Die primär am epigraphischem Material orientierte Untersuchung verzichtet auf alle weiterführenden Fragen, die sich von den Dedicationsinschriften nicht oder nicht hinreichend beantworten lassen. Dieser Verzicht betrifft nicht nur die anthropologischen und gesellschaftlichen Voraussetzungen des in der Antike weitverbreiteten Phänomens der Ehrungen, er betrifft auch die erklärungsbedürftigen Unterschiede des hellenistischen Konzepts des Wohltäters und des römischen der patronalen Beziehungen. Aber wenn die Beschränkung auf die epigraphische Gattung der Dedicationsinschriften zugleich die Grenze der historischen Aussagekraft der Arbeit bezeichnet, so kommt dem Verf. doch das Verdienst zu, das seiner Untersuchung zugrunde gelegte Quellenmaterial vorgestellt, erschlossen und auf seine (begrenzten) Aussagemöglichkeiten hin sorgfältig überprüft zu haben.

Frankfurt am Main

Klaus Bringmann


David Boehringer’s study, Heroenkulte in Griechenland von der geometrischen bis zur klassischen Zeit: Attika, Argolis, Messenien, is a reworked version of his comprehensive dissertation presented to the University of Freiburg in 1998. Contrary to what some may suspect, considering the amount of recent scholarship dealing with heroes, this study offers both new approaches and new insights.

Of prime concern here is not so much the religious aspects of the hero-cults as their meaning and function in a social perspective and how they were affected by the changes that the political system underwent during the same periods. B. focuses on the hero-cults’ duration in time, believing that these cults can be understood only if a diachronic perspective is adopted. He proposes that they should be taken as an indication of the formation of groups within society in connection with the rise of the polis. The function of the hero-cults was to shape an identity for the groups performing them, as well as to help to integrate these groups in a larger social context. By studying the archaeological material, it will be possible to define the nature of these cult-groups and to identify the worshippers, while the duration of the cults can be used to clarify why they arose and, most importantly, why they ceased or were abolished.

The book begins with an introduction (p. 11–46) outlining the aim, previous research, method and definitions used. Then follow three large chapters of roughly a hundred pages each, in which the evidence from the three regions chosen for study is presented and discussed: Attica, the Argolid and Messenia. A brief conclusion (p. 372–375) sums up the main arguments of the analysis. There is a bibliography listing the works most frequently cited (p. 377–395) and an index of general character (p. 391–398). There are three maps, one for each of the regions investigated, and 16 tables presenting various kinds of finds.

In Ch. 1, the introduction, B. gives an overview of the modern research on hero-cults (p. 13–15), concluding that none of the previous interpretations is
satisfactory, since they have not treated the archaeological material comprehensively enough and have mainly focused on the earliest evidence for hero-cults, which dates from the 8th century BC.

There is a lengthy and welcome discussion of the concept of 'heros', hero-cults and the relation between such cults and the cults of the gods, the ancestors and the dead (p. 25–46). B. adopts a wide definition of 'hero', which includes the recipients of cults at Mycenaean graves (contrary to Carla Antonaccio’s standpoint), as well as the later war dead. He further emphasizes that all hero-cults did not have to be focused on a grave.

He believes that the ritual practices cannot be used for distinguishing hero-cults from the cult of the dead, ancestor cults and the cult of the gods. Moreover, the concept of ancestor cult is found to be inapplicable to the Greek conditions. The fact that B. attempts to define 'ancestors' and their relevance for the Greek circumstances is commendable, since 'ancestors' are commonly used in discussions of hero-cults and the cult of the dead without any consideration of their meaning and validity.

The study deals with both the archaeological and the written evidence for hero-cults, but the main emphasis lies on the archaeological remains and, in particular, the post-Bronze Age remains found in or at Mycenaean graves. Reconciling the archaeological and the written sources is always a problem in a study of this kind. B. begins with a thorough description and analysis of the archaeological material and then gradually proceeds to historical interpretations, always anchored in the archaeology. If there is not a match between the two kinds of evidence he warns against using the written sources to explain the archaeological remains of the cults.

The basic structure of the three regional chapters is the same: a presentation of the archaeological evidence, an analysis of the finds and an interpretation from which historical conclusions may be drawn. For the actual presentation of the archaeological evidence, B. has done a remarkable job, in many respects supersed- ing Carla Antonaccio’s discussion of the same material in 1995, by being more careful and lucid and also by being fortunate in having access to unpublished data. The material is outlined in detail and the circumstances of excavation are discussed, as well as the opinions of the excavators, supplemented by B.’s own interpretations in those cases in which they differ. The crux of the matter is, in many cases, to decide whether the post-Bronze Age remains are to be considered as sacred or profane. B. is fully aware that a detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence is rendered difficult by the nature of the publications (or lack of publications) and he clearly states when the evidence does not allow us to proceed further.

