

Tales of Epic Ancestry: Boiotian Collective Identity in the Late Archaic and Early Classical Periods. By STEPHANIE L. LARSON. *Historia Einzelschriften* Band 197. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Press, 2007. Pp. 238. Paper, \$87.00. ISBN 978-3-515-09028-5.

Stephanie Larson's *Tales of Epic Ancestry* stands at the convergence of two productive strands in Classical scholarship. The first and more recent is a developing interest in ethnicity and identity more generally, behind which one may glimpse the influence of contemporary national and global politics, the so-called "linguistic turn" in modern historiography and, above all, J. Hall's grounding of such study in a theoretically rigorous yet accessible framework. The second is continuing research on Boiotia, the best known member of H.-J. Gehrke's "third Greece," where there is a long tradition of historical, archaeological and epigraphic study.

Larson (henceforth L.) argues a two-part thesis: First, that a distinct Boiotian ethnicity existed already in the Archaic era; second, that this ethnic group did not achieve political and military salience until the Boiotians defeated the Athenians at Koroneia in 447/6, following a decade-long period of submission to Athens after the battle of Oinophyta in 458/7. L. discusses methodology and defines key terms (the works of A.D. Smith and J. Hall loom large) in a brief introduction. Chapter 1 exposes a coherent Archaic account about Boiotos, eponymous ancestor of the Boiotians, who was regarded as the son of Poseidon and an Aiolid woman, and as the father or grandfather of a host of important figures in Boiotian cult and myth. Chapter 2 demonstrates that already in the Archaic period there was a uniform tradition about a Boiotian migration from southern Thessaly. By doing so, L. has already demonstrated that, by the criteria of Smith and Hall, the Boiotians were a bona fide ethnic group by this date.

Subsequent chapters consider a plurality of indicia of Boiotian ethnicity, i.e., features that may accompany and support Boiotian ethnic identity but are not constitutive of such an identity. Chapter 3 engages with Boiotia's rich numismatic heritage in the late Archaic and early Classical period. Drawing on T.H. Nielsen's recent work on the so-called Arkadikon issues, L. argues that those exceptional early- to mid-5th-century coins (probably minted in Tanagra) bearing the legend BOI or BOIO are more likely festival issues than true federal issues. Individual cities routinely minted coins in Boiotia in this period, and L. unpacks the implications of the use of common types: The Boiotian cut-out shield simultaneously recalled the iconography of the better-established Aigina turtles, while creating an implicit association with Ajax, an Aiakid hero often depicted in contemporary scenes with such a shield. Chapter 4 less successfully explores

the epic character of Boiotian dialect and suggests that Boiotian preservation of Archaizing and epicizing features connected Boiotians to their Homeric past. Dialect and coinage can both be seen as drawing on and mutually reinforcing Boiotian claims to shared descent and territory.

In Chapter 5, L. demonstrates that the ethnics *Boiotios* and *Boiotoi* were used in the 6th and early 5th century in cultic contexts especially, and often associated with Athena (Ptoion, Delphi), and that in no case do the Boiotians seem to express themselves as a political or military *koinon*, but rather as a community of cult. Use of these ethnics by non-Boiotians does not contradict this image. Thus Pindar's awareness that Boiotians were slandered by outsiders as "pigs" reveals that they were regarded as a cultural unit, not a political one. After the middle of the 5th century, however, a shift occurs and the ethnics begin to have a clear political referent (e.g. *SEG* 26.475, a riddling tablet from Olympia). Chapter 6 confronts the evidence that poses the steepest resistance to L.'s thesis, namely the passages of Herodotus and Thucydides that seem to indicate a more formal political organization of Boiotia at the time of the Persian Wars and earlier; L. dismisses such testimony as retrojection (often polemical) of late 5th-century conditions into an earlier context. Koroneia emerges as a turning point when Boiotia was united into a politically and militarily effective union. L. concludes in her final chapter with some broader reflection on how Boiotian ethnogenesis compares with that of the Arcadians and Phokians. An iconographic appendix, bibliography and separate indices of ancient sources and general subjects bring the work to a close.

L.'s thesis is plausible, the argument is relentless and meticulous, and the work as a whole is theoretically circumspect without succumbing to jargon. There is much to commend here, in the first four chapters in particular, which make the positive case for a Boiotian ethnicity and go some way toward describing its chief features. L.'s close readings of authors like Pindar or Thucydides are usually illuminating. Chapter 3 on Boiotian numismatics is also exemplary—"thick description" at its thickest and most revealing. In what emerges as a strong secondary theme, L. persuasively shows how Athenian antipathy impacted external conceptions of Boiotian ethnicity.

There are problems, however, particularly in the later chapters. Some mid-5th-century inscriptions are dated too closely (and conveniently) by letter form. The lack of discussion of Boiotian membership in the Pylaios-Delphic Amphictyony strikes me as a missed opportunity. More seriously, consideration of Boiotian identity often takes place within a context devoid of *Boiotika* (tellingly, there is no map of Boiotia); L. summarily discusses inter-communal rivalry in Late Ar-

chaic–Early Classical Boiotia as indicating the absence of a regional political federation (pp. 182–4), but this was simultaneously the background for the continuing progression of Boiotian ethnogenesis. My deeper concern is that notions of collective identity, ethnicity, and the like are fetishized here. The utility of the Boiotian ethnicity on display in L.’s work is abstract, and it is clear neither how it mattered on a day-to-day level, nor, for example, how distinct a “populous geographic collective mobilized around the chance at acquiring new territory” (pp. 151–2, L.’s description of the Boiotians at the time of their invasion of Athens in 507/6) was from a formal military and political league. [[1]] The prose style and overall bulkiness of the argument, finally, too often reveal its origins as a doctoral dissertation.

These criticisms do not detract from the overall value and usefulness of L.’s work, which represents a significant contribution both to scholarship on ethnicity in Greek antiquity and Boiotian studies in general.

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[[1]] On this point, mention should be made of the recent, very preliminary publication of a fragmentary Archaic columnar monument from Thebes inscribed with a dedication (which came to light too late for L. to take note of) likely recording a ‘Theban’ perspective on the crucial events of 507/6 (*SEG* 54.518; *BullÉp.* 2006, no. 203). In Athenian perspective, these northern invaders were simply [ἔθνεα Βοιωτῶν] (*IG* 1³ 501, supplemented by *Hdt.* 5.77).