

In Search of the Dioskouroi. Image, Myth and Cult
A 'periegesis'



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Cover: Athenian black-figure *amphora* signed by Exekias as both potter and painter from Vulci c. 540 BC, Ht 61cm. Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 16757. Photo: Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano.

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For Charles

‘... καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων τοσαῦτα ἡμῖν εἰποῦσι καὶ
παρὰ τῶν θεῶν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἡρώων εὐμένεια εἶη.’

Herodotus, *The Histories* 2.45.3

Contents

List of Figures and Maps	iii
Foreword.....	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Chapter 1. Starting out: the research and its aims	1
Introducing Kastor and Polydeukes, the Greek Dioskouroi	1
Designing the study.....	6
Methodology.....	11
The context of past scholarship	13
Chapter 2. First steps on the journey: searching for the Dioskouroi in Greece from the time of Homer.....	15
Who were the Dioskouroi?	15
Sources for myths of the Dioskouroi: literature, vases, and temple decoration	36
Images of the Dioskouroi from Greece	41
Buildings and sacred space	48
Summing up	52
Chapter 3. The Dioskouroi at home: in the Peloponnese	55
An introductory tour	55
SPARTA.....	63
The literary evidence for cult	63
Pausanias at Sparta.....	66
The archaeological evidence for sacred space at Sparta	73
Votive reliefs and inscriptions.....	82
Characteristics of the Dioskouroi at Sparta	105
MESSENE.....	109
The archaeological and literary context	109
Sources for history and cult at Messene before Epaminondas: interpreting Pausanias	112
A Messenian mythography of the Dioskouroi.....	114
The archaeological evidence for cult of the Dioskouroi.....	118
Sanctuary Ω-Ω and the Dioskouroi	125
ARGOS	133
The literary record	133
The equestrian images of the Dioskouroi at Argos	138
The archaeological evidence.....	143
Cult of the <i>Fanakes</i> and the Dioskouroi at Argos	147
The cavalier relief	150
Cult of the Dioskouroi at Argos and in the Argolid	155

Chapter 4. The Dioskouroi abroad: some early appearances in the eastern Mediterranean.....	157
An introduction.....	157
THERA	157
KYRENE.....	167
The literary evidence for cult of the Dioskouroi	167
The archaeological evidence for a sanctuary of the Dioskouroi at Kyrene	168
A <i>Dioskourion</i> at Kyrene?	173
The Dioskouroi, <i>Dioskoureia</i> and dining	174
Kyrene, Sparta and Thera	175
The provenance of cults of the Dioskouroi at Kyrene.....	177
NAUKRATIS	179
Cult of the Dioskouroi at Naukratis: gathering the evidence	181
The pottery finds	183
A temple of the Dioskouroi?.....	184
Interpreting the finds	187
Summing up	187
THASOS.....	191
DELOS.....	199
Overview.....	199
The evidence for cult	199
The evidence for a <i>Dioskourion</i>	200
Additional material evidence for cult of the Dioskouroi on Delos.....	213
Cult of the Dioskouroi on Delos	216
The evidence from Delos in the wider context	219
Chapter 5. Journey's end.....	223
Drawing together the threads	223
Summing up: reflections on the journey	230
Bibliography	233
Reference works and abbreviations.....	233
Journals and abbreviations	234
Websites and abbreviations	235
Museum references	235
Ancient Sources: a note on the use of abbreviations, translations, editions and commentaries.....	235
LIMC citations	236
General bibliography: Abbreviations.....	236
General bibliography.....	248
Index	270

