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### A Review of:

*Bianca Mazzinghi Gori*

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## A Review of: Sammartano, Roberto, 2020. *Alle radici della syngeneia. Parentele etniche nel mondo greco prima della guerra del Peloponneso*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso.

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### Book Details

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### Review

To introduce the theme of his book,<sup>1</sup> Roberto Sammartano opens it with a reference to Édouard Will's work on Dorians and Ionians, published in 1956, which offered a compelling counterargument to the then-prevailing idea of biologically distinct Greek races.<sup>2</sup> By adopting a Weberian notion of ethnic consciousness, Will insisted that the distinctions between *ethne* should be seen as a subjective construction of common ancestry rather than in terms of actual blood-relatedness. According to Sammartano, however, Will went too far in claiming that the differences between Dorians and Ionians are merely a product of fifth-century propaganda connected to the conflict between Sparta and Athens and that ethnic consciousness played no role in the archaic period. Sammartano thus aims to trace the origins of ethnic discourse and kinship diplomacy before appeals to interstate *syngeneia* and *oikeiotēs* became a standard trope with the outburst of the Peloponnesian War. In this way, he intends to compensate for the scarce attention to the archaic period that characterises the studies of Jones on kinship diplomacy and of Patterson on the diplomatic and political use of kinship myths.<sup>3</sup>

The author positions his work within the trend in scholarship started by Jonathan Hall and developed, for instance, by the works of Nino Luraghi.<sup>4</sup> This trend draws on modern anthropological approaches to consider ethnicity as a sociocultural construct and regards ethnic boundaries as flexible and open to negotiations. In this perspective, Sammartano's book aims to reconstruct how and when the boundaries between the two main *ethnē*, the Ionians and the Dorians, were defined. To do so, the author adopts a diachronic perspective and a 'stratigraphic' method, trying to go back to the earliest occurrences of the relevant themes and tracing their development. In opposition to Malkin and

<sup>1</sup> Chapter titles are listed at the end of this review.

<sup>2</sup> Will, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, 1999; Patterson, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Hall, 2002; Luraghi, 2008; 2014.

Fowler, who, according to Sammartano, provide unduly monolithic interpretations of an issue like the relationship between the Dorian and the Heraclidean strands of the Dorian *ethnos*,<sup>5</sup> the author chooses to highlight changes and adaptations rather than impose artificially coherent interpretations to these processes and traditions.

The book is divided into two parts, each consisting of four sections. The first part examines evidence from the archaic period, while the second delves into the development of ethnic and kinship discourse during the first half of the fifth century.

Sammartano begins the first part with a section (1.1) on the Homeric poems, which pay virtually no attention to the theme of ethnic kinship. While *Hellēnes* and *Iones* have a different and limited meaning in Homer (indicating populations located respectively in Southern Thessaly, corresponding to Achaia Phthiotis, and somewhere between Achaia Phthiotis and Attica), the only possible allusions to the canonical ethnic configurations are a reference to the colonisation of Rhodes by Herakles' son Tlepolemos (*Il.* 2.653-70) and to the Dorians living on Crete (*Od.* 19.177). Sammartano analyses both cases, interpreting them as anachronistic projections of the presence of Dorians on the two islands in the poet's own days to the period in which the poems are set.

The following section (1.2) examines the earliest mythic genealogies to determine their implications for ethnic consciousness. The main case study is the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which represents the oldest attested genealogy of ethnic significance: Hellen and his sons, Aiolos, Doros, and Xouthos, and Xouthos' own sons, Ion and Achaïos, clearly serve the function of eponym forefathers. Sammartano here disagrees partially with Martin West on the question of the poem's authorship.<sup>6</sup> While West claims that the whole *Catalogue* is spurious and should be ascribed to an anonymous poet connected to Athens and active around 550-500 BCE, the author believes that some parts probably date back to Hesiod, considering that the special place assigned to Aiolos as first-born among Hellen's sons might be a sign of Hesiod's pride in his Boiotian and Aiolic origins. He nonetheless agrees with the majority of scholars that the genealogy transmitted by the *Catalogue* should be interpreted in the context of the Delphic Amphictyony and its development, reflecting both the initial leading role of southern Thessaly (to which Hellen and his sons were connected) and the increasing influence of Athens (recalled through the role of Kreousa and her son Ion). Concerning the question of the potential origins of kinship diplomacy, Sammartano takes pains to stress that the genealogy should not be read as a form of propaganda for the Amphictyony but rather as a classification of the different communities that took part in it.

