

Greek Hero Cults

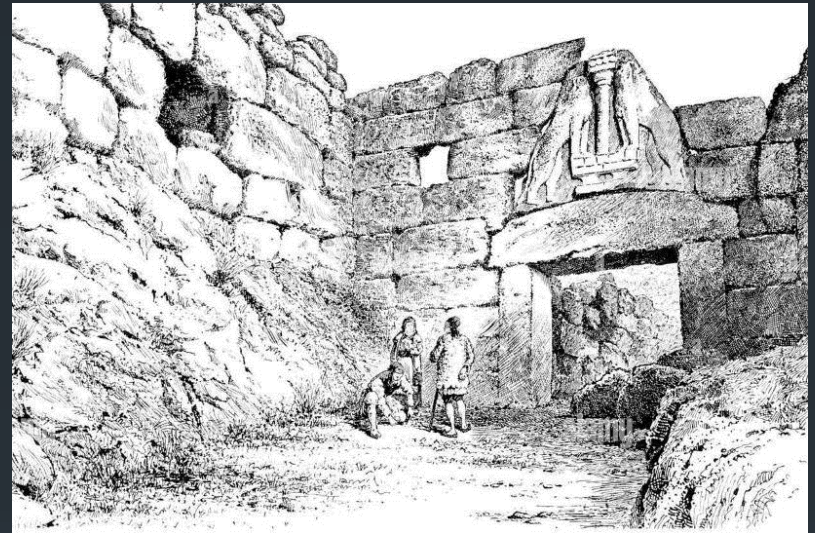
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Heroic Past

- Heroes:
 - Not gods, but divine parentage
 - Hesiod's Age of Heroes: historical period equated with LBA past
- Iron Age: persistence of memory of Bronze Age past:
 - Bronze Age remains still visible
 - Oral recitation



11th century lyre player,
Cyprus



Mycenae, Lion Gate in 19th century

Heroic Past

- Impact of Mycenaean past on development of LG & Archaic culture & religion:
 - Provided set of ideals
 - Reiterated gulf between “present” & heroic past
 - LG pictorial pottery apparently refers to stories which survive in Homeric epic
- Late 8th-7th century: Homeric epic is written down



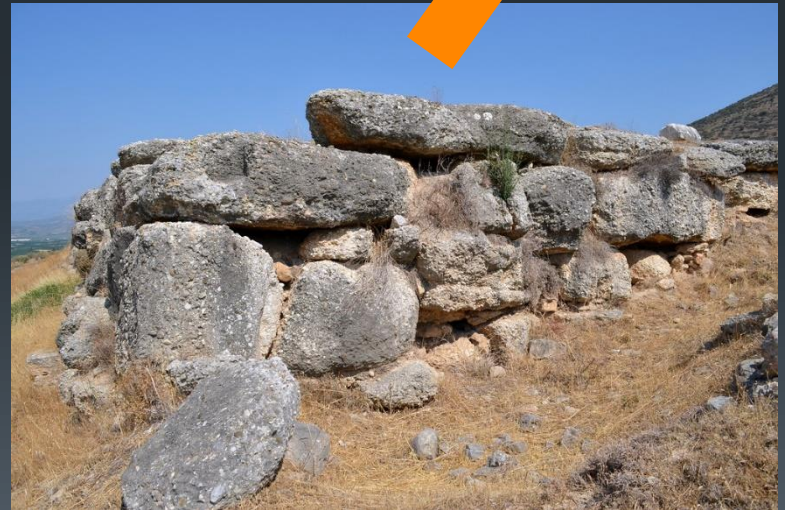
Attic krater from Thebes

Heroic Past

- Possible memory of Mycenaean forbears at certain points in the landscape
- Manipulation of heroic past: politico-religious contexts
 - Argos: polis temple
 - Location
 - Cyclopean wall



Argive Heraion



Cyclopean terrace

Nestor's Cup

- Pithekoussai: late 8th century
- Rhodian cup with Euboean inscription:
 - I am the cup of Nestor , a joy to drink from, but anyone who drinks from this cup will soon be struck with desire for fair-crowned Aphrodite
 - Clear reference to Homeric epic
 - References the symposium:
 - Occasion for exchange of gifts between Greeks, Phoenicians, locals, Etruscans...