List of Figures and Maps

Map 1.	Sites discussed in the text, by evidence type.....	xii
Figure 1.	Temple of Castor and Pollux, Rome: columns from the first century AD, built on the fifth-century BC temple site, rise above the Sacred Way in the forum. Photo: author	xiv
Figure 2a–b.	a) Statues of the Dioskouroi, possibly copies of the Greek originals from the fourth century AD, outside the Quirinale, Rome; b) A Dioskouros from the Quirinale group. Photo: author	2
Figure 3a–b.	Statues of the Dioskouroi, depicted as cavaliers and wearing <i>piloi</i> , on the Capitoline Hill, Rome, originally erected outside the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Circus Flaminius, from the second century AD. Photo: author	3
Figure 4.	Relief on grey marble from Sparta, c. 575–550 BC. H. 0.71m. W. (max. without protruding snake reliefs) 0.36m. Th. 0.08–0.10m. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 5380. Photo: author	5
Figure 5.	Relief on blue local marble from Sparta, early sixth-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 575. H. 0.53m. W. 0.50m. See also Fig. 39. Photo: author	5
Figure 6a–b.	a) Athenian black-figure volute <i>krater</i> , naming Kastor and Polydeukes, from Fonte Rotella near Chiusi, c. 570 BC. H. 66cm. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4209. Photo: Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco; b) As per Fig. 6a. Detail showing Kalydonian boar hunt. H. 5.6cm. Photo: Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco.....	14
Figure 7.	Graffito from Thera, late eighth/early seventh-century BC. Photo: after IG XII 3, 359	15
Figure 8a–b.	Chian <i>kalyx</i> (26 fragments) from Kyrene, late seventh-century BC. Kyrene, inv. no. CA 06S3US3. H. max. 8cm. W. max. 7.8cm. Th. 0.3cm. The border with the inscription measures 0.9–2.6cm. Photo: after Luni/Marengo, “Dioskourion” figs 7–8.....	17
Figure 9a–b.	a) Inscribed body sherd of Chian chalice from Naukratis, c. 630–600 BC. London, British Museum 1886, 0401.936. H. 1.1 cm. W. 2.9cm. Th. 0.2cm. b) Inscribed Ionian cup fragment (possibly made in Miletos) from Naukratis, c. 570–530 BC. London, British Museum 1886, 0401.926. Diam. 15.0cm. H. 2.9cm. W. 5.9cm. Th. 0.3cm. Photos: British Museum Services	17
Figure 10.	Plinth and feet of limestone statuette from Knidos, early sixth-century BC. London, British Museum 1893, 1113.2 (formerly B 32). Diam. 8.3cm. H. 5.0cm. Photo: British Museum Services	17
Figure 11.	Bronze disk from Kephallenia dedicated to the Dioskouroi, late sixth-century BC. London, British Museum Bronzes 3207. Diam. 16.51cm. Th. 4.0mm. Photo: British Museum Services	17
Figure 12.	Marble <i>stèle</i> dedicated by Pleistiades from Sellasia near Sparta, c. 500 BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 447. H. 1.13m. W. 0.58m. Photo: author.....	18
Figure 13a–c.	Black-figure kylix attributed to the Naukratis Painter from Lavinium c. 560–550 BC. Pomezia, Museo Archeologico Lavinium E 1986. a) the bowl of the	

