

NINO LURAGHI: *The Ancient Messenians. Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-85587-7. XIV, 389 pp., 10 plates and 8 figures. GBP 60, USD 120.

The study of ethnic identity and collective memory has been traditionally a field for sociologists and anthropologists. However, during the past few decades, scholars of ancient history have become interested in the subject within the framework of Greek and Roman antiquity. In his book, Nino Luraghi engages in this scholarly discussion by offering a comprehensive study of the ancient Messenians, their history and the way they identified themselves ethnically in relation to other Greeks, and later, to Romans. Ancient Messenia offers an interesting case study for the examination of the construction of ethnic identity since its history is quite peculiar: the concept of Messenians as an ethnic group is known already from Homeric poetry, but Messenia as an independent polity came to exist only after 369 BC, when Epaminondas liberated from Spartan rule the area of the south-western Peloponnese called Messenia, and its inhabitants living to the west of the Taygetos range. Thus, Messenian identity emerged later than most of the other ethnic identities among the Greek people.

In his work, Luraghi covers the whole history of the Messenians, starting from the Bronze Age and finishing with the third century AD, taking into account the populations both in the Peloponnese and elsewhere in continental Greece, as well as in Sicily. His thesis is to show how the Messenians in different times "construed, interpreted and transmitted, by ways of stories, rituals, and other symbolic practices, representations of their shared past, of what made of them a specific and recognizable group inside the greater community of the Greeks – and also, how other Greeks reacted to those ideas and contributed, for various reasons, to their shaping" (p. 1).

In Luraghi's study of the Messenian ethnic identity, one central feature arises: the opposition to Sparta. The boundaries that separate an ethnic group from another group of the same order, a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, has a significant role in defining an ethnic identity. For Messenians, separation from the Spartans came to be the crucial feature of their ethnic identity. Hostility between neighbouring *poleis* is not at all unheard of in ancient Greek contexts, but in the case of Messenians, it had more complex and deeper connotations than usual. During the early archaic age, the area of Messenia fell under Spartan rule after one or possibly two wars, in ancient history known as the First and Second Messenian Wars. From the eighth century BC until the liberation of Messene by Epaminondas in 369 BC, Messenia remained the western part of the *Lakonike*, occupied by *perioikoi* and Helotized Messenians. Thus, it is natural that Messenians and Spartans shared many cultural features. However, after an earthquake in the Peloponnese in the 460s BC, a revolt broke out in the area of Mount Ithome, around the city of Ithome/Messene. The rebels identified themselves as the offspring of the original Messenians, thus placing a strong mark of an ethnic conflict on the revolt. This rebellion lasted for ten years, but it took another hundred for Messenia to become a free polity. The liberation of Messenia was a result of a favourable historical context, and a part of the Theban scheme to subdue the Spartan polity once and for all. The idea of the Messenian identity came to be the cornerstone of the new polity, of which the inhabitants were the *perioikoi* and helots of western *Lakonike*, as well as probably people from other parts of the Greek world that claimed to be of Messenian origin. The legend of the Messenian exile after the First and Second Messenian Wars and the subsequent return of the original population after 369 BC had a strong part in the

construction of Messenian history and ethnic identity. Cohesion came to be the problem for the new polity of Messene: the way that the Messenian past was articulated during the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods clearly reflected the attempt of the *polis* of Ithome/Messene to express its dominance in the area. The opposition to Sparta remained the main characteristic of the Messenian identity for centuries. However, Roman rule slowly changed the function of Messenian identity. During the Imperial period, linking themselves to the tradition of Messenian *epos* was just one of the ways for the powerful families to claim social superiority in the community and in the empire.

The book is divided into eleven chapters. In the introduction, Luraghi gives the theoretical and methodological background to his study. Chapter 2 outlines the historical timespan of the work, focussing on the political and ethnic separation between Messenia and Sparta. Chapters 3 to 10 discuss in chronological order the history of the Messenians. In the conclusion, the author draws the different aspects of his study together by offering a tentative history of the Messenian identity and its main structural elements. By way of examining archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources, Luraghi draws an interesting and detailed picture of the construction of the ethnic identity of the ancient Messenians throughout the centuries from the Bronze Age to the Imperial era. The number of sources for this kind of comprehensive study naturally is abundant, but the writer handles it with neat accuracy, discussing all the various aspects with careful scrutiny, covering multiple fields of studies related to ancient history. Conclusions at the end of every chapter, as well as short introductions to the questions to be discussed at the beginnings of chapters, make the reading experience enjoyable, as they lead the reader on as well as help to keep track of the large amount of historical data received. An extensive bibliography and detailed indices complete this study, which is of importance to every scholar interested in the history of the Messenians, or more generally, in the notion of ethnic identity in antiquity.

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GARY D. FARNEY: *Ethnic Identity and Aristocratic Competition in Republican Rome*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2007. ISBN 978-0-521-86331-5. XVI, 337 pp. GBP 52, USD 95.

Though questions pertaining to ethnicity have always received their due share of attention among classical scholars, it can be noted that the underlying ideologies for such research have undergone profound changes over the decades. There is a tradition going back to a dark age when racial prejudice held sway, not only in war-torn, militaristic societies with poor democratic traditions, but also in the United States; it is less than one hundred years since Bryn Mawr College professor Tenney Frank infamously identified the influx of foreign (that is, eastern) ethnic elements into Italy as a principal cause for the decline of the Roman civilization ("Race Mixture in the Roman Empire", *AHR* 21 [1915–16] 689–708). Subsequent developments have been affected by colonialism, post-colonialism and, increasingly, by recent experiences of multiculturalism and plurality as well as by current identity issues. As for the main areas of focus, in Greek studies there has been a prominent preoccupation with the cultural demarcation lines between a more or less monolithically perceived Hellenicity and an equally