Homer’s epics and the cycles of legends connected with them can be considered one of the main factors in the elaboration of the concept of space in the Ancient Mediterranean. Throughout history, these poems have held an importance for the Greeks that we cannot even begin to imagine. One of the first inscriptions known to us in the Greek language, dating from the third quarter of the 8th century BC and found on Ischia, a Euboean colony in the Bay of Naples, reveals specific knowledge of a passage from the *Iliad*.1 In the 6th century BC, Xenophanes of Kolophon wrote that Homer was the “teacher of Greece” from the most ancient times (ex arkhês). Two centuries later, some particularly cultured Athenians were able to recite the two poems from memory.2 The education of generations of young Greeks, up to the Hellenistic era, was based quite simply on the study of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as the papyruses of Hellenistic Egypt show.3

These two works by Homer were augmented by a series of legends and minor narratives that are usually known collectively as *nostoi*: literally, “the returns”. At the end of a long and bloody war in which victory had been secured only by deception, with an aftermath of violence and atrocious crimes, the Greeks were denied an uneventful return to their homelands.4 Many of them had to endure lengthy peregrinations in the

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2 Xenophon, *Banquet*, III, 5–6, points out that the learning of Homeric poems was a fundamental element of a perfect aristocratic education in classical Athens.
4 As the wise Nestor says in *Odyssey*, III, 129–134: “But when we had sacked the lofty city of Priam, and had gone away in our ships, and a god had scattered the Achaeans, then, even then, Zeus planned in his heart a woeful return for the
Mediterranean, in the course of which they discovered new peoples and founded new cities and dynasties. In a certain sense, the return from Troy can be seen as the first great diaspora in the Mediterranean, touching first and foremost the shores of the Italian peninsula. The wanderings and adventures of their returning heroes provided the Greeks with a geographical image and a mental representation of the Western Mediterranean. In this sense, it is certainly possible to agree with Irad Malkin, who wrote: “History began with the return from Troy”. It even appears that this function of the epic poems has persisted up to modern times. Homer’s works proved excellent travelling companions – for example, for British explorers setting out in the 18th century to discover and lay claim to the Pacific Ocean. We know that Sydney Parkinson, a young draughtsman in Sir Joseph Banks’ expedition, took both the Iliad and the Odyssey in his baggage.

This mythical “migration of heroes” preceded in some cases the historical colonisation of the Greeks in the Mediterranean, pioneered between the 8th and 6th centuries BC. Various figures from the Trojan cycle allegedly set foot on the coast of the Ionian Sea. One of them was Epeios, the mythical artisan who built the Trojan horse. Authors writing in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC narrated his arrival in a city called Lagaria or Gargaria, near Metapontium, on the Ionian Sea, where he dedicated his tools to Athena. According to Strabo, Metapontium itself was founded by a Greek people, the Pylians, under their leader Nestor, on his return from Troy, while another group of Nestor’s troops allegedly sailed up Argives, for in no wise prudent or just were all. Wherefore many of them met an evil fate through the fell wrath of the flashing-eyed goddess, the daughter of the mighty sire, for she caused strife between the two sons of Atreus”. (Augustus Taber Murray, Homer. The Odyssey, I, Cambridge, Mass., London 1960, 77–79). See also art. Kyklos-Nostoi, in: Pauly-Wissowa et al., Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, XI, 2 (1922), 2422–2426.