	vase, showing a <i>theoxenia</i> scene. Diam. 22cm; b) facsimile drawing of the same, after Lavinium II fig. 435; c) the restored vase. H. 11cm. Photos: Museo Civico Archeologico Lavinium, sul concessione del Ministero della Cultura25	
Figure 14.	Black-figure white ground <i>lekythos</i> from Kamiros, Rhodes, c. 500 BC. London, British Museum 1867, 0506.39 (formerly B633). Diam. 7.7cm. H. 21.8cm. W. 7.6cm. Photo: British Museum Services.....26	
Figure 15.	Terracotta plaque depicting the Dioskouroi and a <i>theoxenia</i> from Messania near ancient Taras, late fourth-century BC. H. 26cm. W. 23cm. Taranto, Museo Nazionale 4118. Photo: Taranto Museo Nazionale.....31	
Figure 16.	Athenian red-figure volute <i>krater</i> c. 425–375 BC, attributed to the Talos Painter. Ruvo, Museo Jatta 36933 (previously 1501). Photo: Museo Nazionale Jatta di Ruvo di Puglia, sul concessione del Ministero della Cultura34	
Figure 17.	Incised cartoon on bronze <i>cista</i> from Palestrina, c. 340–320 BC, showing the boxing match between Polydeukes and Amykos. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 24787. Photo: Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia34	
Figure 18.	Limestone metope relief depicting the cattle-rustling escapade of Kastor and Polydeukes with Idas and Lynkeus (missing), the Apharetidai, from the so-called Sikyonian treasury at Delphi, sixth-century BC. H. 0.58m. Delphi, Archaeological Museum 1322. Photo: École Français D'Athènes/Philippe Collet.....37	
Figure 19.	Limestone metope relief with the first known depiction of the Argo, one of the Tyndaridai mounted left from the so-called Sikyonian treasury at Delphi sixth-century BC. H. 0.58m. Delphi, Archaeological Museum 1324. Photo: École Français D'Athènes/Philippe Collet.....37	
Figure 20.	Athenian red-figure <i>kalyx</i> <i>krater</i> depicting the Dioskouroi abducting the Leukippides, from Spina, c. 475–425 BC. Ferrara, Museo Archeologico 44893. H. 54.5cm. Photo: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Ferrara, sul concessione del Ministero della Cultura.....38	
Figure 21.	Athenian red-figure <i>hydria</i> signed by the potter Meidias, depicting the rape of the Leukippides in the upper register, from Tarquinia, c. 410–400 BC London, British Museum 1772,0320.30+ (formerly E 224). H. 52cm. W. 47.3cm. Photo: British Museum Services38	
Figure 22.	Athenian black-figure <i>amphora</i> signed by Exekias as both potter and painter from Vulci c. 540 BC. H. 61cm (without lid). Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 16757. Photo: Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano.....40	
Figure 23.	Possible base of a lead figurine from Zagora, c. seventh-century BC. Andros, Archaeological Museum 1238. H. c. 1.5cm. × W. c. 1.5cm. Photo: after A. Cambitoglou <i>et al.</i> , <i>Zagora 2</i> (Athens 1988) pl. 281 (b).....42	
Figure 24.	<i>Kotyle</i> fragment from Perachora, c. 600 BC. Athens, Archaeological Museum. Photo: after Payne/Dunbabin <i>Perachora 2</i> no. 2469 pl. 16342	
Figure 25a–b.	a) Athenian black-figure <i>lebes</i> fragments from Smyrna, attributed to the Sophilos Painter, c. 600–550 BC. Izmir, Archaeological Museum 3332. Photo: after G. Bakir, <i>Sophilos: ein Beitrag zu seinem Stil</i> (Mainz 1981) taf. 40 b) Detail of 25a. Photo: after G. Bakir, <i>Sophilos: ein Beitrag zu seinem Stil</i> (Mainz 1981) taf. 45..42	
Figure 26.	Athenian red-figure bell <i>krater</i> attributed to the painter Polion depicting the birth of Helen from an egg, while her mother Leda and her mortal husband look on, as do her brothers the Dioskouroi from beside the statue of their	