Nestor's cup

Hero Cults

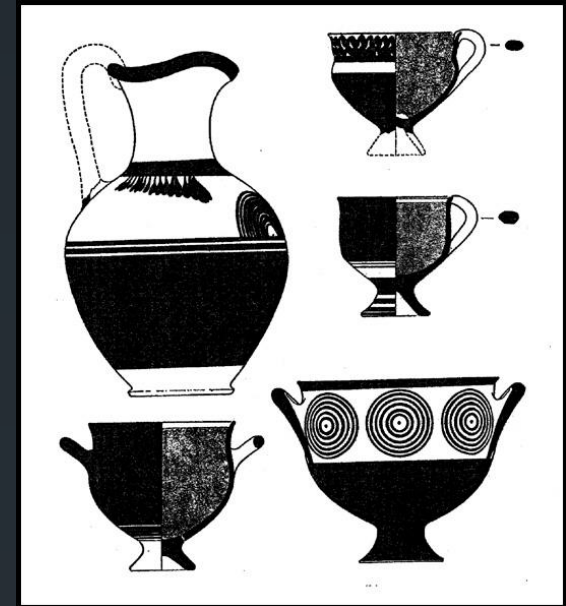
- 8th century: associated with increased interest in Homeric past
- Three main types:
 - Cults at Bronze Age tombs (un-named heroes) – blurred with ancestor cult at contemporary tombs?
 - Cults to named heroes (with epic associations)
 - Oikists: cults of colonial founders
- Literature focuses on politics & identity:
 - What about performativity & lived experiences



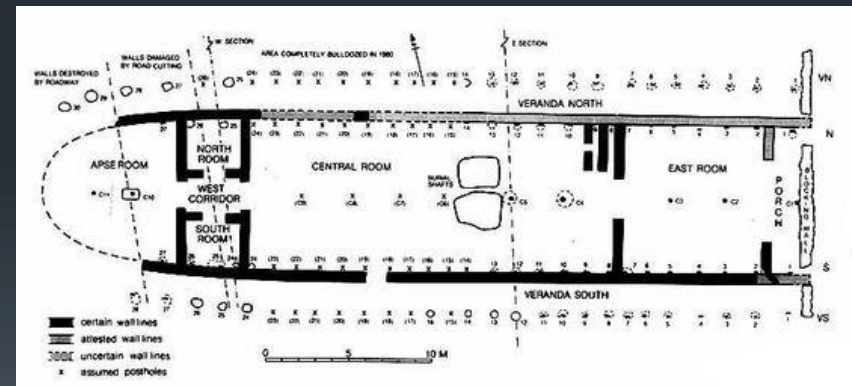
Heroön at Paestum

Heroön of Lefkandi

- 10th century BC: chieftain's house:
 - Wooden apsidal building: 45 x 10m
 - Facing East
 - Organisation of construction: labour, materials & skills orchestrated by important individual
- Housed considerable wealth
- Location of feasting (& epic recitation?)
- Home of inspirational individual: "Big Man of Lefkandi"



