, in his visit to the area (8.53.10), mentions his grave and a stele depicting his battle against Hyllos. It has been argued that the Alea relief is the one Pausanias saw. The relief was originally part of a frieze decorating an unknown monument and was later reworked and reused in Echemos' heroon with the addition of his name.²⁸

A large number of heroes do indeed figure as warriors in the legends associated with them. They were venerated by the entire local community as protectors and would be expected to help in times of danger.²⁹ Thus Theseus was said to have appeared at Marathon fighting at the head of the Athenians,³⁰ and Echetaios, a local hero whose name was revealed later by the Delphic oracle, fought there with his plough.³¹ Phylakos and Autonoos, two native heroes of Delphi, defended their land at the time of the Persian invasion,³² and the Salaminians Telamon and Aias were invoked before the battle at

²¹ Bulle 1930, pp. 186–187; Barron 1972, esp. pp. 35–40. See also the plaque from the South Stoa mentioned above in note 3.

²² See, e.g., a stamnos in the Vatican: Von Bothmer 1957, pl. 80:2; a neck amphora in Jerusalem: Kurtz and Sparkes 1982, pl. 5:a.

²³ Bassai frieze (ca. 400 B.C.): Boardman 1973, p. 127, fig. 129; Gjölbасchi-Trysa frieze (early 4th century B.C.): *LIMC* I, 1981, pl. 420, s.v. Amazones (P. Devambez). Cf. the Boiotian stele of Saugenēs (end of the 5th century): Kaloyeropoulou 1968.

²⁴ Raven 1957, pp. 77–81; Rizzo 1946, p. 201, nos. 9, 10, and pl. XLII. Cf. a contemporary coin of Messene with a similar warrior (holding a spear this time) inscribed with the name Pheraimon (a son of Aiolos): Lacroix 1965, pl. III.

²⁵ Diodorus Siculus 4.23; Rizzo 1946, p. 214.

²⁶ Starting from ca. 387 B.C.: Sayles 1985, pp. 27–28, 35. It is interesting to note here the suggestion made by Simon (1977, p. 18) that the warrior offering a cock to Persephone depicted on a Lokrian plaque (Prückner 1968, pl. 6) could be identified with the hero Aias, son of Oileus.

²⁷ Tegea Museum 2294; Pikoulas 1981, pp. 283–286, pl. 9. The only difference from the warrior on the Lakonian plaques is that the shield is held out in front, so that the whole inner side shows.

²⁸ Pikoulas 1981, *loc. cit.*

²⁹ Dentzer 1982, p. 480; Brelich 1958, pp. 91–92; Kearns 1990, esp. pp. 323–334.

³⁰ Plutarch, *Thes.* 35.5.

³¹ Pausanias 1.32.5; Jameson 1951.

³² Herodotos 8.38–39; Pausanias 10.8.7.

Salamis.³³ Finally, the Lokrians left a position in their ranks for Aias, the son of Oileus.³⁴ The importance given to the protective aspect of the local hero is clearly demonstrated in the story related by Herodotos, according to which the Spartans, on the advice of the Delphic oracle, had to recover the bones of Orestes from Tegea in order to be able to defeat the Tegeans.³⁵

THE SNAKE

What distinguishes the warrior on the Lakonian and Corinthian plaques from all other depictions is the presence of the snake. Although warriors are sometimes depicted fighting a snake, the scheme of a fighting warrior with a snake simply accompanying him and with no indication of a combat or even an interaction between the two³⁶ is, to my knowledge, found nowhere else. A similar combination, but with the warrior simply standing, is found on terracotta plaques deposited with other offerings during the Early Hellenistic period in the area of a tholos tomb at Voidokilia, Messenia. These are oblong plaques representing a frontal warrior wearing a short chiton and cuirass. He sports a helmet and with his left hand holds a shield shown in profile; his right arm is bent and holds a vertical spear. A snake is uncoiling behind the warrior, starting from the right side of the plaque and going up along the left.³⁷ Despite the static pose of the warrior, the snake clearly associates

³³ Herodotos 8.64. Before the battle at Plataia a sacrifice was offered to seven local *archegetai*: Plutarch, *Arist.* 11.4.

³⁴ Pausanias 3.19.12.