	father Zeus, from Egnatia, 450–400 BC. H. 26cm. Akademisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn 78. Photo: Akademisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn.....	45
Figure 27.	Marble votive stele from Larisa, second-century BC. H. 64.5cm. W. 40.5cm. Thickness 14.4cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA746. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen (2011), CC-BY-2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15852900	47
Map 2.	Pre-Roman buildings and shrines associated with the Dioskouroi, by category of evidence. Map: author	49
Figure 28.	View of the River Eurotas in Lakonia from the Spartan Menelaion, winding north in the direction of Mt. Lykaion. Kastor and Polydeukes were said by Theognis and Aristophanes to have galloped on its banks. Photo: author.....	54
Figure 29.	Tile stamps from Geraki dated no later than the second century BC. Excavation inventory nos 4450/SF1 and 4500/SF1. Unbroken size of stamp: H. 4.5cm . W. 3.9cm. Photo: after J.H. Crouwel <i>et al.</i> , “Geraki. An acropolis site in Lakonia. Preliminary report on the eighth season” in <i>Pharos</i> 10 (2002) 70, fig. 23, nos 4 and 5	56
Figure 30.	Plans of the rectangular structure/putative sanctuary associated with the the Dioskouroi at Epidauros, c. mid-fourth century BC: actual and restored. G. Roux <i>L'architecture de L'Argolide</i> fig. 70. Photo: École Français d'Athènes	61
Figure 31.	The Menelaion looking towards the Taygetos range. Photo: author.....	62
Figure 32.	General Plan of Ancient Sparta, as Pausanias might have seen it. Photo: After Kourinou <i>Sparta</i> fig. 5; repr. Kaltsas <i>Athens-Sparta</i> fig. 1.....	67
Map 3.	Map of ancient Sparta and environs, showing the main find-places for archaeological evidence associated with the Dioskouroi mentioned in the text. Map: author.....	71
Figure 33.	Side view of bronze pyriform <i>aryballos</i> from the Menelaion, first half of the seventh-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 14742. H. 7.5 cm. Base diam. 1.1 cm. Rim diam. 3.5 cm. Photo: after N. Kaltsas, <i>Athens-Sparta</i> (Athens 2006) 177 no. 80	75
Figure 34.	Top view of bronze pyriform <i>aryballos</i> from the Menelaion, illustrated at Fig. 33. Photo: after N. Kaltsas, <i>Athens-Sparta</i> (Athens 2006) 177 no. 80.....	75
Figure 35.	Lead plaque from the sanctuary of Artemis <i>Orthia</i> , Sparta, c. 700 BC. H. 6–7cm [2–3 inches in the original record]. Photo: after Dawkins <i>Orthia</i> pl. CXCIV no. 41	76
Figure 36.	Reconstructed clay <i>akroterion</i> statue from the temple of Zeus at Lokri Marafioti, early fifth-century BC. Reggio di Calabria, Museo Nazionale di Magna Graecia 10475. H. 1.28m. L. 1.58m. W. 0.58m. [Base: L. 1.23m W. 0.495m]. Photo: after Palagia <i>Greek Sculpture</i> 85 fig. 39	80
Figure 37.	Reconstructed marble relief from Kalyvia Sokhas near Sparta, late fifth/early fourth-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 9711. H. at the preserved rhs edge 0.51m. W. 0.51m. Photo: author.	80
Figure 38.	Argive <i>krater</i> from Argos, seventh-century BC. Argos, Archaeological Museum 201. H. 47.3cm. Photo: École Français D'Athènes/Émile Sérakis	86
Figure 39.	Angled photograph of Fig. 5, showing the flat and shallow relief work, to a depth of 0.05 cm. Photo: author.....	86