8 Pseudo-Aristotle, On Marvellous Things Heard, 108 (Gargaria) and Lycophron, Alexandra, v. 930 (Lagaria).
the Italic coast as far as the Tyrrenian Sea and the mouth of the Arno, where they founded Pisa. Another hero of the Trojan saga linked to early Italic history is Philoctetes. Although Philoctetes is a minor figure in the Homeric epics, characterised with some of the negative attributes of the “anti-hero”, he was nonetheless a key figure in the final victory at Troy: he possessed the arrows of Heracles, without which the Greek army would not have subdued their enemy. In a Western version of the myth, following the fall of Troy, Philoctetes journeyed west to the coast of Calabria, and dedicated his weapons in the temple of Apollo Alaios. This version dates probably from the end of the 6th century BC, while, according to Homer, Philoctetes would instead be able to return peaceably in his Greek homeland, Thessaly. Another version of the legend makes explicit mention of foundation myths, involving Philoctetes in the Ionian Sea and Sicily. The collection of marvels written in 4th century BC and included in the Aristotelian corpus, tells us that when Philoctetes returned from Troy, he lived in the region of Croton and dedicated Heracles’ bow and arrows at the temple of Apollo. After his death during a fight against the natives, he was buried there, by the river Sybaris, and was honoured among the Sybarites. In the 3rd century BC Lycophron wrote that after the Trojan War Philoctetes journeyed up to the city Crimissa, in the country of the Oenotrians (Calabria); after his murder by native barbarians he was buried near the river Cratis, in the nearby sanctuary of Apollo Alaios, and there worshipped as a god.

The Trojans, too, figure as protagonists in this westward migration quite as strongly as the Greeks. Besides Rome, the most famous Trojan foundation of all in the West – which we shall not deal with here, given the vast corpus of material on the subject – various cities and peoples laid claim to a descent from the Trojans. The historian Timaeus, the philosopher Aristotle and the geographer Strabo attributed a Trojan origin to Siris, an archaic colony in the Ionian Sea. Several other foundation myths involve Trojan fugitives along the entire Adriatic Sea. From at least the 5th century BC, when Sophocles wrote his tragedy The Antenorides,

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9 Strabo, V, 2, 5 (foudation of Pisa); VI, 1, 14–15 (foundation of Metapontium).
10 Homer, Odyssey, III, 190.
11 Strabo, VI, 1, 3, who follows on this point Apollodorus’s Commentary on the Homeric Catalogue of Ships. According to his account, these Italian foundations are Petelia in Leucania, Crimissa on the coastland of Bruttium, and Chone, the principal city of the Chonians, the indigenous inhabitants of the interior of the promontory of Crimissa; he also founded Aegesta in Sicily.
14 Strabo, VI, 1, 14; Timaeus of Tauromenion and Aristotle, in Athenaeus, The Deinosophists, XII, 523.
the Veneti were seen as descendants of the Trojans, who arrived in the Adriatic, led by their prince Antenor. According to Strabo, Padua, too, was founded by Antenor.\textsuperscript{15} The Trojan origin of the Veneti was probably based on some lines of Homer’s \textit{Iliad}, including the Heneti of Paphlagonia, in the Trojan army.\textsuperscript{16} During the 5th century BC this oriental people was identified with the Adriatic Veneti, as is indicated by the tragedy of Sophocles.\textsuperscript{17} Although known in Republican Rome,\textsuperscript{18} the legend actually flourished in the age of Augustus, when both Virgil and Livy drew parallels between this episode and Aeneas’s foundation of Rome.\textsuperscript{19}

Various factors lie behind the creation of these myths. In the first place, the \textit{nostoi} constituted a poetic vehicle for imagining and describing those regions of the Mediterranean that were still unknown. Further, they served to justify the Greeks’ colonial conquest of the indigenous territories of Southern Italy in the 8th to 6th centuries BC. To give an example: far from invading foreign territory, the Achaeans of the Peloponnese who founded Metapontium in the second half of the 7th century BC claimed merely to be reclaiming land once occupied by Nestor and his companions. Another important function was, finally, to legitimise the rivalry between neighbouring \textit{poleis}. Once again, Metapontium provides a case in point. The legend of its foundation, immediately after the Trojan war, ensured Metapontium a more venerable origin than that of its rival Taras, founded by the Spartans only at the end of the 8th century BC.\textsuperscript{20} Another example is the rivalry between Croton and Sybaris in laying claim to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See above, note 15.
\item For example, the source of Pliny, \textit{Natural History}, III, 130, is Cato the Elder, writing in the first half of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BC.
\item Virgil, \textit{Aeneid} I, 242–253; Livy, \textit{Ab Urbe Condita} I, 1, 1–3. On the role of the Trojan legend in the process of Romanization, see Mario Torelli, \textit{Tota Italia: Essays in the Cultural Formation of Roman Italy}, Oxford 1999.
\end{enumerate}
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legend of Philoctetes at the end of the 6th century BC, which is also the period of the final conflict between these two Greek cities. The account of Pseudo-Aristotle clearly reveals this strategy to appropriate the saga of Philoctetes: “It is said that Philoctetes is honoured among the Sybarites. (...) They relate that he dedicated Heracles’ bow and arrows at the temple of Apollo the sea god. There they say that the Crotoniates during their supremacy dedicated them at the Apollonion in their own district. It is also said that when he died he was buried there by the river Sybaris, after having helped the Rhodians (...) and joined battle with the barbarians, who dwelt in that part of the country”.