³⁵ Herodotos (1.67–68) and Pausanias (3.3.6) give a detailed account of how the Spartans accomplished this task (see also Vandiver 1991, pp. 34–38; Boedeker 1993; Malkin 1994, pp. 26–30). Pausanias (3.11.10) mentions a shrine of the Moirai in the Spartan agora, near which was a grave for Orestes, constructed after the transportation of his bones from Tegea. Huxley (1979) argues that the bones of Orestes were discovered not in Tegea but at Oresthasion, to the southwest of Tegea; in this he follows Forrest (1968, pp. 73–76), who was the first to argue for a deliberate confusion between Orestes and the local hero of Arkadia, Oresthes. On the exact location of Oresthasion see most recently Drakopoulos 1991. Boedeker (1993) rejects the idea that there was a propagandistic aspect to the motive behind the transferal of Orestes' bones, supporting a new policy of the Spartans in favor of alliances instead of annexation. She argues instead that the Spartans acted in the framework of their general interest in their Achaean predecessors and imported Orestes, who by having no descendants in Sparta belonged not to individual families but to the *polis* as a whole. Although the propitiation of Orestes may indeed have had a local meaning for the Spartans, the possibility that this action may also have greatly served their political intentions of becoming one way or another sovereigns of the entire Peloponnese should not be downplayed.

³⁶ As, for example, in a Late Archaic relief from Charouda, in the western Mani, which portrays a young warrior wearing a short chiton and greaves, facing a large erect snake: Gytheion Museum 1; Schröder 1904, pp. 44–46, fig. 6; Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 63–64, fig. 20; Andronikos 1956, pp. 301–302. The warrior is preparing to deposit his shield on the ground, where his Corinthian helmet already lies. A similar erect snake appears on another Lakonian relief, in front of a standing youth who perhaps holds a spear: Sparta Museum 558; Tod and Wace 1906, p. 189 (no. 558); Mitropoulou 1977, p. 66, fig. 21.

³⁷ Peppa-Papaioannou 1987–1988, pp. 259, 270, fig. 12; Korres 1982, p. 204, pl. 136:α; Korres 1985, pl. 30:1; Korres 1988, pp. 315, 320, fig. 6. In all, approximately ten examples of warrior plaques have been discovered, belonging to three different mold series; the snake is missing from the third mold series.

the type with that of the fighting warrior on the Lakonian and Corinthian plaques by which it was certainly inspired.

The snake in this context lends a more-than-human quality to the warrior figure and must therefore have a symbolic meaning.³⁸ There are strong reasons to believe, as I will argue, that the snake was included in the scene on the Corinthian and Lakonian plaques in order to specify and accentuate the heroic nature of the warrior figure.³⁹

The snake, a creature that evokes fear, awe, and fascination, has a very wide range of meanings. In ancient Greece, as in many other cultures, it was closely associated with the earth, probably because it crawls on and lives in the ground and appears suddenly from holes. Herodotos reports that it was considered a “child of the earth”,⁴⁰ and indeed many mythological snake monsters, like Typhon, Ladon, Echidna, and Hydra, claimed the goddess Earth as their mother or grandmother.⁴¹

In the eyes of modern scholars, the characteristics of the snake have given rise to a number of associations: since it resides in recesses of the earth and is frequently seen near graves, the snake has been connected with the dead and with chthonic cults; its relation with the earth, where seeds germinate, has also associated it with life and fertility; moreover, the snake has been considered a symbol of immortality and resurrection by virtue of its ability to renew its skin.⁴²

The ancient literary tradition points particularly to the association of the snake with heroes. According to Plutarch (*Cleom.* 39) there was an old folk belief that the snake possessed a demonic character pertinent to heroes.⁴³ In 219 B.C., for example, the appearance of a large snake around the head of the Spartan king Kleomenes while his dead body was being crucified inspired fear in King Ptolemy, who interpreted this as a sign that Kleomenes was more than an ordinary human being. Most important, it created a commotion and excitement among the common people, who declared Kleomenes a hero and son of the gods. This contrasts with attempts by the Alexandrian intellectuals to provide a “scientific” explanation for this phenomenon: that snakes grow naturally out of the decayed human body. At the end of his account, Plutarch clearly states that “the ancients associated the snake more than any other animal with heroes.”⁴⁴ Similarly, the

³⁸ Apollodoros (*Bibl.* 2.8.5) mentions the *drakon* as *semeion* in Lakedaimon. That the snake is not simply a reptile but represents something else is shown by literary references to the kind of food offered to it; it is not given such favorites of real snakes as eggs or mice but instead honey cakes or gruel (Pausanias 6.20.2; schol. Aristophanes, *Nub.* 508). Such a practice may imply that in the eyes of the ancients the snake symbolized a creature of anthropomorphic characteristics or origins: see Roscher I, ii, 2467, *s.v.* Heros (F. Deneken); Küster 1913, p. 136; Dentzer 1982, p. 498.