Figure 40.	Part of a limestone votive relief from the sanctuary of Artemis <i>Orthia</i> at Sparta, early sixth-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 1991. H. 0.13 m. W. 0.25m. Photo: author	87
Figure 41.	Late fifth-/early fourth-century BC blue marble <i>stèle</i> from Sparta. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 613. H. 0.82m. W. 0.49m. Photo: author	90
Figure 42.	Detail of Fig. 12, showing inscription IG V 1, 919. Photo: author	91
Figure 43.	Local stone relief <i>stèle</i> from Sparta, second-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 319. H. 0.37m. W. 0.40m. Photo: author	94
Figure 44.	Bluish marble relief <i>stèle</i> from Riviotissa, Sparta, fifth-century BC. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 588. H. 0.44m. W. 0.34m. Photo: author	94
Figure 45.	Detail from Egyptian limestone false doors from the tomb of Tjetji, Giza, fourth dynasty. London, British Museum EA157. H. (of each false door) 2.52m. W. 2.085–2.185m. Photo: British Museum Services.....	98
Figure 46a–b.	a) Limestone sarcophagus with relief false doors on the short side, Peieia-Maa, Hellenistic period (second/first century BC), H. 97cm. Max. L. (base) 178cm. Max. L. (roof) 190cm. W. (base) 60m. W. (roof) 57 cm. W. (box) 48cm. Paphos Archaeological Museum. b) Detail showing doorway relief: W. (at lintel) 32cm. H. 37cm. Photos and measurements: author	98
Figure 47.	Marble relief <i>stèle</i> possibly from Pephnos, second-century BC. Verona, Museo Maffeiano 22620. H. 0.42m. W. 0.75m. D. 0.08–0.10m. Photo: after T. Ritti, <i>Iscrizioni e rilievi greci nel Museo Maffeiano di Verona</i> (Rome 1981) 58 cat. no. 23...100	100
Figure 48.	Inscribed marble relief <i>stèle</i> from Sparta, second-century AD. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 844. H. 0.74m. W. 0.46m. Photo: Sparta Archaeological Museum.....	100
Figure 49.	Gable topped limestone relief <i>stèle</i> from Aigeira, Achaia, c. 400–350 BC. H. 0.46m. W. 0.305m. Athens, National Museum. Photo: National Archaeological Museum, Athens.....	100
Figure 50.	Inscribed bluish marble relief <i>stèle</i> from southern Sparta, first-century BC. H. 0.70m. W. 0.48m. Sparta, Archaeological Museum SM 201. Photo: author	103
Figure 51.	View of ancient Messene from the temple of Eileithuia on mount Ithome. Photo: author	108
Figure 52.	Site plan of ancient Messene, showing the position of building Ω-Ω. Photo: after Luraghi <i>Ancient Messenians</i> 274 fig. 7	110
Figure 53.	Plan of building Ω-Ω, ancient Messene. The find places of two bronze shields, one dedicated to Polydeukes (Fig. 58), are marked in compartment 9. Photo: after Themelis “Dioscouri” 159 fig. 1.....	120
Figure 54.	Terracotta votive plaque from building Ω-Ω at Messene, late seventh-century BC. Messene, Archaeological Museum 2188. Photo: after Themelis <i>Messene</i> fig. 79	123
Figure 55.	Terracotta votive triad statuette from building Ω-Ω at Messene, late seventh-century BC. Messene, Archaeological Museum. Photo: after Themelis <i>Messene</i> fig. 78	124
Figure 56a–c.	Parts of a relief from the Roman theatre at Messene, fifth-century BC. Messene, Archaeological Museum: a) 12272 and 15271; b) 12272; c) 15271. Fragment 56a H. 0.28m. W. 0.295m. D. 0. 0.11m. Photos: author	126
Figure 57.	Marble votive relief from ancient Messene, unrecorded location, third-century BC. Messene, Archaeological Museum 267. Photo: author	126