In this instance, descent from Philoctetes was a guarantee of military success: the weapons of Heracles, which had ensured victory for the Greeks over the Trojans, were considered a potent talisman.

Among the many examples of legends deriving from the Trojan cycle that we could cite, the case of Diomedes appears particularly representative. This hero is one of the most original and fully drawn characters in the *Iliad*, figuring in several episodes and occupying most of one entire canto; a renowned horse tamer, endowed with a powerful war cry and superhuman courage and ferocity. Diomedes is the only Greek hero to have not one but two homelands, for he was the son of Tydeus, king of Argos, in the Peloponnese, but also the grandson of Oineus, king of Calydon, a celebrated city of Aetolia.

Diomedes even dared attack the gods: in the *Iliad*, Book V (1–144), he pursued and wounded Aphrodite, who had taken the field to defend her son Aeneas. The boldness of this exploit left its mark on the imagination

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22 Malkin, op. cit. (n. 2), 216.

23 Homer, *Iliad*, VI, 119–236 (Glaucus and Diomedes) and X, 150–579 (the capture of Rhesus’ horses).


of various painters of the second half of the 18th and the turn of the 19th centuries, especially in France: its rise and fortune provide an interesting example of change in the evaluation of classical culture. The subject was never exploited until the mid-18th century, for the goddess’s wounding was seen as a too audacious and indecorous matter for an artistic work: but from the mid-18th century to the first half of the following century, a long list of paintings and drawings appears – all showing with many variants the representation of the wounded Aphrodite being borne back to Olympus in a chariot driven by Iris. This event should probably be viewed as the consequence of a larger transformation in the appreciation of Antiquity. During that period ancient civilizations no longer appear as the equivalent of barbarian and ‘rude’ customs but as the symbols of a pure and not yet corrupted nature, contrasting with the contemporary decadence of customs. This idea of a genuine ancient force and virtue explains Denys Diderot’s aims when describing a painting of Gabriel-François Doyen, shown in 1761 in the Parisian “Salon de Peinture”: “J’aurais élevé Diomède sur un amas de cadavres. Le sang eût coulé à ses pieds. Terrible dans son aspect et dans son attitude, il eût menacé la déesse de son javelot”. Diderot no doubt played a major part in this artistic revival of the classical past; the Count of Caylus was certainly another outstanding personality of this age. This protagonist of French culture of the 18th century selected a list of “tableaux” derived from the chief works of ancient epics, whose main purpose was to increase artists’ appreciation for the past by providing some subjects derived from ancient mythology that could be easily translated into images. For he was convinced that not all literary forms could be easily converted into images: the myth of Diomedes supplied him with a good example to prove his case. According to Caylus, Book X of the Iliad can hardly provide the material for a figurative work: although the action is extremely fascinating, it is impossible to draw it, since it takes


