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Dean Peeters, *Shaping Regionality in Socioeconomic Systems: Late Hellenistic – Late Roman Ceramic Production, Circulation, and Consumption in Boeotia, Central Greece (c. 150 BC-AD 700)*. Roman and Late Antique Mediterranean Pottery 18. Pp. 394, 131 color illustrations, 6 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress 2023. ISBN: 978180327219 paperback; ISBN: 9781803272207 e-book, paperback £ 60.

The publication of Dean Peeters' ambitious monograph is timely,³ seeing that regions and 'micro-regions' in antiquity are attracting increasing scholarly interest.⁴ It is based on the author's recent Ph.D. thesis from the University of Cologne,⁵ and he explains in the introduction that its aim is 'to highlight and explain the shaping of socioeconomic diversity in Boeotia (Central Greece) from c. 150 BC to AD 700' (p. 2), defining two central research questions: 1) How did local and regional economies look, work from within, and link into larger socioeconomic networks and systems? And 2) How were differences in the workings and development of economies and communities shaped in space and time? To come up with answers, Peeters looks to new data provided by archaeology, and in particular to pottery studies, which are in his view capable of throwing 'interesting lights on locally-anchored and socially-embedded economies, socioeconomic networks, and agency by extension' (p. 4). This is the central premise of the volume, which builds on the author's meticulous evaluation of ceramic evidence from the Boeotia Project, which is – somewhat curiously – only introduced to the reader later.⁶ Since its inception in 1978 this groundbreaking project has surveyed an impressive 80 km², i.e. about 3% of Boeotia,⁷ leaving 97% of its territory and about two thirds of its ancient city states unexplored, including Thebes, its capital. In view of this, the

author's constant projection of his conclusions to Boeotia as a whole seems overly optimistic.

The Introduction is otherwise devoted to discussions of themes such as globalisation, connectivity and integration, and Peeters makes clear that he agrees with the scholarly tendency to view modern and ancient economies as 'complex economic systems' and argues that we should employ a 'bottom-up' approach and focus on "more indigenous" factors and processes that were running on the 'micro' and 'meso-levels' of such systems' (p. 5) to better understand the factors involved. He also discusses the concept of regionality, which is at the core of his study, quoting a definition suggested by the geographer Peter Haggett in his standard work 'Geography: A Modern Synthesis from 1979: 'any tract of the earth's surface with characteristics, either natural or of human origin, which makes it different from the areas that surround it'. One searches in vain for a definition of the term 'local'.⁸

The monograph's first three chapters expand on some of the issues already touched on in the Introduction and set the scene for what is to follow. Chapter 1 is a detailed review of old and new theories about the nature of ancient economies, followed by a closer examination of regionality, in which Peeters specifies three types of regions that are essential to his analyses: the formal, the functional and the perceptual. He next turns to the so-called 'New Regional Geography', arguing that regions are social constructs, which are fluid in space and time. Chapter 2 is devoted to the geographical setting of the investigation with a special focus on the boundaries, landscapes, geology, vegetation and socio-ecological interactions of the areas in and around the nucleated settlements at Thespieae, Askra (including the Valley of the Muses), Hyettos and Tanagra, which were surveyed by the Boeotia Project. Chapter 3 offers a detailed account of the history of Boeotia, and Chapter 4 is concerned with the 'urban development, non-urban settlement patterning and demography' (p. 53) of the survey areas together with a discussion of their demography.

The two next chapters focus on issues associated with the interpretation of pottery from archaeological projects, in particular surveys.⁹ Chapter 5 analyses the notion of pottery as a proxy through which we may gain a better understanding of certain aspects of ancient economies, and Chapter 6 usefully synthesizes issues involved in

³ See also Peeters 2021.

⁴ Cf. for instance Lund 2015; Ballmer et al. (eds) 2018; Harpster 2021; Pirson et al. (eds) 2024, and two conferences in 2025: <https://www.dainst.blog/transpergmikro/cfp-city-and-micro-region/>.

⁵ *Shaping regionality in complex economic systems. Late Hellenistic-Late Roman pottery production, circulation, and consumption in Boeotia (c. 150 BCE-700 CE)*, completed in the winter semester 2020/2021.

⁶ For a brief introduction, see Bes and van der Enden 2024, 9, and <https://www.boeotiaproject.org/>, accessed on the 1st of June 2025.

⁷ <https://www.boeotiaproject.org/>.

⁸ Cf. Lund 2015, 44.

⁹ See now also Peeters et al. 2024.

the processing of survey pottery, departing from procedures used by the Boeotia project. The author also addresses several other issues of a more general nature, including terminology, functionality, reuse, chronology and distribution.