Figure 58.	Bronze shield, with inscription <i>IG V 1, 1426</i> , dedicated to Polydeukes from building Ω-Ω at Messene, late fourth/early third-century BC. Messene, Archaeological Museum (in repair). Photo: after Themelis “Dioscouri” 161 fig. 2.....	128
Figure 59.	View of Argos from the sanctuary of Apollo <i>Pythaius</i> , the Larissa hill rising on the right. Photo: author	132
Figure 60.	Reverse of Argive <i>dupondius</i> minted under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus c. 161–169 AD. Photo: after Flament <i>Monnayage argien</i> 86 fig. 53	135
Figure 61.	The Argolid plain with main ancient and modern sites, showing the original shoreline c. 2500 BC. Photo: École Français D’Athènes	137
Figure 62.	Copper coin minted under Septimius Severus c. 193–211 AD. The Danish royal collection of coins and medals <i>SNG (Copenhagen) s.v. Laconia</i> . Argolis: Argos no. 99, plate 2 no. 100 (<i>sic</i>). Photo: after <i>LIMC</i> 3, 2 s.v. <i>Dioskouroi</i> no. 14	143
Figure 63.	Plan of Argos town centre, showing main excavated sites including the theatre. Photo: École Français D’Athènes.....	144
Figure 64.	Plan of the excavated theatre at Argos. Photo: École Français D’Athènes.....	145
Figure 65a–c.	a) Cavalier relief on orthostat inset in south <i>parodos</i> wall of part-Hellenistic theatre at Argos, third-century BC or later. H. 0.47m. W. 0.78m. b) showing the position of the orthostat; c) showing location of inscription above with lettering H. 2.5–3cm: <i>SEG</i> 16, 245. Photos: author.....	151
Figure 66.	Roman relief in the flat style from Argos. Argos, Archaeological Museum E192. Photo: author.....	152
Figure 67.	View of the site of Mesa Vouno from Kamari. The ‘ <i>agora of the gods</i> ’, where a seventh-century BC graffito naming the <i>Dioskouroi</i> was found, lies just above the daunting cliff-face. Photo: author.....	156
Figure 68.	Plan of the excavated site at Mesa Vouno, Thera, The area Hiller von Gaertringen named the ‘ <i>agora of the gods</i> ’, and where he found the <i>Dioskouroi</i> graffito, is shaded in blue. The ‘ <i>temenos of Artemidoros</i> ’ is marked in green not far beyond the Ptolemaic garrison post and Gymnasion. Photo: after Sperling <i>Thera</i> fig. 24 (adapted from <i>Thera</i> III plans 1 and 2).....	159
Figure 69a–b.	a) Photograph of graffito dedication to Zeus from Thera: <i>IG XII 3, 350</i> . b) Transcription of graffito dedication to Zeus from Thera: <i>IG XII 3, 350</i> . Photos: after Inglese <i>Thera Arcaica</i> 455	160
Figure 70a–b.	a) Drawing of the altar of the <i>Dioskouroi</i> in the <i>temenos</i> of Artemidoros, late third-century BC, <i>IG XII, 3 422/1333</i> . Photo: after <i>Thera</i> III 92 fig. 75; b) The <i>temenos</i> of Artemidoros at Mesa Vouno, with the altar of the <i>Dioskouroi</i> on the far right. Photo: author	162
Figure 71.	Local stone votive relief dedicated to Trophonios from Livadia, Boeotia, fourth-century BC. H. 0.33m. W. 0.93m. Athens, Archaeological Museum 3942. Photo: after Kaltsas <i>NM Sculpture</i> no. 448	165
Figure 72.	View from the sanctuary of Apollo to the western end of the acropolis ridge at Kyrene, looking towards the sea. Photo: after M. Luni, <i>Cirene “Atene d’Africa” (Rome 2006)</i> 33 fig. 28.....	166
Figure 73a–b.	a) Plan of Kyrene. showing the sanctuary of the <i>Dioskouroi</i> in relation to the wider site; b) The sanctuary of the <i>Dioskouroi</i> and putative <i>hestiatorion</i> are shaded in blue. Photo: after Luni <i>Cirene e la Cirenaica nell’antichità</i> fig.1 (with additions).....	169