30 Siefert, op cit (n. 24), 8–15.


place in the darkness of night. Conversely, the scene of Venus wounded by Diomedes seems to him an excellent subject for painting: this is perhaps one of the reasons for the wide contemporary dissemination of that mythological theme. At all events, Caylus’s passion for Antiquity was unquestionably a fundamental link between past civilisation and the artistic creations of the end of the 18th and the turn of the 19th centuries. From the very beginning of the 19th century, the selection of pictorial (and, incidentally, musical) subjects for the prestigious “Prix de Rome” was repeatedly inspired by ancient myths, and in particular by Homer’s epics. Moreover, it has been proved that Caylus had a great influence on Joseph Vien, who became Director of the French Academy in Rome in 1776 and was one of the key figures in French neoclassicism. One of Vien’s paintings is inspired by Homer’s story of Aphrodite’s wounding by Diomedes, and the same subject appears in Caylus’s selection of Homeric “Tableaux”.

It is time to return to ancient interpretations of the myth of Diomedes. In Homer’s account the hero finds his way back to Argos with no difficulty after just four days at sea. But other versions of the myth, dating back at least to the 7th century BC, tell of a much more troubled return. Once in Argos, Diomedes is said to have found that his wife, Aigialeia, had been unfaithful and plotted his downfall, inspired by the goddess Aphrodite in revenge for her ignominy on the battlefield. Diomedes thus found himself turned out of his homeland and deprived of his kingdom. He went

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34 See Michel, op. cit. (n. 25), 115, quoting Charles-Nicolas Cochin (Mémoires inédits, Paris 1880, 67), a strong opponent of Caylus’s views: “M. Vien a gâté quelques compositions de tableaux par cette même complaisance, et ce fut aussi M. de Caylus qui l’engagea dans ces compositions froides de figures à la grecque”.

35 Siefert, op. cit. (n. 24), 267, n. 120: shown in Paris in 1775, this painting is now at Columbus (Ohio), in the collection of the Columbus Museum of Art. This work was created a short time after Vien’s departure from Rome and it fell short of David’s drawing on the same subject (Siefert, op. cit. (n. 24), 263, n. 112, now in Vienna, Albertina Museum).

36 Caylus, op. cit. (n. 32), Livre V, tableau IV, V, VI, VII.

37 As Nestor tells Telemachos in Odyssey, III, 180–184.

off to Aetolia in order to restore his grandfather Oineus to the throne, in which, however, he was only partially successful.\(^{39}\) It was here that the hero assembled the company of Aetolian troops who were to be his faithful companions throughout his subsequent peregrinations.

This, then, was the beginning of Diomedes’ Adriatic adventures. The first author to recount his exploits was Mimnermus of Kolophon, a poet who lived in Ionia in the 7th century BC. According to his account, when Diomedes arrived in Apulia with his companions, he aided the local king, Daunus, to defeat his enemies in exchange for a kingdom.\(^{40}\) But Daunus, who became the prototype of the treacherous barbarian, betrayed his promise and had the hapless hero killed;\(^{41}\) as in many similar legends, the plot ends with the dramatic act of a Greek hero’s murder by barbarian natives.\(^{42}\) This legend remained in circulation throughout the following centuries and acquired any number of variants and details. Following the assassination of Diomedes, his companions were turned into mysterious birds that inhabited the so-called Islands of Diomedes.\(^{43}\) Many ancient authors relate that these prodigious creatures showed themselves hostile to passing barbarians but well disposed towards Greeks, in allusion to their own origins.\(^{44}\) Diomedes himself underwent a kind of metamorphosis, or indeed divine apotheosis: according to Ibycus, a poet living at Rhegion in the 6th century BC, Diomedes was worshipped as a god after his tragic death.\(^{45}\) Thus the ruthless warrior of the *Iliad* became a powerful god *(the-*)


\(^{40}\) See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities* XII, 14, 16, on Diomedes, ally of king Daunus; *some scholia* in the *Iliad* relate the account of Diomedes’ murder in Iberia *(sic)* by Daunos or by his son lunos (Gulielmus Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* 3, Oxford 1877, Schol. Ad II. E (5) 412; Hartmut Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (scholia vetera)* I, Berlin 1969, 64–65.

\(^{41}\) Malkin, op. cit. (n. 2), 237.