One constant problem with the discussion of the archaeological evidence is the absence of illustrations or plans. The book contains three not very attractive maps showing the main sites for each region, but illustrations or plans of specific hero-cults would certainly have made it easier for the reader to follow the discussion (see, for example, the discussions of Chamber Tomb 19 at Prosymna, p. 145–148, and the Sanctuary Ω-Ω at Messene, p. 272–277, for which B. even refers to the numbers from the excavator’s plan in his own text).

Chapter 2 (p. 47–131) covers Attica and the evidence comprises the later activity at the Mycenaean graves at Menidi and Thorikos, as well as other possible hero-cults in the Attic countryside, cult-places for heroes in Athens itself and a section on the so-called ‘sacred houses’. The rich epigraphical evidence for hero-
cults in the same region is summarized, perhaps a bit too briefly to fully account for its complexity.

A good illustration of B.’s aim to link the hero-cults to the social structure is the discussion of the cults at Thorikos and Menidi. The analysis of the finds at these two cult-places suggests that there were substantial differences, which are taken as indications of the cults catering for different categories of worshippers.

The specific trait of the deposit in Chamber Tomb 1 at Thorikos is the large number of oil vessels, taken as an indication of particular rituals, namely libations of oil. The other votive gifts (terracotta figurines, spindle whorls and miniature pottery) are very close to the material found at Brauron and may therefore indicate a female recipient, besides the main, male hero. Judging from the finds and the location of the cult-place high on the Ve-laturi, B. makes the tempting suggestion that the heroes worshipped there are to be identified with the Heros Hyperpedios and his Heroines, mentioned in the sacrificial calendar from the deme of Thorikos. Furthermore, according to this calendar, the Heroines were to receive an offering-table, which could be recognized in the table-like structure found at Chamber Tomb 1. Against the background of the development of the structure of Athenian society in the Archaic and Classical periods and the inconspicuous character of the pottery and other finds, B. concludes that the worshippers at Thorikos are likely to have consisted of farmers from the settlement nearby, expressing their common concern for the agriculture by the cult activity. He further connects the sacrifices to Hyperpedios and his Heroines with the Thargelia, a first-fruit festival of apotropaic and purificatory character of interest to the rural population, in which libations of oil would have served an important function.

In his analysis of the offerings at Menidi, B. concludes that the worshippers must have belonged to the richest segment of the Athenian population. The earliest pottery at Menidi has its best parallels in the offering trenches of the 7th century BC and the repertoire resembles those of other cult-places in Attica (for example, on the Athenian Agora). Such circumstances point to an aristocratic setting and B. suggests that the worshippers are likely to have been what he labels a ‘Hetairos-Gruppe’, an association of aristocrats striving for common political goals and manifesting themselves by worshipping at the Menidi tholos and perhaps viewing the hero as a common ancestor.

In the Classical period, a number of Athenian hero-cults came to an end. It is suggested that the aristocratic cult at Menidi succumbed as a result of the political transformation that the Athenian polis underwent in the early 5th century BC, changing the position and influence of the noble families. Neither the cult-group nor the cult could be integrated in the new political and religious landscape of the demes. The cult at Chamber Tomb 1 at Thorikos, on the other hand, continued to thrive, since the cult was performed by the village community and therefore could be fitted into the political context of the deme, a development which also led to the incorporation of the cult of Hyperpedios in the sacrificial calendar of the same deme. The close connection between the hero-cult at Chamber Tomb 1 and the community of Thorikos is further illustrated by the fact that, when the settlement was abandoned at the end of the 5th century, so was the cult.

The third chapter discusses the Argolid (p. 132–241), the region with the largest number of hero-cults at Mycenaean tombs in the pre-Classical period but with very few written sources to complement the archaeological evidence. The later remains found in the Mycenaean graves at Argos, Prosymna, Mycenae, Tiryns and Berbati are covered, as well as two heroa in Argos and the Agamemnoneion at Mycenae. Only a few Bronze Age tombs are adjudged to demonstrate
signs of a proper cult, the rest of the later material being considered to be the result of erosion or dumping. On the question of the identity of the deity worshipped at the Agamemnoneion, B. favours Agamemnon but does not exclude a joint worship with Hera, considering the number of female terracotta figurines (p. 201–202).