Figure 74.	Roman marble head from the agora area at Kyrene, late second/early third-century AD. London. British Museum BM 1861, 1127.59. H. 24cm. Photo: British Museum Services	171
Figure 75.	Marble architectural sculpture from Kyrene, unrecorded location, probably Roman. Photo: after Luni/Marengo “Dioskourion” fig. 9.....	172
Figure 76a–b.	a) Plan of the excavated temple building, putatively identified as a <i>Dioskourion</i> , abutting a further building identified as a <i>hestiatorion</i> in the agora at Kyrene, part seventh-century BC. b) Photo of the excavated <i>Dioskourion</i> building. Photos: after Luni/Marengo “Dioskourion” figs 4–5.....	173
Figure 77a–b.	a) Excavated buildings to the west of the theatre at Kyrene, showing the putative <i>hestiatorion</i> with the <i>Dioskourion</i> at the left. b) Plan of the same. Photos: after M. Montanari, “Un <i>hestiatorion</i> nel santuario dei Dioscuri a Cirene” in <i>Luni Cirene</i> 208 fig. 4	174
Figure 78.	Pottery lamp with dedication to Dioskouroi from Naukratis, locally made, c. 525–475 BC. London, British Museum 1900.2-14.18. Outer diam. 15cm. H. 3.40cm. L. 11.60cm. Photo: British Museum Services.....	178
Figure 79.	Plan of excavated site at Naukratis from the seventh to the third-centuries BC. Photo: after Möller <i>Naukratis</i> fig. 1	180
Figure 80.	Plan of a portion of the north-west area of the excavated site at Naukratis, 600–400 BC, showing the <i>temenos</i> of the Dioskouroi, including the temple <i>in antis</i> . Photo: after Möller <i>Naukratis</i> fig. 2.....	181
Figure 81.	View of the archaeological site at Aliko on Thasos. Photo: Shutterstock stock photo ID: 2416511973.....	190
Figure 82.	Relief dedicated by Pola to the Dioskouroi, second-century AD. Thasos, Archaeological Museum 22. H. 0.32m. Photo: École Français D’Athènes/ Bernard Holtzmann	192
Figure 83.	Part relief of the Dioskouroi with Helen or a dedicant, possibly first-century BC. Thasos, Archaeological Museum 145. Photo: École Français D’Athènes/ Émile Sérafis.....	193
Figure 84.	Thasian <i>amphora</i> stamp from the agora in Athens (SS4974), Hellenistic. Stamp size: H. c. 3cm. W c. 1.5cm. Photo: after F. Salviat, “Religion populaire et timbres amphoriques” <i>BCH</i> 88/2 (1964) fig. 8.....	194
Figure 85.	General view of Delos from Mount Kynthos looking towards Rheneia. The putative <i>Dioskourion</i> lies further along the shoreline to the left (south). Photo: Vijnn Wikimedia Commons	198
Figure 86.	Map of Delos. Photo: after Robert ‘Trois Sanctuaires’ fig. 1.....	206
Figure 87.	Plan of building GD 123. Photo: École Français D’Athènes.....	208
Figure 88a–c.	Details of Archaic votive equestrian statue, Delos. DM A4098. Dimensions*: Horse. 113x43x30cm. Rider. 36x30x30cm. Photo: École Français D’Athènes/ Philippe Collet.....	214
Figure 89a–b.	Front and back view of Archaic votive equestrian statue DM A4102. Dimensions*: 41.2x28x14cm. Photo: École Français D’Athènes/Philippe Collet	214
Figure 90.	The peak of Mount Olympus rising in the distance from among the clouds: the final resting place on alternate days of Kastor and Polydeukes. Photo: author.....	222

Foreword

My interest in the Dioskouroi stems from studying ancient Athenian vase-painting with Professor Donna Kurtz. A simple query about why these figures, traditionally associated with Sparta, appeared on painted vases made in Athens sparked a veritable Pandora's box of further questions, in particular about their role in Greek myth and cult.

In the course of my researches, a new and important question emerged around the fact that much of the evidence not only for the Dioskouroi but for ancient Greek religion and cult more generally, comes from later Roman writers whose accounts were necessarily coloured in choice of subject and interest - as is mine - by the age and context in which they were writing. At the heart of this book, therefore, is an effort to distinguish between, if not disentangle, the different types of evidence available, with a particular focus on displaying the primary evidence from the time, as distinct from later accounts. By applying a chronological and geographical approach to the evidence, the study sets out to provide both an historical account as well as first steps in a survey of the Dioskouroi in Greece, aiming to shine a fresh light on the subject.

The book itself is based on the research undertaken for my doctoral thesis supervised primarily by Professor Donna Kurtz, and also by Professor Robert Parker. The thesis was examined by Professors Sir John Boardman and Paul Cartledge. The doctorate was awarded by the University of Oxford in 2015.

It has not been feasible for me to undertake substantial further research since then, but where there have been significant developments, for example, the excavations undertaken at Naukratis to be published shortly, these have been considered as far as possible. An additional section on Delos has also been added. I would hope that the research approach as well as the content is still valid and valuable in taking forward future work on the understanding of the Greek Dioskouroi and their place in the history of Ancient Greece.

Acknowledgements

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All are to be thanked for contributing to the content of this study, but responsibility for the views expressed or any errors in the text remain my own.

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as has my fellow doctoral student Ann-Sofie Diener. Elissavet Stagoni has helped with modern Greek.

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Oxford and Nafplio, 2024.