³⁹ That the warrior figure may also have been an ancestor is not to be excluded, since heroes and ancestors of a family or community often overlapped: see Alcock 1991, p. 449, note 3; Whitley 1994, p. 214; Antonaccio 1994, pp. 390, 401.

⁴⁰ Herodotos 1.78.3; Artemidoros 2.13.

⁴¹ Egli 1982, pp. 171, 201–203; Küster 1913, pp. 87–100. The Athenian king Erechtheus was also γηγενής (Herodotos 8.55), as was Ogygos, the first king of Thebes (Pausanias 9.5.1).

⁴² For the snake in general see Küster 1913; Egli 1982; Bevan 1986.

⁴³ Andronikos 1956, p. 285; Rhomaïos 1914, pp. 213–215; Dentzer 1982, p. 498. Cf. Lucian, *Alex.* 7; Diogenes Laertius, *Herakl.* 6.

⁴⁴ . . . οἱ παλαιοὶ μάλιστα τῶν ζώων τὸν δράκοντα τοῖς ἥρωσι συνφκείωσαν. Seiffert (1911, p. 114) has argued that this last sentence was a later addition; this is not considered necessary by Rhomaïos (1914, p. 214, note 1).

scholiast to Aristophanes, *Pl.* 733 explains: "the snake was commonly placed next to the heroes and especially next to Asklepios."⁴⁵

It should be stressed here that these particular references do not actually indicate the assimilation of a hero by the snake but only refer to it as his companion or attribute.⁴⁶ On the other hand, some heroes, such as Kychreus, Sosipolis, and Asklepios, did appear in snake form, and Kekrops and Erechtheus were considered either snakes or creatures of half-human, half-snake shape.⁴⁷ Along the same line, divine figures such as Zeus Ktesios, Zeus Philios, Zeus Meilichios, and the Agathos Daimon, all of whom were associated with domestic and ancestral cults, are known to have taken the form of a snake,⁴⁸ probably because they developed out of old divinities associated with the earth.⁴⁹

The ancestral qualities of the snake are apparent in some foundation myths, where a snake plays a decisive role as leader of the tribe.⁵⁰ As is clear from its name, the tribe of Ophiogeneis in the Hellespont considered as their *archegetes* a hero who had metamorphosed from a snake (Strabo 13.1.14).⁵¹ References to snakes at the Asklepieion

⁴⁵ κοινῶς μὲν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἥρωσι δράκοντες παρειτίθεντο ἐξαιρέτως δὲ τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ. It is possible that Asklepios became associated with the snake owing to his nature as hero and healer (in his case the boundaries between hero and god were fluid). On the close relation of Asklepios with the snake see Küster 1913, pp. 133–137. Cf. Artemidoros 2.13; 4.79: δράκοντες οἱ μὲν εἰς ἄνδρας μεταβάλλοντες ἥρωας σημαίνουσιν, οἱ δὲ εἰς γυναῖκας ἡρώιδας; Theophrastos, *Char.* 16.4: the superstitious man would set up a heroon where he had seen a sacred snake; Photius, *Lex.*, s.v. ἥρως ποικίλος: διὰ τὸ τοῦς ὄφεις ποικίλους ὄντας ἥρωας καλεῖσθαι; Dentzer 1982, pp. 497–501; Thönges-Stringaris 1965, pp. 56–57, 60 (part of a hero's essence); Küster 1913, pp. 72–85; Seiffert 1911, pp. 125–126.

⁴⁶ Dentzer 1982, p. 498. On the basis of Pausanias (1.36.1), who says that the snake that appeared among the ships in Salamis was declared by the Delphic oracle to have been the Salaminian hero Kychreus, it has been supposed that heroes customarily assumed the form of a snake: Dentzer 1982, p. 497; Küster 1913, p. 100. Pausanias' reference, however, is not exact. According to Hesiod (Strabo 9.393) a snake, having been fostered by Kychreus in Salamis, finally became the attendant of Demeter at Eleusis. Thus the earliest reference to Kychreus deals not with his snake form but with a snake associated with him, perhaps because the hero was an aboriginal earth spirit.

⁴⁷ Roscher I, ii, cols. 2466–2469, s.v. Heros (F. Deneken); Pausanias 1.24.7, 2.10.3; see also Kearns 1982; Küster 1913, pp. 97–100; Bevan 1986, pp. 262–264; Dentzer 1982, p. 497.

