

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

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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

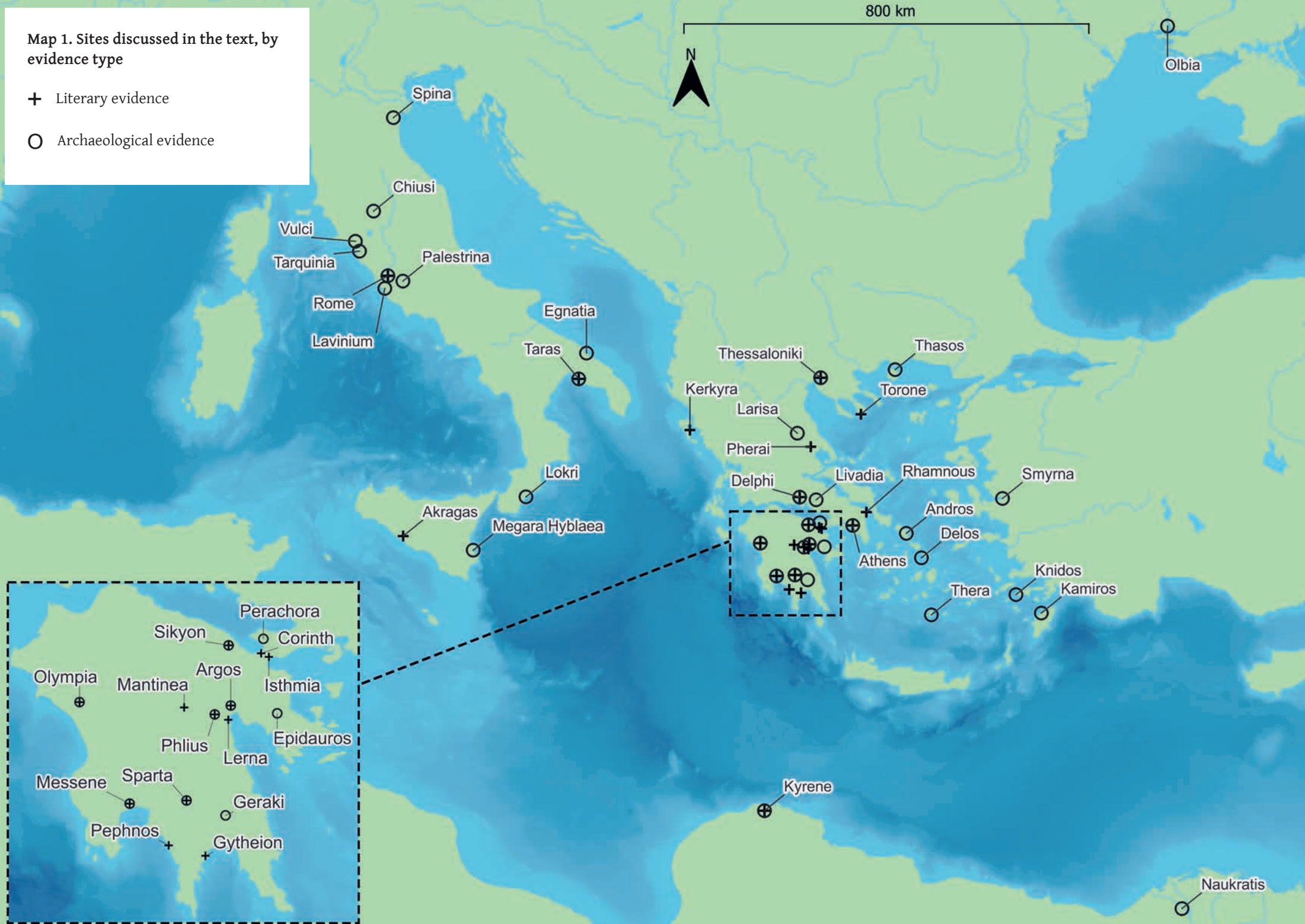




Figure 1. Temple of Castor and Pollux, Rome: columns from the first century AD, built on the fifth-century BC temple site, rise above the Sacred Way in the forum. Photo: author.