\(^{42}\) Malkin, op. cit. (n. 2), 237, underlines the analogies of this story with the tradition of Theseus’s murder by the Dolopians, and of the Cretan Minos by the Sicilian king Kokalos.

\(^{43}\) Malkin, op. cit. (n. 2), 238, rightly speaks of “some kind of a bird *apoikia*”.


os) who ruled, according to Lycophron, over “the vast sea of Ios”.46 His cult appears almost as compensation for the injustice he suffered at the hands of the barbarians on the Adriatic coast. Sanctuaries of Diomedes were scattered along this coast, their distribution probably reflecting the navigational routes used by Greek sailors in the Adriatic from the 6th century BC onwards. Thanks to the recent discoveries of Croatian archaeologists, we now know of a sanctuary in the Islands of Diomedes, on the island of Palagruža, and of the “Promontory of Diomedes”,47 at Cape Ploća, south of Šibenik. Other cult sites are known to us only from literary sources. Strabo records that a large sanctuary of Diomedes stood at the mouth of the Timavus, at the border of the lands of the Veneti and the Histrians, in the north of the Adriatic.48 Here, the cult of the hero was associated with that of Hera Argeia and Aetolian Artemis, goddesses evoking the dual origins of Diomedes.49 The cult of Diomedes was also celebrated among the Umbrians in the Central Adriatic.50 Diomedes himself allegedly made offerings in temples in Southern Italy, one in Apulia being dedicated to the Trojan Athena (brought over from Troy) and to Artemis.51

In the Adriatic Diomedes was not merely revered as a god: he was also, and above all, regarded as a civilising hero. Like so many other heroes of Greek mythology, Diomedes battled with monsters. At Corcyra (modern Corfu), he slew the famous Colchian dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece and laid waste to the neighbourhood.52 This particular heroic deed was recorded in a statue, and the episode takes its place in the Adriatic appendix to the voyage of the Argonauts.53 Diomedes, frequently referred to by Homer as “tamer of horses”, was expert in everything to

46 Lycophron, Alexandra, ll. 630–632, close to Ibycus’ phrase.
47 Pliny, Natural History III, 141.
48 Strabo, V, 1, 9.
50 Pseudo-Skylax, Periplus, 16.
51 See Pseudo-Aristotle, 109, on the Daunian shrine of Athena, “called Achaean”, in which the arms of Diomedes are dedicated, and 110, on a temple of Artemis in the ancient Peucetia, where the Greek hero dedicated a bronze necklace with a legend inscribed “to Artemis”.
53 According to Jean Bérard, La colonisation grecque de l’Italie méridionale et de la Sicile dans l’Antiquité : histoire et légende, Paris 19572, 369, the monster killed by Diomedes was the Colchian serpent, guardian of the Golden Fleece. According to Apollodorus, The Library I, 9, 25, “the Colchians settled down
do with this animal, a prime symbol of many aristocracies throughout the Mediterranean. This association is particularly evident in the territory of the Veneti, where the cult of Diomedes was associated with the sacrifice of horses. Moreover, the legend of Diomedes was often associated with urban settlement. A number of cities claimed to have been founded by the hero – above all, in Southern Italy and along the Adriatic coast. In one version of the myth, Rome itself is said to have been founded by the eponymous hero Rhomus, sent by Diomedes from Troy. And, lastly, Diomedes was expert in new techniques designed to transform the land and landscape. Strabo speaks of a canal dug by the hero in Apulia to link the plain and the sea.

At the same time, such powers and knowledge could be employed in a negative way: after the treachery of Daunus, for example, Diomedes uttered a curse that rendered the lands of that region permanently infertile. There are also allusions to supernatural powers in the legend of the magical stones used by Diomedes as ballast in his ship. In reality, according to Lycophron, these were stones taken from the walls of Troy, built by Apollo and Poseidon.

There is also a “political” dimension to the myth of Diomedes in the Adriatic. During the period of Syracusan expansion in the Adriatic, the tyrants of Syracuse identified themselves with the figure of Diomedes in order to legitimise their territorial claims in the Adriatic.