⁴⁸ The snake appears in domestic cults already in Minoan times and is distinct from the snake embodying the soul of the dead: Nilsson 1955, p. 198; Burkert 1985, p. 30. Perhaps this domestic cult was devoted to the ancestor of the family and became similar to the cult of the *archegetes* and the eponymous hero (Dentzer 1982, p. 500). On ancestors see, most recently, Antonaccio 1993.

⁴⁹ Seiffert 1911, p. 116; Küster 1913, pp. 105–107, 145, with references to several monuments. For Zeus Ktesios see an inscribed Boiotian relief depicting a snake: Nilsson 1908. For Zeus Meilichios see Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 112–155; Harrison 1955, pp. 17–21; Van Straten 1974, p. 180, note 164; Jameson 1965, pp. 161–165. See also a votive relief with two worshipers in front of a large snake coiling inside a cave, said to be from Boiotia; the snake is interpreted as Zeus Meilichios, but it could also be Trophonios: Blümel 1928, K92, pp. 65–66, pl. 77. Two unpublished stelai from Lebadeia bearing a dedication to Daimon Meilichios are decorated with a snake: Rhomaios 1914, p. 216, note 2. For Zeus Philios see Effenberger 1972, pp. 148–152. For Agathos Daimon see *LIMC* I, 1981, pp. 277–282, s.v. Agathodaimon (F. Dunand).

⁵⁰ E.g., at Mantinea (Pausanias 8.8.4–5) and at Epidauros Limera (Pausanias 3.23.6); Brelich 1958, p. 221; Küster 1913, p. 102, note 2.

⁵¹ Küster 1913, pp. 101–103. Cf. the Ophieis or Ophioneis in Aitolia (Thucydides 3.94; Strabo 10.2.5, 3.6). Whitley (1988, p. 180, note 46), following Roussel 1976 and Bourriot 1976, pointed out that the terms phratry, genos, and tribe by expressing kinship (even if entirely fictive) were important for bolstering unity

at Epidauros as having impregnated infertile women and to the claim of a serpentine paternity of several illustrious historical personages also point to the ancestral aspect of the snake.⁵²

It seems likely, therefore, that the snake was considered in some Greek areas an independent chthonic being and may have been worshiped.⁵³ Despite its appearance in very different religious contexts, the snake eventually assumed a primary association as hero (or ancestor) signifier.⁵⁴ It became the companion or attribute of a hero and sometimes may also have represented the hero himself, as, for example, in the case of Sosipolis. The precise reason behind this association, however, remains unclear to us. One could argue that the snake, originally an underworld being, became associated with heroes because heroes were persons who had died and who were closely attached to their real or alleged graves,⁵⁵ or, more likely, because this animal, so intimately connected with the earth and tied to particular locations, better expressed the restricted locale and autochthonous nature of most heroes, especially founders and eponymous heroes.⁵⁶ It is also possible that in the minds of the ancients the snake represented such figures of the remote past as the Hesiodic Silver Generation, the *hypochthonioi*, who were honored after their death and, by definition, resided under the earth. The hero, therefore, being buried and attached to a specific location, would have kept company with the original subterranean inhabitants, who were anonymous and collectively embodied by the snake.⁵⁷

Another commonly argued explanation is that the snake was first the manifestation of all chthonic spirits, including heroes; with the advance of anthropomorphic concepts it was demoted, becoming the sacred animal of some chthonic gods and heroes and thus their attribute. Its presence then would indicate that a scene takes place in the Underworld or is to be connected with the chthonic powers.⁵⁸

and solidarity. The French scholars, however, have argued against an earlier origin for these Classical Attic institutions.

⁵² E.g., Aristomenes, the hero of the second Messenian war (Pausanias 4.14.7); Brelich 1958, pp. 221, 318–319; Küster 1913, pp. 100–104, 145.

⁵³ See, for example, the relief from Charouda (note 36 above), where it is clear that the snake is an independent superhuman creature being venerated by the youth. Andronikos (1956, pp. 301–303) has considered the relief a dedication to a hero or *daimon* appearing in the form of a snake, the warrior being the dedicator. Hibler (1993, p. 202) identified the youth as a warrior who died in battle and was subsequently heroized, but he did not comment on the snake.

⁵⁴ Seiffert 1911, pp. 125–126; Küster 1913, pp. 56–60. According to Küster (1913, p. 74) the snake in depictions might designate a hero tomb.

⁵⁵ Cf. Kontoleon 1970, p. 32, note 1.

⁵⁶ Küster 1913, pp. 97–100; Roscher I, ii, col. 2470, *s.v.* Heros (F. Deneken); Dentzer 1982, p. 500; cf. Abramson 1978, p. 46.

