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Section 2 Work in Progress

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Doctoral Project: The federal sanctuaries of Boeotia: religion and politics

Aims of the Project

My PhD thesis, a project I have been working on for a year, aims to analyze the role played by the federal sanctuaries of Boeotia in the Classical and Hellenistic ages through the study of epigraphic and literary sources.¹ My examination will focus, specifically, on the shrine of Athena Itonia at Coronea, the shrine of Poseidon at Onchestos, the Ptoion at Akraiphia and the Amphiareion at Oropos. The latter, despite not being defined by scholars as trans-regional or federal, represents a significant religious space for evaluating how the Boeotians initiated processes of identity affirmation in dialogue with other powers of the Greek world.

Each of the four sanctuaries will be treated by thematic chapters, further sub-structured into macro-topics. They will be preceded by an introduction and a chapter on the Boeotian confederacy. The introduction will focus on the history of federalism studies and the most recent research on federal sanctuaries, which developed following the publication of P. Funke and M. Haake's volume on trans-regional sanctuaries in ancient Greece (2013). To understand the literary texts and documents relating to the sanctuaries, as well as their political and religious functions they held for the Boeotians, there will be an initial chapter on the Boeotian confederacy, based on the latest research findings, which aims to outline a history of the Boeotian koinon from the end of the 6th century BC to 197 BC. In this chapter, I will address some issues related to the Greek federal vocabulary, often reproduced through inadequate modern translations, and I will reconsider the method applied by historians to the

¹ Supervisor: Daniela Bonanno; Co-Supervisor: Matteo Zaccarini.

study of ancient federal systems, which is characterized by non-inclusive exegesis and too rigid conjectures compared to the variable federal contexts of the ancient world.

The second chapter will be centered on the sanctuary of Poseidon at Onchestos. After reconstructing the history of the excavations and establishing the period in which the cult and the sanctuary started, all the literary and epigraphic sources relating to Onchestos will be analyzed, providing an opportunity to describe the rites performed in honor of Poseidon in Boeotia and the ways in which the Boeotians consolidated their ethnic identity through the creation of traditions, very often of a genealogical nature, that ensured a link with the god. A survey of the onomastic attributes with which the Boeotians addressed Poseidon will provide a starting point for reflecting on the interactions between the human and the divine in Boeotia and the god's spheres of influence in the region. Finally, the reasons why the Boeotians chose the sanctuary of Poseidon at Onchestos as their federal seat in the Hellenistic period will be discussed and a profile of Poseidon as a federal deity offered, considering the other contexts in Greece in which the god presided over amphictyonies.

The next chapter, on Athena Itonia, will be similarly structured. The history of the cult's birth, via mythical traditions and rituals, will be followed by a study of the goddess's onomastic attributes. A significant part of the chapter will be devoted to analyzing the links with Thessaly, since a cult of Athena Itonia is also attested there, and the festivals held at the sanctuary in the Hellenistic period, the Pamboiotia, as these represented the true federal agones of Boeotia, organized according to the district system at the basis of the Boeotian federal state.

The fourth chapter will concentrate on the sanctuary of Apollo Ptoios. From the 6th century BC, the Ptoion stimulated the birth of numerous traditions as it was used by some Boeotians to corroborate the ethnos through a series of dedications to the god. After addressing the problem of the sanctuary's birth and of the presumed existence of two places of worship, one local and one Theban, I will reflect on the characteristics that qualify a sanctuary as trans-regional or local and on the various strategies adopted by political actors to make use of religion to consolidate ethnic and identity ties.

The final section of my thesis will be on the Amphiareion at Oropos, whose literary sources will be discussed regarding the identity of the worshipped hero and the existence of an original sanctuary in the Theban territory at the beginning of the Classical period. I will then move on to the study of the sanctuary located in the territory of Oropos, tracing in parallel the fate of Oropos in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, to show that the large number of epigraphic documents found in the sanctuary is linked with the Boeotians' desire to exhibit the political and identity unity of the region in a cultic context visited by all Greeks.

The comprehensive analysis of the four places of worship will provide a more precise idea of the functions that these religious spaces had for the Boeotians, but also of the ways in which the federal structure permeated the religious life and ritual sphere of the region.