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Section 2 Work in Progress

Roy VAN WIJK (Università di Trento)

### **Recent Work on the Cults of Boeotia, Archaeology, Epigraphy and History**

Conference organized by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 4 to 6 December 2023

For the first time since Fribourg in June 2017, a conference entirely dedicated to Boiotia took place from December 4th to December 6th at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The school was (briefly) the main hub of activity for Boiotian studies in the world. Accounting for this statement was not just the impressive programme of speakers but also a very high attendance online – according to the organisers 7,000 people, including the author of this report.

The event started with a wonderful exploration of the fortress at Gla and its possible place within the Mycenaean Palatial system around Lake Kopais by Elena Kontouri. She explored how the fortress was a possibly a key hub for regulating the lake's draining.

From these deepest roots of Boiotian history, the next day was brought to life by Dimitra Oikonomou's presentation of the place of tripods in Boiotian sanctuaries. This included Apolline stops at the Ismenion in Thebes and the Ptoion at Akraiphnia, investigated the vexing inventory lists for the Heraion found at Chorsiai and treated the seventh-century stone tripods at Plataia. In addition, tripods from Thespiiai and Orchomenos were treated as well. It provided a perfect and succinct preview of the religious sites that would return in several other papers. The next paper by Nikos Gkiokas focused on a phenomenological approach to the Ptoion sanctuary and its plethora of kouroi, and how this would have impacted the human experience at the site. Concluding the section on dedicatory practices was Maria Mili's paper on the variations in dedicatory practices in Boiotia and Thessaly, especially regarding

childbirth. Whereas in Boiotia the role of the mother was possibly suppressed to emphasise the family, in Thessaly the mother took centre stage in dedications thanking the gods for fertility and new additions to the family.

The next section explored local cults through time. The section was rich in tracing the primordial roots of cults and their development until the Classical and beyond, when evidence is more readily available. Alice Solazzo provides an intriguing start by tracing Poseidon's role as a safekeeper of amphictyonies and his role as a federal god in Boiotia prior to Onchestos becoming the federal hub in the post-Chaironeia period. In doing so, she traced local mythologies across the region and their connection to Poseidon to reveal that the god was already perceived as belonging to all the Boiotians in the archaic and classical period, thus making the choice for the Onchestos sanctuary as the federal sanctuary a logical one. Following Solazzo's investigation was the paper by Eleni Goula, in which she revealed the long-standing traditions regarding (Athena) Tritogeneia in Boiotia – with roots in the Mycenaean period – and argued that it was this cult that eventually developed into Athena Ithonia at Alalkomenai. The section concluded with a piece on the cult of Dionysos in Boiotia and an ethnographical exploration of his continuing legacy among the Vlachs in the region.

From these journeys through time – interrupted by a brief break – the subsequent investigations were firmly entrenched in the ground and space by analysing the development of sacred landscapes in the region. A wonderful expose by Vasilis Aravantinos and Kyriaki Kalliga demonstrated the development of the Herakleion in Thebes. Recent excavations revealed early traces of the sanctuary and the early sacrificial pyres that formed the core of the cult at these stages. In addition, they explored how the location of the cult was chosen as well to demonstrate the development of a Theban identity via the Herakleion, for instance through shared feasting. The next paper brought us back to the Ptoion. In this case, Michael Dyer proposed to view the Ptoion's apogee and possible nadirs as the result of the fertile lands surrounding Akraiphnia, and how its integration into the Theban chora shifted these agricultural networks away from the sanctuary, thus leading to less traffic at the Ptoion. Concluding the sacred landscapes section was the keynote by Yannis Kalliontzis, Guillaume Biard and Alexandra Charami on their new research at the sanctuary of the Muses in the homonymous Valley. Working with scattered papers and incomplete notes from the original excavator, Jamot, the team has been cleaning the remaining architectural blocks and examining them. Other elements involve analysing the monuments and the altar; there is the possibility that there was an earlier cult at the site, not necessarily dedicated to the Muses, but perhaps to a predecessor like Kalliope. In addition, evidence for the later re-use of the site for Christian worship was also uncovered, providing an interesting preview for the last section of the conference.