⁵⁷ I owe the essence of this idea to Gloria Ferrari Pinney. For the heroic nature of both the Gold and Silver Generations, see Nagy 1979, pp. 151–154. On Hesiod's generations see, most recently, Whitley 1994, p. 222; Antonaccio 1994, pp. 405–408.

⁵⁸ Küster 1913, pp. 68, 74, 76, 80–82, note 7; Harrison 1899, p. 205; Broneer 1942, p. 133; Effenberger 1972, p. 139; Furtwängler 1883–1887, p. 26; Rhomaios 1914, pp. 215–220, who, however, objects to the idea that the presence of the snake accords hero status to the person (p. 224). Dentzer (1982, pp. 500–501) identified the snake present on banquet reliefs as the hero's attribute or companion. Effenberger (1972,

THE CORINTHIAN SNAKE STELAI

In Lakonian art the snake is found very frequently, but its role in the context of Lakonian ideology remains obscure. It appears in vase painting, Dioskouroi reliefs, the well-known hero reliefs (ranging in date from the 6th century B.C. to the Roman period), and terracotta relief plaques, as well as in the round.⁵⁹ The importance of this reptile in Lakonia is apparent in a series of stone reliefs, probably dating to the 5th century B.C., where erect snakes appear in isolation.⁶⁰ The snake is particularly popular in the finds from the Amyklai deposit, from which the two warrior plaques came; it appears on vases, terracotta plaques depicting seated and standing figures, and with a seated man in a terracotta figurine.⁶¹ Particularly striking is the association of the snake with the figures on the stone hero reliefs and the terracotta plaques. The most common scheme consists of a seated man holding a kantharos, while a snake is writhing in the field and sometimes approaches the cup; the man may be accompanied by his consort, seated next to him, and by various attending figures or adorants. I have argued elsewhere that reliefs and plaques decorated with such depictions were offerings dedicated to heroes in Lakonia, an area exceptionally rich in hero shrines.⁶²

The snake is also a familiar motif in Corinthian art, and its specific association with the warrior survived into later periods. A class of typically Corinthian votive offerings first made during the 5th century B.C. has been discovered in mostly Hellenistic deposits in the Corinthian forum. These are the so-called Snake Stelai, small cutout terracotta reliefs representing a stele with a molding at the base and top and crowned by a Corinthian helmet shown in profile, usually to the right; a snake is depicted slithering up the shaft of the stele (Pl. 63:b).⁶³ At an earlier date, similar terracotta "stelai" were made with one or two snakes but had no helmet on top.⁶⁴

p. 136) objects that, although several chthonic gods appeared in the form of a snake, the latter was never their attribute.

⁵⁹ For Lakonian vase painting see Stibbe 1972; Stibbe 1994, pp. 75–85; Pipili 1987. For the Dioskouroi reliefs see Sanders 1992. For the stone hero reliefs and terracotta plaques see Andronikos 1956; Stibbe 1991; Hibler 1993; Salapata 1992 and 1993. A bronze snake in the round has been published in Wace and Hasluck 1904–1905, p. 84, fig. 5. See also the two reliefs mentioned in note 36 above.

⁶⁰ Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 221–222; Stibbe 1991, p. 42.

⁶¹ Salapata 1992 and 1993; Stibbe 1991; Stibbe 1994, pp. 75–85.

⁶² Salapata 1992 and 1993. See also the reference to the Spartan Kleomenes, pp. 250–251 above.

⁶³ *Corinth* XV, ii, p. 157; Davidson 1942, p. 113, fig. 4; Broneer 1942, fig. 7; *Corinth* XII, nos. 184, 365–374; Robinson 1906, no. 24, pp. 171–172, pl. XIII. Two examples show a column instead of a stele: Davidson 1942, nos. 30, 31, pp. 105–127. Cf. two small "ticket" relief plaques from Corinth, one with a cuirass, the other with a Corinthian helmet: Robinson 1906, nos. 22, 23, p. 171, pl. XIII; *Corinth* XII, nos. 375, 376, p. 54, pl. 34.

⁶⁴ From the Potters' Quarter: *Corinth* XV, ii, nos. 14–16, pp. 156–158, 161–162, pl. 34. A forerunner of the relief plaques, a plaque with two painted snakes, has been dated to the Middle Corinthian period: *Corinth* XV, ii, p. 157. Ronald Stroud kindly informed me that in the Corinth Museum there are two unpublished poros stelai with vertical snakes in relief: one stele has two snakes; the other, in the form of a half column, has one snake.

