

## Project Group A2

# The Transformation and Communication of Heroic Ideas in the Intercultural Context of the Hellenistic World

Principal investigator: Prof. Dr. Sitta von Reden; research associates: Thibaut Boddez, Carla Gebauer

The publications of Mari, Mitchell and Pfeiffer<sup>1</sup> demonstrate an intense scholarly interest in the origins of the Hellenistic ruler cult. In contrast to Mitchell's view, however, this project has followed Mari in arguing that only isolated local forms of deification and cultic worship of human beings occurred in the pre-Hellenistic period. The project group's goal was to identify various local traditions of the exaltation of human beings, both living and dead, and to show their trans-cultural fusion in Hellenistic ruler-, dynasty-, and hero cults. With the advent of Alexander the Great, something entirely new emerged. Under his successors, there developed a variety of ruler-, founder-, and dynastic cults in which kings were venerated as benefactors and saviours. Cults also sprang up for local royal personnel and local civic officials who, however, could claim no divine cult of their own. This is apparent not just from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE when a certain inflation of heroization and hero cults for local people set in.<sup>2</sup> It rather marks a general culture of heroization in which heroization was used as instrument to mark and control authority through various kinds of social and economic reciprocity (von Reden 2016; Boddez 2017).<sup>3</sup>

*Sub-project A (not yet completed): "Negotiating Heroic Models in Literature and Visual Representations of the Ptolemies" (dissertation, Carla Gebauer)*

The elevation of a monarch to an above-human position was a crucial power resource in both the Egyptian and the Greek traditions. Thus, one of the central concerns of this investigation was to work out to what extent hero narratives served as a medium to make seemingly incompatible notions of kingship comprehensible and transferrable to the other culture and, beyond that, to create some broad acceptance for the divine worship of the Ptolemaic kings and their dynasty. In order to identify which aspects of Ptolemaic Egypt were constitutive of heroism and in which form these concepts were communicated, this sub-project analysed epic and historiographical texts written in the context of the Ptolemaic court.

The Ptolemies took a place in a long tradition of dialogue between king and subjects in the literary negotiation of the themes raised above. They even went a step further, interweaving their own concept of rule, super-humanness and the ideal of a heroic nature with local narrative traditions. They thereby used two decisive strategies to their advantage: communicating with their subjects via the medium of narrative, and linking themselves to the pre-existing cults of posthumously deified Egyptian kings by means of ritual texts and setting up cult statues in kings' temples.

The concept of the royal hero opened up new communicative spaces, as portrayals of heroes in *hymnos* and ritual allowed both cultures to enter into an open dialogue about their own specific characteristics. Furthermore, they portrayed the hero as a figure of mythical memory

<sup>1</sup> Mari, M. 2008: The Ruler Cult in Macedonia. *Studi Hellenistici* 20, pp. 219–268; Mitchell, L. 2013: Heroic Rulers in Archaic and Classical Greece. London; Pfeiffer, S. 2014: Alexander d. Gr. in Ägypten. Überlegungen zu seiner ägyptischen Legitimation, in: V. Grieb [et al.] (eds.), *Alexander the Great and Egypt. History, Art, Tradition*, Wiesbaden, pp. 89–106.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, D. D. 1999: Hero cult, heroic honours, heroic dead. Some developments in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, in: R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek hero cult*, Stockholm, pp. 167–175.

<sup>3</sup> Also von Reden, S. 2015: Stiftungen und politische Kommunikation in hellenistischen Städten, in: eadem (ed.), *Stiftungen zwischen Politik und Gesellschaft. Geschichte und Gegenwart im Dialog*. HZ Beiheft 66, pp. 205–236.

in lyric works, thus making the principle moments of their own cultural memory tangible for a wider audience. Over time, ecumenical worship and the narrative structure of heroic history gave way to a common semiotic system whose core elements were intelligible to both cultural milieus. Thus the problem of common cult practice – for a heroized revolutionary figure, for example – was also addressed explicitly in the texts.

The ideal image of the ruler changed drastically during this process. With his spirit and his will to conquer, the hero often constituted a foil for a weak ruler, whose narrative persona was marked by inaction and a lack of self-assertion. In this way, certain kings of recent Egyptian history were deliberately deheroized so that other rulers like Nectanebo, to whom Alexander was dynastically connected, could be idealized. The fusion and articulation of heroic models through the modification of traditional songs and biographies of heroes and rulers, and the attendant alteration of a frame of reference entrenched in collective memory, were a crucial precondition for the legitimation of a Hellenistic monarch in a Ptolemaic regime.

