

Hans Beck, Kostas Buraselis and Alex McAuley (eds.), *Ethnos and Koinon: Studies in Ancient Greek Ethnicity and Federalism* (= *Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien* 61). Stuttgart (Franz Steiner Verlag) 2019. 415 pages, 25 b/w ill. ISBN 978-3-515-12217-7.

This volume is another promising outcome of the intensified interest in political and social forms of community that defy the generalization that Greeks lived in *poleis*. Somewhat recently, a similar cast of scholars produced *Federalism in Greek Antiquity* (H. Beck and P. Funke [eds.], Cambridge: 2015), a comprehensive update on the various federal states and/or *ethnê* that dominated the central Greek mainland and coexisted with the *polis* settlements there and elsewhere. As with all such ambitions, further questions were raised, in particular regarding the “fascinating interplay between ethnicity and politics” (8). These questions gave rise to a colloquium on the subject, and finally the volume under review. The title also gives a nod to Emily Mackil’s homonymous chapter in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Malden, MA: 2014).

In their preface and on the back cover, the editors identify three main themes that the 22 contributions address: the influence of ethnicity on federal foreign policy; the influence exerted by one federal organization on others; and the impact of ethnic discourse on the internal organization of an *ethnos*. Mackil fittingly picks up where she left off in the *Companion to Ethnicity* with additional case studies that support a working “typology of ethnic arguments” found in our evidence (12). From these cases she concludes that ethnicity encouraged federal participation and was adaptable to political changes in membership, but was not a decisive argument for participation because it was only “one weapon in a much larger arsenal” for advocates of federalism (25).

The remaining chapters focus on one of the main themes and together cover both the usual suspects—Lokris, Boiotia, Aitolia, Achaia, Lykia, Arkadia, Thessaly, the Chalkidike—as well as federal states or societies less well known (at least to this author): Eubolia, Achaia Pthiotis, the Thesprotians, the Macedonians, and the Aioliens. Particularly insightful is Maria Mili’s reassessment of the Thessalian *ethnos* as a society with flexible institutions rather than a rigidly centralized federal state. Misunderstanding Thessaly as a political federation has often led to unfair condemnations that mistake internal disputes for failure. Another extremely informative piece is the co-authored “Ethnic Constructs from Inside Out: External Policy and the *ethnos* of Achaia Pthiotis,” by Margriet Haagsma, Laura Surtees, and C. Myles Chykerda. The authors include a thoughtful introduction on the distinctions between *ethnos*, *koinon*, and the concept of ethnicity, before pursuing an instrumentalist reading of the evolution of Phthiotic Achaian identity in response to Macedonian, Aitolian, and Thessalian invasions and influences. Their decision to consider literary and archaeological evidence together makes this contribution especially valuable.

Most of the contributions tend to target those specializing in the leagues under study, and so I leave it to the table of contents to recommend how one engages with this book.<sup>1</sup> The remainder of this review will focus on the success of the book as a collaborative effort to address common thematic questions pertaining to federalism and ethnicity. The first thing to point out is the rather light editorial touch hovering across the pages. This impacts not only minor issues like regular typographical errors and lack of consistent formatting, but seems to have prevented any form of productive dialogue among the contributors. Cross-referencing is shockingly rare: the multiple chapters on the Lokrians, Boiotians, Aitolians, and Achaians never acknowledge each other in spite of clear overlaps and, at times, contradictions. For example, A. Schachter conceives of the Boiotians as a composite of several distinct but primordial groups of people (“*Boiotoi* proper,” Minyans, and the descendants of the Mycenaean population). This essentialized and etic understanding of Boiotian ethnicity contrasts with the idea of ethnogenesis (i.e., the fluidity and constructedness of ethnic identity) that underpins R. Post’s discussion of the Boiotian League’s integrative practices.<sup>2</sup> One gets the impression, here and elsewhere, that each contributor simply wished to have their say, unopposed.

This missed opportunity for constructive dialogue is of course also bound up with the lack of a common framework to guide each contribution’s investigation. The example above highlights major theoretical differences on a central concept of the entire work—ethnicity—that is typical of the volume as a whole. Several chapters follow Schachter in ascribing to an essentialized (but undefended) notion of identity. Others repudiate this view in championing constructionism and instrumentalism, but do not engage with their fellow contributors who disagree. Such overall methodological incoherence extends to the concept of federalism as well, with many contributors taking for granted the equivalence of “federal state” and “*koinon*,” while others (especially Mili) adamantly insist on key distinctions. Without an introduction or conclusion to make sense of these unacknowledged disagreements, the editors have left it up to the reader to decide which contributions are correct. In other words, they have produced a book where assumptions (and camps of interpretation) are reinforced rather than challenged.

For those like myself who have engaged extensively with scholarship on ethnicity (both within and beyond the discipline of Classics), the subtitle of this volume will feel a bit misleading. With a handful of important exceptions, the majority of the contributions either fail to advance a significant understanding of how ethnicity functioned within federal states and/or *koina*, or neglect to consider the topic at all. The latter result is true for many of the chapters on foreign policy or the influence of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.steiner-verlag.de/uploads/tx\\_crondavtitel/datei-datei/9783515122177\\_i.pdf](http://www.steiner-verlag.de/uploads/tx_crondavtitel/datei-datei/9783515122177_i.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The missed opportunity here is no doubt the result of the power disparity between an Emeritus Professor (Schachter) and a graduate student (Post), but in these cases it is the role of the editors to shepherd differences in perspective while protecting more vulnerable scholars.

one league on another. The former outcome is largely the product of a commitment to what Haagsma, Surtees, and Myles Chykerda call “primordial” ethnicity. This position leads proponents of the theory, which is always taken for granted rather than justified, to conflate the political, religious, and ethnic, which in turn begs the central question posed by the volume. If we simply assume that joining the Aitolian League meant becoming in some sense ethnically Aitolian, then we are finished investigating the relationship between federal citizenship and ethnic belonging as soon as we have started.

These criticisms do not undermine the truly impressive undertaking that this volume represents. The collection of diverse methodological and national perspectives creates the possibility for healthy debate and future investigations of the role of ethnicity in *ethnos* societies and federal states, and opens up new ways to engage in comparative studies of different *koina*. While I expect that few will read the book in its entirety, chapters relevant to a particular scholar’s interests will become required reading, perhaps even more so than the pertinent chapters in *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, which act more as survey and synopsis, while the contributions in *Ethnos and Koinon* aim to reach novel conclusions. The field of ancient federalism possesses a very promising future indeed.

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