Most of the Snake Stelai come from sanctuaries or sanctuary deposits. Thus, for example, Snake Stelai, banqueters, and riders were among the finds in a small hypaethral temenos constructed over Protogeometric graves in the Corinthian forum. Although the cult itself was established in the late 7th century B.C., the temenos, with the enclosing wall and an offering table, was built later, sometime during the 6th century B.C., and remained in use until the mid 2nd century B.C.⁶⁵ This type of shrine has been classified as a hero shrine by Williams and defined as a cult area usually associated with graves and probably dedicated to a hero or ancestor.⁶⁶

What is the iconographic relationship between the warrior plaques and the Snake Stelai crowned with a helmet? Actual weapons and armor had long been deposited as funerary gifts in the graves of warriors. They must also have been placed on top of the grave, as shown on an Attic red-figured lekythos on which a young man, most likely the dead warrior himself, seems to be in the process of placing a Corinthian helmet on the grave stele, while a shield already leans against it.⁶⁷ It is indeed probable that the idea of using painted or sculptured armor as a decorative motif on grave stelai evolved from such a practice.⁶⁸ On a white-ground lekythos by the Thanatos Painter (third quarter of the 5th century B.C.) a helmet is painted on the upper part of the grave stele of a warrior who is being carried off by Hypnos and Thanatos.⁶⁹ Stelai crowned by helmets were also used to represent the marker over the grave of a mythical warrior. On a Lucanian Panathenaic amphora of around 380 B.C. Elektra, Orestes, and Pylades are shown next to the tomb of Agamemnon, which is represented as a stele crowned by a Corinthian helmet, with the king's name, Agamemnon, written on the shaft.⁷⁰

Votive terracotta plaques representing a stele topped with a helmet have also been discovered in the Spartan colony of Taras in South Italy and have been dated to the 4th century B.C. The helmet in this case is shown full face.⁷¹ Similar stelai appear on other plaques as part of a larger scene that includes a naked man half sitting, half reclining on a

⁶⁵ Williams and Fisher 1973, pp. 2–12; Williams, MacIntosh, and Fisher 1974, pp. 1–6; Williams 1981, p. 410.

⁶⁶ Williams 1981, p. 410, who distinguishes this type from the stele shrine built over a house: the Corinthian warrior plaque was most likely associated with a stele shrine (see p. 246 above).

⁶⁷ Weissshaupl 1893, cols. 17–18, pl. 3. The warrior does not seem to be a visitor, as Weissshaupl believes. According to Pausanias (9.25.1) the place of death of Polyneikes and Eteokles was marked by a column topped with a shield.

⁶⁸ Crous 1933, pp. 34–35. For arms depicted on grave monuments see Woelke 1911, p. 220, note 50b; Fischer-Bossert 1992, p. 59, note 156, fig. 16. On the ancient tropaion in general see Pritchett 1974, pp. 246–275. Cf. a unique Attic funerary stele of the 4th century B.C. decorated with a round shield on the shaft and topped by a frontal helmet in the round: Peppas-Delמוש 1973–1974. I owe this reference to Ronald Stroud.

⁶⁹ Kurtz 1975, p. 211, pl. 32:4. The helmet is painted on the face of the stele. Three Boiotian grave stelai, of unknown date, are reportedly crowned by helmets: Woelke 1911, p. 220, note 50b.

⁷⁰ *LMC* III, 1986, pl. 6, *s.v.* Elektra I (I. McPhee); Fuchs 1963, pp. 33–34, pl. 19:1. Another vase shows the tomb as a column; behind it is probably an appearance of the dead Agamemnon depicted as warrior with helmet, spear, and shield: Fuchs 1963, p. 35, pl. 19:2. For other examples of Agamemnon's tomb depicted as pillar or column see Fuchs 1963, pp. 34–35.

⁷¹ Mollard-Besques 1954–1986, nos. C550, C551, p. 153, pl. XCVIII; Wuilleumier 1939, pl. XXXI:1.

couch. A frontal helmet and a round shield are fixed on the stele;⁷² more significant, a snake is winding up the stele, an element that associates the Tarantine terracottas with the Corinthian Snake Stelai.⁷³ On another similar plaque there is no armor on the stele, but there seem to be some offerings on its top; in this case the man is giving the snake something to drink from a mesomphalic phiale.⁷⁴