Map 1. Sites discussed in the text, by evidence type

- + Literary evidence
- Archaeological evidence

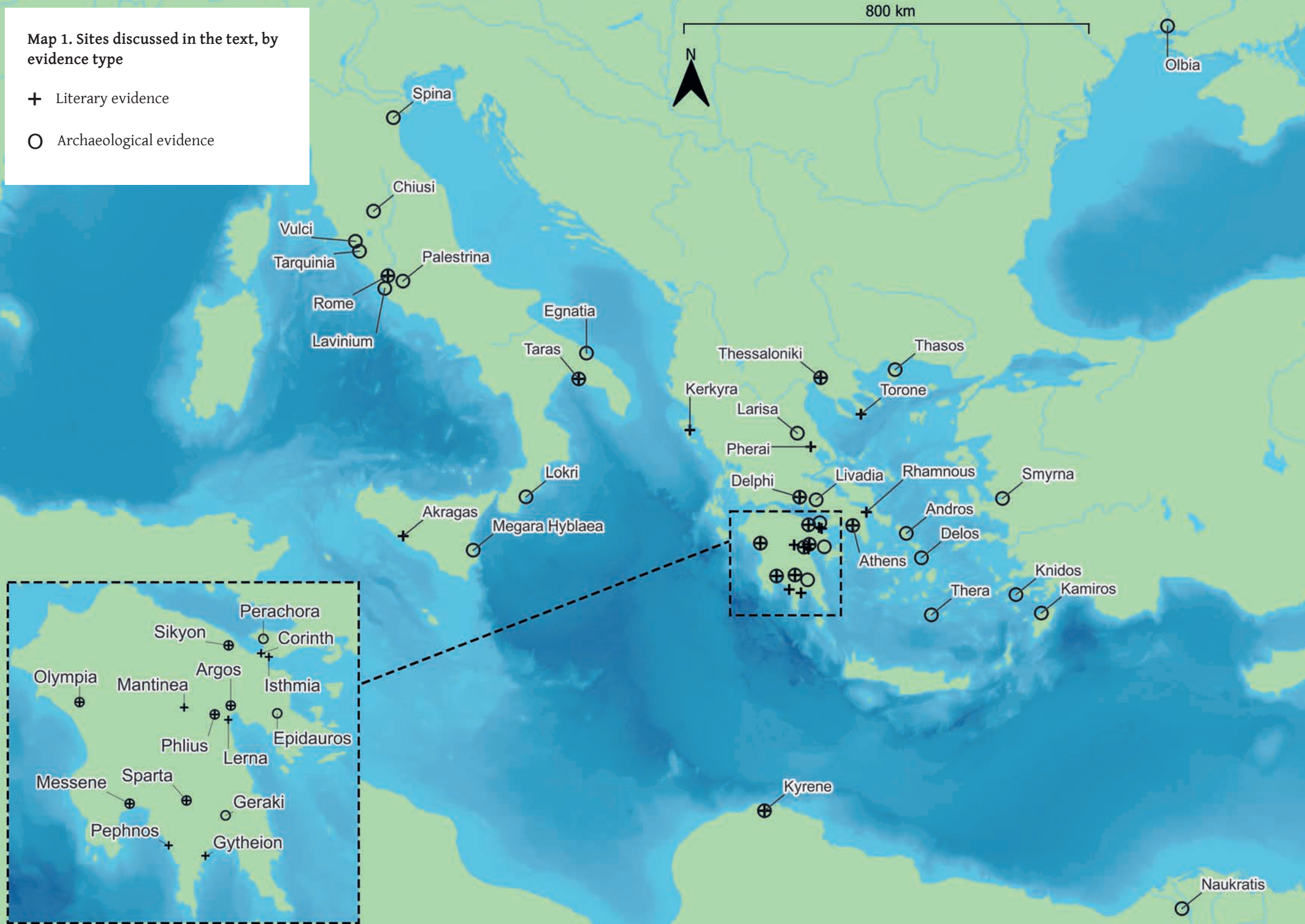




Figure 1. Temple of Castor and Pollux, Rome: columns from the first century AD, built on the fifth-century BC temple site, rise above the Sacred Way in the forum. Photo: author.