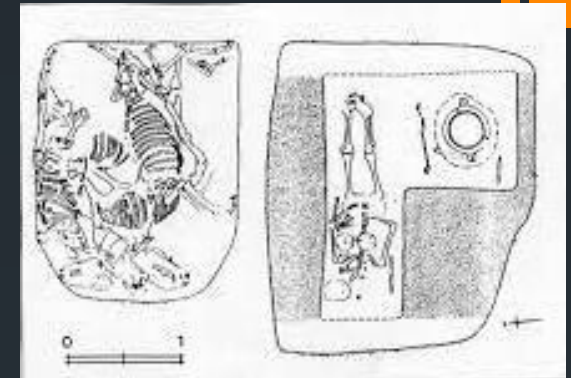
Pottery from heroön



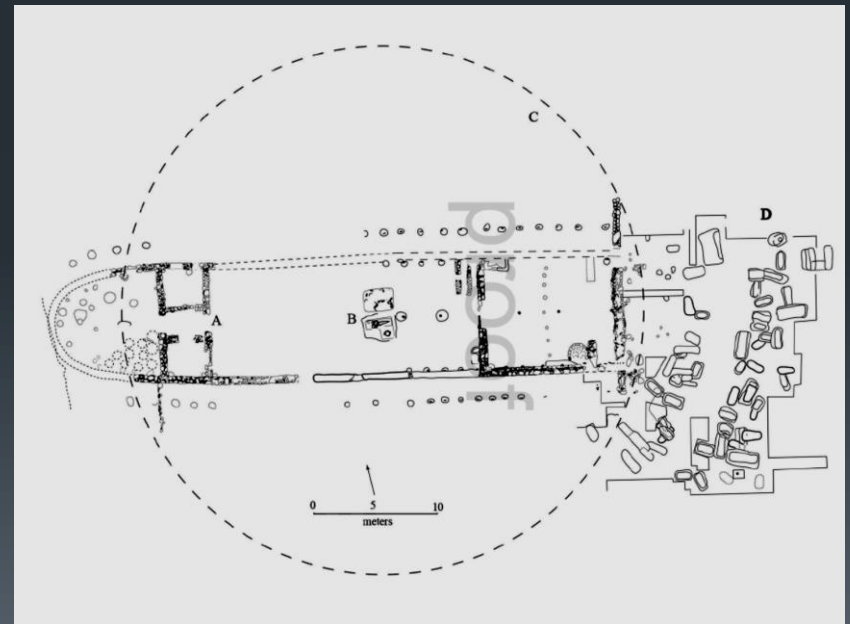
Plan of heroön

Heroön of Lefkandi

- Short period of use before abandoned & destroyed c.950 BC
- Double burial:
 - Male cremation in bronze urn
 - Female inhumation (facing East)
 - & horse burials
- Covered with tumulus
 - Iron Age cemetery builds up at edge of burial mound
 - Revered by (later) inhabitants?



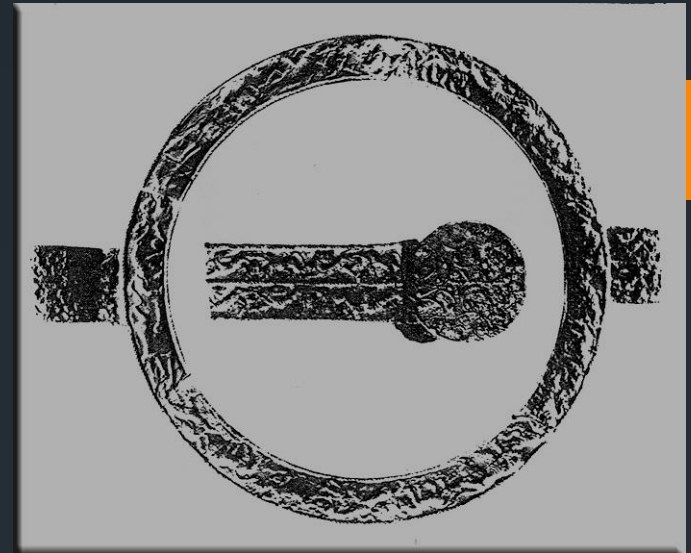
Burials



Later burials adjacent to Toumba

Burials

- Bronze funerary urn:
 - Cypriot 12th century heirloom
 - Warrior equipment: killed sword & linen shroud/cloak
- Female burial (sacrifice?):
 - Gold pectoral & breast plates
 - Gold & faience necklace
 - Iron knife with ivory handle
 - Numerous bronze & iron gilt pins