I would suggest that the Corinthian Snake Stelai, like the Tarentine plaques, were votive offerings representing the grave monument of a hero, with the pieces of armor on the stele manifesting his qualities as warrior. The snake crawling on the face of the stele would make the heroic association clear.⁷⁵ Oscar Broneer, on the other hand, has suggested that the Corinthian Snake Stelai represent the turning post in the race track, with the snake pointing to the chthonic character of the cult with which the Snake Stelai were associated.⁷⁶ This view is certainly influenced by his assumption that not only did the deposits in which the Snake Stelai were found come from hero shrines but also the offerings alluded to equestrian events in the hero's honor.⁷⁷ The nature of the votive offerings may indeed point to a heroic (or funerary) cult,⁷⁸ and there also seems to be a relationship between columns (or pillars) as grave markers and columns as turning posts in racecourses.⁷⁹ I do not find it necessary, however, in view of the similar Tarentine plaques, to move beyond an interpretation of the Snake Stelai as a representation of the marker over a hero's grave, specifically a hero warrior, as is shown by the helmet.

CONCLUSION

During the 5th century B.C. the two Dorian cities of Corinth and Sparta were very closely linked politically in the Peloponnesian League. In fact, Corinth was at least partly

⁷² Compare the Attic stele mentioned in note 68 above.

⁷³ Bartoccini 1936, p. 167, fig. 78. According to Willeumier (1939, p. 507) the arms recall the armed god on the Lokrian plaques and the heroized dead. Cf. Epameinondas' grave described by Pausanias (8.11.8) as having a column bearing a shield decorated with a snake.

⁷⁴ Bartoccini 1936, p. 167, fig. 79; Willeumier 1939, pp. 507–508, note 1. A fragmentary terracotta plaque from the end of the 5th century B.C. depicts weapons (shield, Corinthian helmet, sword, and corselet) together with a horse protome: Lullies 1957, pp. 401–402, no. 17, fig. 21.

⁷⁵ This combination of weapons and snakes on offerings to heroes is also found on terracotta disks from Olbia; they bear graffiti referring to Achilles and simple drawings, among which are snakes and swords: Hedreen 1991, pp. 315–316.

⁷⁶ Broneer 1942, pp. 130, 157.

⁷⁷ Broneer 1942, pp. 130, 135–161.

⁷⁸ The large number of rider plaques showing a snake between the legs of the horse, the Snake Stelai, and the banqueters have long been considered appropriate offerings to heroes: cf. Robinson 1906, pp. 172–173; Callaghan 1978, pp. 24–28; Dentzer 1982, p. 480; Alcock 1991, p. 461. Hägg (1987) is reluctant to assign a "heroic character" to a deposit solely on the basis of the types of offerings unless they are present in large quantities.

⁷⁹ For the use of a grave marker as a turning post for horse and chariot races, see *Il.* 23.329–33 (funeral games for Patroklos); Pausanias 6.21.15–19, 10.37.4 (hero Taraxippos buried at the turning post of the racecourse at Olympia). For a complete discussion see McGowan 1995; Brulotte 1994.

responsible for propelling the League into the Peloponnesian War.⁸⁰ The two cities also had long-standing commercial links which continued into the 5th century.⁸¹ In such a framework, craftsmen may have exchanged molds for the production of terracotta votive offerings. The image of the fighting warrior accompanied by the snake on the Corinthian and Lakonian plaques must have been appropriate for both areas and could have served similar needs.

Who were the recipients of these plaques? Archaeological and iconographic evidence points to the heroic nature of the cult figures. The iconography of the warrior was generic enough to enable dedicators to offer the plaques to different deities in Corinth, Sparta, and Amyklai.⁸² In each particular sanctuary the warrior would presumably be identified with the locally honored hero, so that people would have no doubt as to whom the figure was supposed to represent.⁸³ The warrior on the Corinth plaque, if indeed, as seems likely, it was dedicated at a stele shrine, may have represented a hero or family ancestor. His identity remains unknown to us since no inscriptions have been recovered. This is also the case with the numerous later cults at Mycenaean tombs, which have generally been associated with heroes.⁸⁴ The absence of inscriptions, however, or the use of the appellation "hero" (as is occasionally the case) does not necessarily mean that the worshiped hero was anonymous or thought of as a generic figure.⁸⁵ Are we justified in assuming that since he remains anonymous to us he was also anonymous to his worshipers? Or that since he was called only "hero" his name was not known to the people of the region? One could argue that there would simply be no need to mention the specific name of the hero since in the restricted locale where his worship was performed everybody would have known that the figure represented the hero of the sanctuary or of the area.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Ste. Croix 1972.

⁸¹ Rolley 1977, p. 129.

⁸² Cf. Miller-Ammerman 1991, pp. 207, 227.