When assembling the corpus of materials, especially the corpus of texts written outside the context of the Ptolemaic court, it became clear that numerous texts and inscriptions, though well edited, have never been subjected to historical or cultural analysis. Since the genre of Egyptian heroic epic is known so far to a small circle of Egyptologists and papyrologists only, the project concentrates on their historical and literary analysis and on making them accessible to a wider range of ancient historians.

*Sub-project B: "Hero Cults and the Articulation of Heroic Patterns in the Political Culture of the Greek Cities" (dissertation, Thibaut Boddez – completed June 2017)*

This project initially focused on an investigation of pre-Hellenistic depictions of rulers in Lycia, Caria and Macedonia that shaped the way the rulers of the new Hellenistic dynasties were portrayed, as well as on local perceptions of rulers and how they influenced the worship of contemporaries. Whereas in pre-Hellenistic times the heroic representation and worship of a ruler was concentrated on his grave, after Alexander's death the articulation of heroic patterns was integrated into the godlike ruler cults of Hellenism. Thus, patterns of behaviour and narratives indicative of an individual's heroic character were illustrated with regard to their integration into a cult. The integration of aspects of hero cults into a godlike ruler cult, and the resolution of the tension between the two cultic forms, can be seen especially well in the worship of Alexander as the founder of Alexandria and in the assimilation of Antigonos I and Demetrius I with the *phyle* heroes of Athens in 307 BCE. The relevance of these models puts an investigation into the naming of phyles after rulers and the establishment of Hellenistic founder cults into greater perspective. This investigation shows that the integration of aspects of hero cults into godlike ruler cults served to express key things about the nature of rule and the relationship between a ruler and a city. The tension between heroic and divine models was obfuscated in the godlike ruler cult. Whereas the understanding of heroic and divine cult veneration was redefined under the influence of the ruler cults, a cult's status as heroic or divine retained its relevance. Cults were also dedicated to individuals who were close to the king and employed at the royal court but who were nevertheless active in the politics of benefaction in the Greek cities. In order to highlight the monarch's cultic supremacy, the cultic community denoted the cultic veneration of these other benefactors as heroic. A clearly Ptolemaic influence on the practice of veneration cannot be discerned. Much more important in this study were regional peculiarities, chronological differences, and Hellenistic forms of expressing the heroization and deification of royal dynasties.

The observation of a dichotomy between Hellenistic models of heroic and divine representation – a dichotomy which had its roots in the Classical period but evolved differently in the Hellenistic period – makes an important contribution to research into the origins of the Hellenistic ruler cult. It appears to have arisen from a hierarchy of heroized and deified individuals that was symbolically implied early on under Alexander in the heroization of Hephaestion. Nevertheless, the sub-project's work was not restricted to the contrast between heroization and deification, as has been typical in past scholarship,<sup>4</sup> but rather identified how these contrasts were articulated in actual cult forms. Finally, this work fills a lacuna in scholarship by systematically studying the heroization of benefactors in the early Hellenistic period (late 4<sup>th</sup> to mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), a topic that has hitherto received little attention.<sup>5</sup>

### **Publications produced by project group A2**

- Boddez, T. *Neue Heroen in einer Zeit lebender Götter. Die Artikulation heroischer Muster in den Herrscherkulturen und Honoratiorenkulturen der griechischen Städte der frühen und hochhellenistischen Epochen (336-150 v. Chr.)*.
- Boddez, T. 2016: *Entre le roi et la cité. Remarques sur le développement des cultes héroïques entre 336 et 150*, in: *Erga-Logoi* 4.2, pp. 75–116, DOI:10.7358/erga-2016-002-bodd.
- Gebauer, C. 2014: *Frank Millers "300" – Modern rezensierte Helden der Antike*, in: *helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen* 2.1: *Populärkultur*, pp. 58–60, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2014/01/07.
- von Reden, S. 2016: *Neue Helden in der hellenistischen Polis: Der Dichterethos und sein Bild im Archelaosrelief von Priene*, in: A. Aurnhammer / U. Bröckling (eds.), *Vom Weihegefäß zur Drohne. Kulturen des Heroischen und ihre Objekte (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 4)*, Würzburg, pp. 41–58.
- von Reden, S. 2013: *Tagungsbericht zu „Des hommes aux dieux. Processus d'héroisation et de divinization dans la Méditerranée hellénistique“*, in: *helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen* 1.1: *Herausforderung Helden*, pp. 93–94, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2013/01/15.

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<sup>4</sup> Buraselis, K. 2003: *Political Gods and Heroes or the Hierarchization of Political Divinity in the Hellenistic World*, in: A. Barzanò [et al.] (eds.), *Modelli eroici dall'antichità alla cultura Europea*, Rome, pp. 185–197.

<sup>5</sup> Most recently Currie, B. 2005: *Pindar and the cult of heroes* (Oxford Classical Monographs), Oxford.