Bronze krater fragments



Female burial



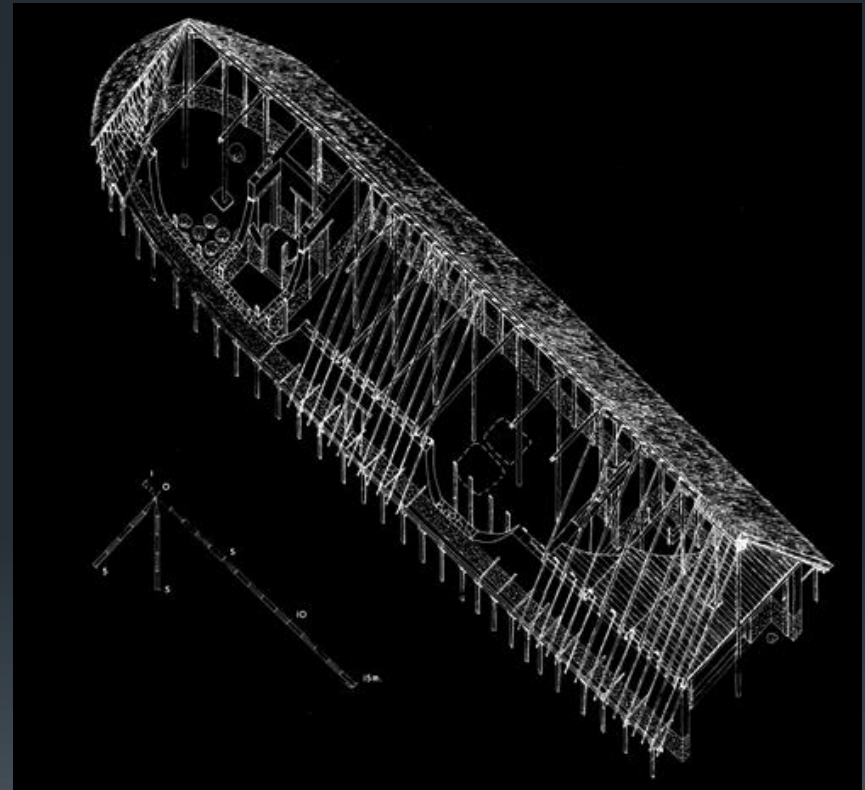
Mesopotamian
pendant



Gold pectoral

Interpreting the Heroön?

- “this burial complex is not a grander version of typical funerals; it completely overturns every norm” (Morris 1996: 3)
- Possible early example of a hero cult?
 - Shrine to a charismatic individual?
 - Antonaccio: an Iron Age basileus or “living ancestor”



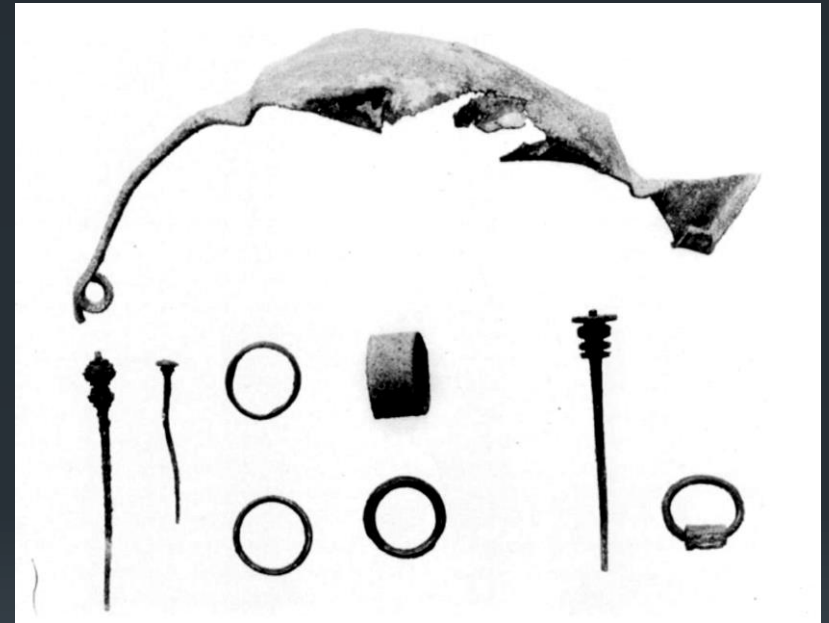
Reconstruction of heroön

Living Ancestors

- “The qualities of seniority or of being “first”... Relate aristocrats as a group to **ancestral founders & creators of social order & customs**, & this association with **cosmological origins legitimizes** their primacy & their aristocratic positions.... Aristocrats must [also] be understood as qualitatively ancestral themselves...to be literally imbued with ancestral qualities & to be distinguished as a social collectivity by *living* ancestorship that places them in a qualitatively different state or condition of being relative to commoners”
- Helms 1998: 6)

Tomb Cult

- Restricted to Attica, Argolid & Messenia
- Offerings made at Mycenaean tombs from late 8th century
 - Anonymous & modest
 - (Grave Circle A, Mycenae): Pot sherd “to the hero”
 - Small items of personal adornment
- Appears to be one-off practice
 - No architectural installations
 - Taps into heroic Bronze Age Past
 - Inspiration from Homeric epic?