⁸³ Cf. Dentzer 1982, p. 454; Broneer 1942, p. 132, note 12; Roscher I, ii, col. 2511, *s.v.* Heros (F. Deneken).

⁸⁴ Antonaccio (1993, 1994, and 1995) rightly emphasized the distinction between "tomb cult" and "hero cult" in the Iron Age as different phenomena but with parallel occurrence. Tomb cult, which goes back to the 10th century but was intensified in the late 8th century B.C., is short-lived and consists of offerings deposited at tombs (mostly Mycenaean). Hero cult, on the other hand, is a ritual action performed at specific locations, often with monumental or at least permanent architecture, and is repeated at regular intervals for a long time. But her conclusion that the cults at Mycenaean and later tombs were directed to ancestors "adopted" by people who, though not linked by blood, sought to establish kinship, though probably true in some instances, cannot be generally applied. One should allow for variability in tomb cults and in the reasons for their establishment in various regions and even within the same community (see Morris 1988; Whitley 1988, pp. 176–181; Alcock 1991, p. 453): sometimes the accidental discovery of an "ancient" tomb called for appeasement; or the "resident" of the area was propitiated out of fear or respect by the farmer who started cultivating the land; in yet other cases the old aristocrats or citizens of a *polis* reacted to protect their rights to a territory by appropriating the local hero.

⁸⁵ One of Antonaccio's distinctions between hero and tomb cult is the presence or lack of inscriptions: hero cults are directed to recipients identified by name or given just the appellation "hero", while tomb cults remain anonymous. For examples of dedications "to the hero" see Dentzer 1982, p. 454, note 5.

⁸⁶ The heroes were so closely tied to their territory that often the name was not used and they were distinguished by a purely local designation as the hero of that city or country: Rudhardt 1958, p. 133; Dentzer 1982, p. 360, note 524; Farnell 1921, p. 84. Furtwängler (1883–1887, pp. 21–22) remarked that

In the case of the Lakonian plaques, however, we are luckier. Although very little can be determined about the recipient of the plaque at Sparta, the two Amyklaian plaques can confidently be associated with a specific hero. At the Amyklai sanctuary of Alexandra/Kassandra, cult was bestowed upon the Achaean king Agamemnon and was centered around his grave (see p. 246 above). Since he lacked descendants in Sparta, Agamemnon must have been worshiped not as ancestor but as hero.⁸⁷ In fact, Agamemnon bridges both meanings of the word “hero”, the epic and the cultic.⁸⁸ He was not only a panhellenic Homeric hero but also a local Lakedaimonian one, since according to a variant tradition, his palace was located in Lakonia.⁸⁹ In the framework of their interest in the Achaean kingdom that preceded them, the Spartans worshiped Agamemnon at the place where he was supposedly murdered and buried. The iconography of the warrior plaques is indeed very appropriate for the preeminent commander of the Greek army during the Trojan expedition, who is represented according to the epic ideal as a mature warrior.⁹⁰ His heroic nature was specified and emphasized through the addition of the snake placed next to him.

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several times the individual name of an ancestor was not given; instead a more general name was used, like *archegetes*, since among the narrow circle of his worshipers his name was well known. See a 6th-century stele from Rhamnous with a dedication to the Hero Archegetes: *IG* I³ 1019; Έργον 1991, p. 6 (I owe this reference to Ronald Stroud). Herodotos (7.117) specifically says that Artachaies, after he became a hero, was called upon by name (the implication being that this was not a common practice).

⁸⁷ It is interesting that hero cults in Greece seem to have emerged first in Sparta with the establishment of the Menelaion (Antonaccio 1993, pp. 57, 62).

⁸⁸ As defined by West (1978, pp. 370–373).

⁸⁹ The tradition is first presented clearly by Stesichoros (Schol. Euripides, *Or.* 46) but may go back to earlier times. Pindar (*Pyth.* 11.31–33) specifies the place of the murder as Amyklai. See Salapata 1992; Malkin 1994, pp. 31–33; cf. Whitley 1994, p. 221.

⁹⁰ Whitley 1994, esp. pp. 228–229.

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a. Warrior plaque from the Potters' Quarter, from first-generation mold (Corinth Museum KT27-7). Scale 1:1



b. Corinthian Snake-Stele plaque (Corinth Museum MF 1853). Scale 1:1



a. Warrior plaque from Sparta, from first-generation mold (Sparta Museum X1)



b. Warrior plaque from Amyklai, from second-generation mold (Sparta Museum A6225/1)



c. Warrior plaque from Amyklai, from third-generation mold (Sparta Museum A6225/3)

(Plaques a, b, and c are printed at the same scale.)