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60 Lorenzo Braccesi emphasizes this ideological and political use of the myth of Diomedes by the tyrants of Syracuse during the 4th century BC. See, for example: Lorenzo Braccesi, “Diomedes cum Gallis”, *Hesperia* 2, 1991, 89–102, and
ably one of the reasons behind the founding of the cult of Diomedes at Cape Ploča, for this coincided with the Syracusan colonisation of Lissos ca. 402–401 BC. In those same years Dionysius I of Syracuse supported the foundation of Pharos, the Adriatic colony of Paros. Another crucial episode in the political renovation of the myth of Diomedes was the Italian expedition of Alexander the Molossian that ended with the latter’s death in 330 BC. In this instance, the reaffirmation of the myth of Diomedes served to legitimise the thirst for conquest of Alexander and his army of Aetolians, who originated from the same region as Diomedes and his companions.

We might well wonder, at this point, whether the ancients really believed in this myth – to paraphrase the title of a famous essay by Paul Veyne – and just how credible the cult of Diomedes and the political propaganda based on his legend were. Surely the answer is that the ancients did give credence to the myth: after all, during the war against Hannibal some of the aristocratic families in Arpi, a city founded by Diomedes in Apulia, claimed descent from the Greek hero as the reason for their resistance against Rome. The heirs of Diomedes against the heirs of Aeneas: the mythical duel was being re-enacted, this time without an Aphrodite to take the field and avert the dramatic end.

In conclusion, the various aspects we have touched on surely bear out the statement that “every conceivable function of nostoi is attributable to Diomedes in Italy”. A true wandering hero, Diomedes appears in connection with space in movement rather than with territorial possession, with the Greeks’ itineraries rather than with their settlements. He seems to preside not over lands or city states but over sea routes, with their eddying currents. A multiform figure, Diomedes was also a mediator between cultures that were not just different but fundamentally heterogeneous, embracing the Greeks from their various homelands and the barbarians from


65 Malkin, op. cit. (n. 2), 254.
different regions in the Adriatic. Indeed, it may have been his own double origin that made him particularly suited to fulfilling this role. A foreign king in Argos, he gained from his Aetolian descent the connotation of a mixed, and to some extent marginal, Greekness – part of a regional, northwestern cultural ensemble. Such complexity cannot be crystallised in a single phase or historical moment. Having arrived in the Adriatic from Greece in the 7th century BC, the legend of Diomedes found fertile ground and over the centuries accumulated a host of motives and allusions that ensured its success and longevity. This can be seen in the importance of many cult sites in the Adriatic, or the adoption of the Greek hero as their ancestor by indigenous gentes. More recent scholars, philosophers and artists were able to appropriate ancient legend and invent their own mythical character. Thus the legend of Diomedes came to be one of the many modes of narrating the migrations, cultural clashes, mixtures and new lineages which have given rise, down the centuries, to so many different “Mediterraneans”.
Nazaj iz Troje: Diomed in drugi heroji staroveškega Mediterana

POVZETEK

Številne grške legende, ki so zrasle okoli potovanj grških junakov iz Troje nazaj v domovino, prepolnih doživljajev, so predstavljale bogato epsko izročilo, v katero so bile vključene, ne glede na velike medsebojne razdalje, različne sredozemsko pokrajine. Čeprav so bili ti miti zgolj sad domišljije, so imeli vendarle zelo konkretne vplive in posledice na dojemanje zgodovine; prek njih so se povezala v mrežo izmišljenih sorodstev in nasledstev različna sredozemska ljudstva, ki so si bila tuja in dejansko niso imela nič skupnega.


Avtorica je razčlenila pomembne faze v tem mitu in poskusila razložiti njegovo zgradbo, ki je glede na njegovo priljubljenost postajala vse kompleksnejša. V zgodovinski okvir je umestila eno od številnih legend, ki so vsaka posebej prispevala svoj delež k orisanovanju in povezovanju pokrajin antičnega Sredozemlja.