Offerings from Prosymna
Tombs VIII and IX

Tomb Cult: Attica

- Menidhi tholos: Protoattic pottery
- Thorikos tholos:
- Aliko Glyphadha tomb delta: Mycenaean chamber tomb
- Eleusis: LH III cist tombs enclosed by wall in 8th century; LG sherds
- Whitley: associated with politics associated with rise of the polis
 - Establishing/reiterating the position of elite individuals & families



Menidhi tholos

Tomb Cult: Argolid

- Argos: three tombs with 8th-7th century finds
- Mycenae (LG & Archaic pottery):
 - Dromos/chamber of 4 tholoi
 - Grave Circles A & B (including sherd “to the hero”)
 - Chamber tombs
- Prosymna cemetery:
 - LG-Archaic bronzes similar to votives from Argive Heraion
- Reflects competition between emerging poleis in Argolid:
 - In particular establishment of Argive Heraion



Tomb of Clytemnestra



Argive Heraion

Eponymous Heroes

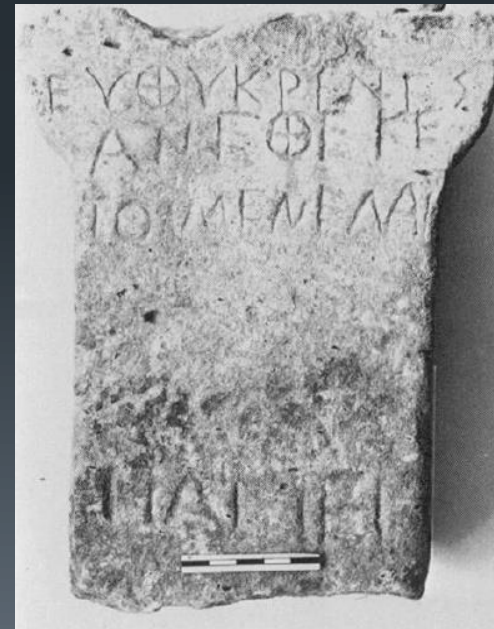
- Hesiod's five ages:
 - Gold, Silver, Bronze, **Heroes**, Iron
- Heroic age:
 - Mortals, but superhuman (frequently divine ancestry)
 - No genealogical relation with Iron Age Greek
 - Conceived of as historic (protagonists in Homeric epic_
- Making sense of the “serious crisis & disruption”(Antonaccio 1995: 113) separating Hesiod & the 8th century from their Bronze Age forebears.
- From the Archaic period a hero is a divine figure & recip[iet of cult

Menelaion

- Close to LBA settlement at Therapne
- 7th century: monumental pedimental structure erected over mound:
 - Fragments of terracotta akroterion
- Burial place of Helen & Menelaos
 - Divine cult of Helen which became associated also with a well-known, local epic character



Menelaion, at Therapne



Stela dedicated to Menelaos

Menelaion

- Focus of repeated offerings from 7th century down to Hellenistic period:
- Three named objects:
 - Bronze aryballos & harpax dedicated to Helen
 - 5th century stela dedicated to Menelaos: “Euthrikrenes dedicated this to Menelaos”
- Great pit 15m diameter, 2m deep:
 - Bronze vessels, pottery & iron spits (communal feasting)
 - Bronze & terracotta figurines