In chapters 7 to 13 attention shifts to the concrete evidence for pottery production and consumption in the survey areas. Chapter 7 is concerned with the identification of pottery manufacture at Thespieae, Askra and the Valley of the Muses, Hyettos, Tanagra and their hinterlands, based mainly on (in)direct evidence (wasters and moulds), but in the case of Tanagra also on direct evidence in the form of kilns. Using these sources of information – and in the case of Thespian fabrics following the lead of Rinse Willet¹ – Peeters painstakingly defines the fabrics and vessel forms manufactured in each of the four areas. This part of the book can now be supplemented by a recent paper by Philip Bes and Mark van der Enden that deals with evidence for pottery manufacture at Koroneia, another site surveyed by the Boeotia Project.²

In Chapter 8, the results so far are put to the test by means of X-Ray Fluorescence spectrometry, and it is concluded that the fabric groups identified by macroscopy ‘are plotted relatively consistent in the plots of major- and trace elements’ (p. 142) with the ‘Tanagran fabrics’ [turning] ‘up the most distinguishable in the plots’ (162), whereas ‘Koroneian, Thespian, and Askran fabrics appear to be hard to distinguish, on the basis of the applied method’, which Peeters sensibly explains by ‘the identified places of ceramic production at Askra and Thespieae’ {being} ‘only situated c. 7 km from each other’ (p. 166). In Chapter 9, building on these findings, he concludes that the evidence for ceramic production ‘is most convincing for [the periphery] of urban centres and their near surroundings’, though ‘the situation at Askra and Thespieae seems to be different’, since the evidence for ceramic production there was found inside the site or in the case of Thespieae the *kastro*. He hints at the possibility that the reason might be that most of the evidence for pottery production at the latter sites dates from the Late Roman period.³

Chapters 10 to 14 focus on the ‘local’ and imported pottery. Chapter 10 introduces the reader to the range of indigenous and imported ceramics circulating in the four survey areas, beginning with

an examination of a (likely) Boeotian provenance, which comprises the fabric groups identified in the previous chapters plus three ‘Boeotian’ fabrics, which cannot yet be ascribed with certainty to a particular production centre. The author goes on to survey the range of imported table wares and transport amphorae, and from there to an analysis of the circulation and consumption of ceramics in Thespieae and the valley of the Muses (in Chapter 11), Hyettos and its hinterland (Chapter 12) and Tanagra and its hinterland (Chapter 13). The results are compared and patterns suggested in Chapter 14.

In the concluding Chapter 15, Peeters brings the results together and attempts to disentangle the ways ‘in which geographical positioning, interactions, and links in larger networks shaped local economic systems and the ceramic data’ (p. 323). He begins by examining how the agricultural orientation of the ancient economies is reflected in the ceramic record and proceeds to a description of the differences and similarities in the ceramic record of the four survey areas. He acknowledges that ‘it is from my point of view clear that it is hard to approach ‘economic performance’ solely on the basis of ceramic data’ (p. 326), and concludes ‘that geographical factors in some ways ‘mattered’ and will have influenced the circulation/consumption of goods’ but with the proviso that ‘it is too simplistic to unravel the dynamics underlying ceramic circulation: it was not geographical positioning, but people, that moved goods from one place to the other’ (p. 331). The author finds elements of the three types of regions (the formal, the functional and the perceptual) reflected in the ceramic record but admits that ‘a fully-fledged exploration of such regions is hard on the basis of archaeological and historical evidence’ (p. 344). Peeters next introduces the koine concept (p. 345–351),⁴ though without fully succeeding in clarifying how this is relevant to his quest, and is in the end more inclined to speak of ‘micro-regions’ than regions (p. 352), emphasizing the considerable variety within the territory of Thespieae and noting that the circulation of certain imported table wares ‘might have been skewed towards the urban centres’ and that ‘the intensity of interaction between the Tanagrike in southeastern Boeotia and sites on Euboea, in Attica, and the Aegean provides a tangible example of an area that might well be characterized as a functional region that is larger than certain formal regions, such as city territories’.

¹ Willet 2012.

² See Bes and van der Enden 2024. The authors announce (9 note 2) that ‘a small quantity of kiln slag and vessel wasters was identified during the restudy of the finds from Haliartos’.

³ See also Bes and van der Enden 2024, 15.

⁴ van der Enden 2013, Lund 2015, 203; Laftsidis 2019 and Lund 2022.

Peeters has done a fine job of analysing the production and circulation of ceramics in the four areas surveyed by the Boeotia Project. He is evidently not someone who is liable to leap at easy solutions to complex problems and seems more at ease describing the socioeconomic diversity in Boeotia than explaining its causes. He tackles a myriad of issues and does so with such an impressive command of the scholarly literature, though some readers might lose their way through the monograph's verbose and at times repetitive passages, not to speak of digressions such as the lengthy discursion on *proxenia* in Chapter 15 (p. 333-342). Hopefully, this will not be the case, for the monograph has much to offer to archaeologists and historians with an interest in ancient economies.

Ceramologists have for generations meticulously described, classified and studied the abundant ceramic material from field projects in the Mediterranean, a process so time-consuming and laborious, that scholars specializing in other branches of ancient history – and even classical archaeologists themselves – have been left wondering if the results are worth the effort. Recent advances in ceramic research, not least our understanding of ceramic distribution patterns and networking theories demonstrate that we are well on our way to quell such scepticism.⁵ The volume under review shows that the same is beginning to hold true for a regional approach to pottery studies, though we are not quite there yet.

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⁵ See, for instance Massar 2022 and De Mitri 2023.