Since there are so few written sources to elucidate the Argive hero-cults, unlike the situation in Attica, B. chooses to evaluate the hero-cults within the wider archaeological context of the late 8th and 7th centuries in the Argolid, especially the sanctuaries and the funerary evidence. This leads him to discuss and to take a stand, without flinching, on a number of key issues of the Geometric and Archaic Argolid, for example, the date of king Pheidon of Argos and the problems concerning the temple terrace and the first temple at the Argive Heraion. B. opts for Argos as the founder of this sanctuary, since this was the richest and most important settlement of the period, but other communities (Mycenae, for example) could very well have been involved. The variations in burial modes from the Protogeometric to the Archaic periods are surveyed and it is suggested that they correspond to different social segments of the population – village communities, as well as an aristocracy – while the changes in the burial practices in the 7th century are interpreted as thehumbling of the aristocrats by the polis.

In the Argolid, B. argues, aristocratic groups were involved in hero-cults only at an early period. The worshippers at the hero-cults at Prosymna, next to the Argive Heraion, are interpreted as consisting of such rich, aristocratic cult-groups, judging from the material found in these tombs. In these groups, both the hero-cults and the nearby sanctuary were employed as means of self-display. When the Argive Heraion gradually came to be used by the polis for its cults and less as an arena for status competition by the aristocrats, this was a change which can be linked to the abandonment of the cults in the Mycenaean graves at Prosymna. These cults were not taken over by the polis.

In the 7th century and later, the Argive hero-cults were mainly a concern for the communities as a whole, as is seen in the smaller settlements, such as Mycenae and Tiryns, which may very well have been independent poleis. The cult at the Tiryns tholos, due to the character of the finds and the period when the cult was flourishing (early 6th to the mid-5th century), is likely to have been performed by a group integrated in the state or even by the state itself. (For the discussion of this particular site, B. has had access to Ulrike Polczyk’s unpublished thesis on the L.G and Archaic pottery, a study that will eventually appear as a volume in the ‘Tiryns’ series.) The abandonment of the Tiryns cult is also said to support this identification of the worshippers: either the cult ceased when Tiryns was destroyed by Argos in the 5th century (just as the destruction of Mycenae ended the cult at the Agamemnoneion) or there was a late Archaic synoikismos, which led to the cult being abandoned. B. concludes that the hero-cults in the Argolid can be seen as a sign of an earlier establishment of the polis in this region than in Attica.

The evidence for hero-cults in Messenia (Ch. 4, p. 242–371) is very complex, but this chapter makes up the most interesting reading in the book, in particular, since B. has been able to incorporate Günther Nobis’ unpublished analyses of the animal bones recovered in many of the Messenian tombs. The chapter on Messenia covers a longer time span than those on Attica and the Argolid, since B. wanted to include the changes that the hero-cults underwent after the liberation of Messenia in 369 BC. The bulk of the hero-cults are those situated at Mycenaean graves, a few of which were embellished with architecture, but in the settlement of Messene itself there were a number of hero-shrines. It would have clarified the argumentation, however, if all the cults at Mycenaean graves had
been discussed as an entity, followed by the account of the hero-cults at Messene. As it is now, the importance and uniqueness of Sanctuary Ω-Ω at Messene, which showed continuous activity from the 7th to the 1st century BC, tend to get lost in the survey of the more uniform cults at the Mycenaean tombs.

The most remarkable trait of the Messenian hero-cults is the abundance of animal bones and the great variety of species (Tables 13-14, p. 301-302: cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse, dog, cat, hen, aurochs, deer (including antlers), wild boar, fox, badger, mouse, crayfish and tortoise), a feature which B. relates to regional, Messenian, ritual practices. To interpret the rituals connected with the animal bones, B. compares the remains with sacrifices described in the literary sources, mainly a category which he labels «Ausnahmeeopfer», explained as an umbrella term covering oath-takings, expiations, purifications and sacrifices to the ‘chthonian’ divinities, heroes and the dead, at which no dining took place. One would have wished for a more comprehensive comparison between the literary and the archaeological evidence, for example, whether the half deer in Koukounara 6 (p. 265-266 and 310-311), interpreted as a purification sacrifice, really corresponds to the literary accounts of such rituals.