Bronzes dedicated to Helen

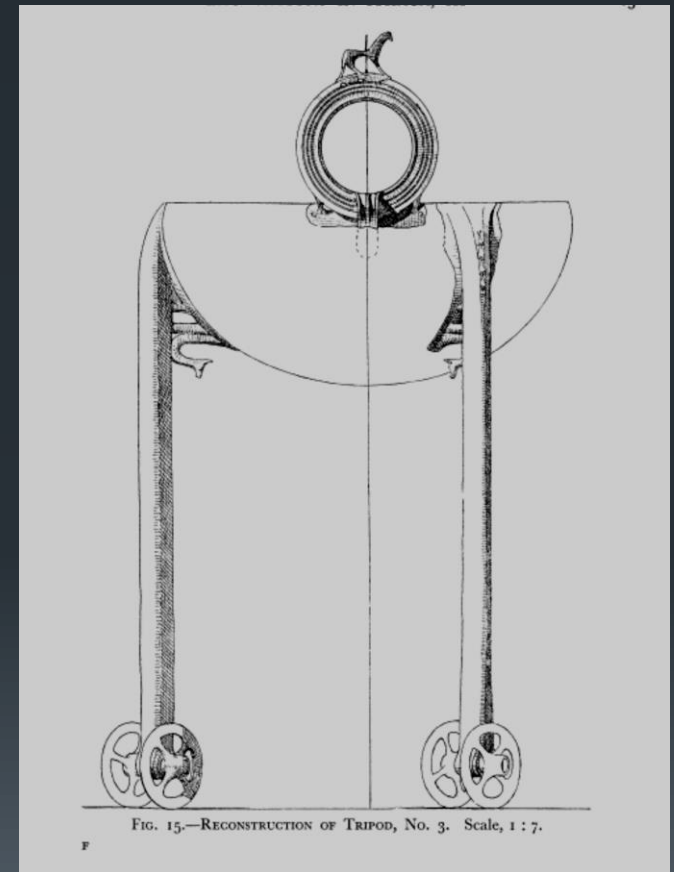


Votives

Ithaca: Cult of Odysseus

- Cave at Polis Bay with evidence for cult offerings:
 - 13 bronze tripods (recalling 13 tripods presented to Odysseus by 13 kings)
 - Female mask with dedication inscribed to Odysseus
 - Other dedications to Hera, Athena & nymphs
- Antonaccio: Odysseus was a later addition to the cult

Inscribed mask



Reconstruction of tripod

LG Athens: Plato's Academy

- 7-roomed structure
- Every room contained cult material:
 - Sacrificial ash deposits, animal bones, & pottery
 - Circular ash hearth in one room
- Earlier religious activity (EG-MG):
 - Cache of some 200 kantharoi
 - Earlier open air sanctuary?
- Identified as a shrine to Akademos, founder-hero of Athens



Plato's Academy

Oikist Cult

- Colonies: primary concern is identity
 - Cannot manipulate past in same way as in Greece
 - Instead is about dialogue between Greeks & natives
- Three strategies:
 - Claim a past: prior presence through nostoi of epic heroes
 - Create a founder's cult: a local Greek history
 - Tomb cult (re-use of tombs)



Magna Graecia

The *Nostoi* and Tomb Cults

- Nostoi: epic heroes who travelled abroad:
 - Uses Bronze Age past/epic heroes to anchor new foundations
 - Lack of Bronze Age monuments (places in the landscape)
 - Instead the wandering heroes provide a local presence
- Or appropriate & manipulate visible Bronze Age past:
 - Claiming local burial monuments
 - Offerings at tombs
 - Pattern identified in area around Syracuse



Magna Graecia

Oikist Cult

- Celebration of founder of colony:
 - Local unique past
 - Focus on ancestors rather than epic heroic past (shared by all Greeks)
- Oikists:
 - “the ultimate local reference” (Antonaccio 1999: 121)
 - Communal ancestor intrinsically associated with identity of colonists
 - Local manipulation of past



Bronze vase, heroön at Paestum

Paestum

- Colony established in 7th century
- c. 560: Hero cult
 - Dummy tomb with “warrior” accoutrements, including bronze vases & obeloi
- “becoming a colony [had] more to do with the **invention of a past** than with a historical moment of invention” (Osbourne 2002: 264-5)



Heroön



Summary

- Hero cults are as much a political as a religious phenomenon
- Growing sense of the importance of the Bronze Age past:
 - Hesiod – rewriting of the *Ages of Man* to incorporate heroes
- Intrinsically associated with the social & political changes of the late 8th-7th century
 - Identity creation: growing sense of what it is to be Greek
 - Sense of community very much focused in place (look at Ingold 1993)
 - Appropriation & manipulation of the past
- How do these relate to the contemporary development & experience of the Greek temple?
- How were they experienced: what about performativity?