The final day of the conference (initially) took us away from material evidence and into the literary world. The first to breach the topic was Bartłomiej Bednarek on Dionysos Eleuthereus in Eleutherai as portrayed in the *Bacchae*. Through a close reading of the text and comparing it with other surviving versions of Pentheus' myth, for instance, Bednarek revealed Euripidean innovations in the *Bacchae* regarding the interpretation of Agave's role in killing her son. Staying in the shadows of Kithairon, Nazim Can Serbest dove deep into Thucydides' text to uncover whether the historian revealed elements of an early cult at Plataia that would later develop into the famed Daidala cult. A further element of his intriguing work was uncovering the agency of nature in Thucydides' writing and how that was replicated by later writers such as Pausanias. Next up was Tullia Spinedi whose wonderful weaving together of mythology, rituals and sexual boundaries in the material culture and Korinna's poetry untangled local Eastern Boiotian perspectives captured therein.

Remaining in eastern Boiotia, Trevor van Damme took the audience to Eleon and the recent excavations undertaken by the Canadian Institute to kickstart the section on ceramic evidence. He offered a brief introduction to the site and possible cult places before presenting two Euboian cult vessels found at Eleon and proposing possible parallels with the cult of Artemis Amarysia in the Eretriad, which could imply Artemis was venerated in Eleon too. A more regional-wide approach was employed by Amy Smith and Katerina Volioti. By looking at local Boiotian cups, including the so-called palmette cups, and the local environment of Boiotia, they suggested a deeply entrenched local perspective went into the depictions found on these cups. Rather than viewing them as 'palmette' cups, which have no roots in Boiotia, they suggested these plants were either swamp plants or honey suckle that can be found in abundance in the region, and thus revealed an intimate knowledge of the land and a highly interesting human-environmental dialectic at work especially as people would be moving between civic centres and festival sites with these ceramics. Ending this section was the exciting paper by Alexandra Zampiti, where she presented evidence from the Cave of the Leibethrian Nymphs on Helicon. An onomastic and linguistic evidence revealed that dedicators at the site were not just local, but came from across Boiotia. Emphasising their Boiotianness was the use of the distinctive epigraphic traces to reveal their place from within the region. The cave, arguably located near one of the main axes of transport in Boiotia, therefore became a locus of pan-Boiotian worship.

After revelling in the delights of the ceramic evidence, the next section was dedicated to presenting new evidence for cultic practices. Alexandra Charami and Eleni Goula showed evidence from late Classical and Hellenistic funerary contexts in places such as Levadia and Tanagra, in addition to Thebes, that could be linked to the Kabeirion and the cultic practices there. That suggests a wider net was cast for initiation into the cult and could possibly have contributed to a growing cohesion in the koinon at the time. Anne-Charlotte Panissié-Odon

brought the proceedings back to the Ptoion, among other places, to reconsider the role of the mantis in the Hellenistic koinon. The Boiotoi were the only ones to have ‘hired’ federal prophets, but Panissié-Odon demonstrated there may have been local traditions of the mantis that were subsequently employed by the koinon, which hired manteis from different cities, to strengthen the cohesion of federation. Finishing off this exciting section was Nikolaos Papazarkadas’ presentation of a stone currently stored in Thebes. It concerned a later re-inscription of a stone that could have demarcated a precinct dedicated to Leto. A new cult epithet was found in the inscription that possibly relates to goat-herding or herding in general, thus uncovering a hitherto unknown element of Leto’s cult and especially her place in Boiotia.

Last but not least was the section dedicated to crossing boundaries. Evi Tsota explored various gates and boundaries across Boiotian sites, before narrowing her focus on the fortifications at Siphai. She presented exciting new material that revealed niches near the gates of the fortress and thus demonstrated an intriguing entanglement between religion and military. Elli Tzavella further looked at cult sites that subsequently transformed into Christian churches in Boiotia, showing how religious worship could tangibly be connected to place. Finally, Stephanie Larson looked at continuity on the Ismenion Hill, including its later appropriation of the site for the construction of the nearby church, as well as its function as a hub of Byzantine activity. This section thus explored the intricate ties between time and space in the ritual landscape of Boiotia.

In sum, the conference demonstrated the rich cultic vocabulary available in Boiotia and the need to investigate this fascinating region further. It is hoped that proceedings will indeed be published, as it would not only strengthen the utility of conferences such as these, but also because of the welter of new evidence that was presented that surely expands our knowledge of Boiotian cult in general.