It is understandable if there was no room to pursue such complex matters further, but, as it is now, we are left, more or less, with a listing of the animal bones against a scattered background of literary sources (Pausanias, Homer, Euripides and Plutarch, for example) and occasional inscriptions, with little attempt to evaluate the validity of these sources or to analyse them in depth, which B., at the beginning of the book, claims to be a necessity. What we may be encountering in these Messenian cults is an entirely new world of ritual practices and remains, and it is far from certain that these will ever match our previous evidence, written or archaeological.

Messenian hero-cults have by many scholars been considered as ‘the odd man out’, not fitting into the pattern of the rest of Greece. B. opposes this view and argues that his hypothesis of the hero-cults as reflections of the self-awareness of various groups in society is valid also for Messenia, though the political history of this region is fundamentally different from that of Attica and the Argolid. To explain the topographical and chronological spread of the Messenian hero-cults and how they were used for the creation of a Messenian identity, B. provides a discussion of the date of the Messenian wars, the Spartan conquest of Messenia and the division of the land among the helots and the perioikoi. Furthermore, the literary evidence for the Messenian heroes, their genealogies, ages and Spartan or Messenian affiliations is explored in detail, concluding that, though most of the mythological traditions may have been conceived after the liberation in 369 BC, some heroes are evidenced in the 5th century and can be taken as an indication of the notion of Messenia prevalent at that time.

The earliest hero-cults at the Mycenaean graves date to the Late Geometric period and are to be connected with rich, local elites, who even at this early period had contacts outside their own society. The finds indicate a ritual mainly centred on libations and that the cults were carried on only for a short period of time. B. sees the disappearance of these cults as connected with the second Messenian war, after which some of the aristocratic groups may have emigrated.

In the Archaic period, there is a hiatus in the ritual activity, but the first traces of hero-cults in the 5th century could be seen as a manifestation of a reawakened, Messenian self-awareness and as attempts to resist the Spartans. The hero-cults of the 5th and 4th centuries are characterized by finds of different kinds than those of the 8th century: plainer
pottery, household ware, mass-produced votives and abundant animal bones. There seems also to have been a change in ritual practices, which now also included food preparation. The cults of the Classical period were of longer duration and are best seen as practised by the rural population, i.e. different cult-groups than previously. After 369, there was a remarkable increase in cults at Mycenaean graves, particularly in the Pylos region, a change that B. interprets as a desire by the Messenians to connect with the mythical past, to reawaken old traditions and to create new ones.

There is a clear distinction between the rural cults at the Mycenaean graves, particularly in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, and the city cults at Messene. At this settlement, there were sanctuaries with proper architecture, different kinds of votives and, most of all, an uninterrupted cultic activity from the Geometric to the Roman period. B. suggests that these cults must have constituted an important source of the Messenian identity, which could not be eradicated by the Spartan conquerors. In all, the cultic influences from Sparta are considered to have been weaker than has generally been assumed.

At the end, B. concludes that the occurrence of hero-cults cannot be explained as engendered by the rise of the polis alone. Polis development can be found all over Greece, while hero-cults at Mycenaean graves are a regional phenomenon. The geographical division, as well as the local traits which can be distinguished among the hero-cults within each region, may be explained in terms of peer-polity interaction. Furthermore, if the rise of the polis is seen as the formation of two segments of society with very different goals – rural and local communities and aristocratic groups – and the relationship between these two, this is a historical development that will provide an explanation of why the hero-cults arose and later disappeared, as they did.

B.’s study can be read and used on different levels. The archaeological sections offer excellent accounts of the various hero-cult contexts and it is to be hoped that the information on the animal bones from Messenia will lead to new insights on Greek animal sacrifices. His approach is characterized by his calling into question many generalisations and preconceived notions commonly accepted among scholars. What is particularly appealing is that this is an archaeological investigation which actually dares to rely on the archaeological evidence to draw conclusions (though with full awareness of its weaknesses), even when this evidence is not supported by the written sources or even contradicts them. B. has definitely contributed to the study of Greek hero-cults by anchoring them in a social and historical context and by aiming at identifying who the worshippers were and why they performed and eventually ceased to perform hero-cults.

At the beginning of B.’s study (p. 25), some of the obstacles to studying hero-cults are described as «einen Pudding an eine Wand zu nageln – es funktioniert nicht». B. has not only clearly recognized these difficulties but has also managed to overcome them – the pudding is firmly fixed to the wall. 

Stockholm


Elfenbein war in der Antike eines der kostbarsten Materialien, das für die Herstellung von Statuen verwendet wurde. Seine weiße, glänzende Farbe paßte sehr