The final two sections of the book's first part explore the origins of ethnic discourse concerning the Dorians and Ionians, respectively. In section 1.3, then, Sammartano accurately disentangles the traditions relative to the two mythical matrixes of Dorian identity, the migrations of Doros' descendants on the one hand and the Return of the Heraclids on the other, showing that, despite some later revisions (such as the one of Ephoros), there was no original notion of *syngeneia* between the Dorian and the Heraclid strands of the Dorian *ethnos*. Things are more complicated regarding the Ionians (section 1.4), but Sammartano carefully reconstructs the various stages of the process that led to the gradual expansion of the 'Ionian' ethnonym and the increasing connections with Athenian mythical and historical figures. In this case, too, the author argues that, during the archaic period, no notion of a collective *syngeneia* encompassing all the communities that later came to be identified as

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<sup>5</sup> Malkin, 1994; Fowler, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> West, 1985.

Ionians can be found. Thus, Sammartano's conclusion aligns with the findings of Mac Sweeney on the traditions relative to the Ionian *ethnos*.<sup>7</sup>

The second half of the book begins with a section devoted to the vocabulary of ethnic kinship and, in particular, its first occurrences. The word family of *syngeneia* is predominant in Thucydides and Hellenistic diplomacy but is not employed in this sense in Herodotos, who also avoids using *oikeios*. Instead, Herodotos prefers to use kinship terms like *pateres* or *kasignētoi* or the term *homaimōn*, 'of the same blood'. As Sammartano further reinstates in a later section (2.3), Herodotos prefers to keep the biological and cultural elements distinct. In agreement with other scholars,<sup>8</sup> he highlights that Herodotos sees ethnic identity in dynamic terms, as subject to historical changes, and assigns great importance to contextual factors such as proximity to other peoples. At the same time, he places great value on some forms of ethnic kinship, such as colonial relationships. By employing the metaphor of fathers and sons, Herodotos reveals his implicit assumption that both parties should value and respect the ties between a *polis* and its colonies.

In section 2.2, Sammartano details the various interactions between ethnic discourse and politics in the fifth century, before the Peloponnesian War. Despite a somewhat confusing structure in this part, the lines of argument and the conclusions emerge relatively easily. Sammartano examines the emergence of the discourse of ethnic kinship from Aristagoras' embassy to the Spartans to the first decades of *pentecontaetia* (Hdt. 5.49). On the one hand, the author demonstrates the ultimate weakness of the rhetoric of blood-relatedness when it came to determining political decisions; on the other hand, he presents how Ionians and Dorians gradually came to be perceived as different by nature and potentially opposed to each other. Of particular interest are the subsections focusing on individual poets, including Panyassis of Halikarnassos (2.2.5.1) and Ion of Chios (2.2.5.2). Notably, the final subsection (2.2.7) concerns an inscription from Paros that appears to reflect hostility from the Ionian population of the island toward the Dorians.

The book's final two sections are devoted to Herodotos and Thucydides, respectively. Section 2.3 mainly recapitulates and occasionally expands the analyses and observations scattered in the previous sections concerning Herodotos' attitude towards the theme of ethnic relatedness and opposition. Then, in section 2.4, the author's investigation of this theme in Thucydides' account of the events leading to the Peloponnesian War reveals that the two historians actually have a comparable attitude towards this topic. Although they both believe in the value of solidarity towards related communities and the importance of shared cultural elements, in their perspective, ethnic sentiments were not a determining factor in political decisions.

In the conclusion, Sammartano provides a clarifying summary of the book. He reinstates that, in the archaic period, genealogies were used to classify and account for the various communities that belonged to a particular context; ethnic consciousness existed and was important on a cultural level but did not significantly impact politics and decision-making.

Overall, Sammartano's learned and meticulous study makes a valuable contribution to the debate on ethnicity and its intersections with history, historiography, and literature. Although it does not stand out as particularly original, as other scholars have investigated several aspects in detail,<sup>9</sup> the book

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<sup>7</sup> See Mac Sweeney, 2013; 2017.

<sup>8</sup> See in particular Thomas, 2001, and Vignolo Munson, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> As highlighted above, for instance, the traditions relative to the Ionian *ethnos* had been analysed with comparable results already by Mac Sweeney (2013; 2017); with regard to Herodotos' attitude towards ethnic identity, Sammartano confirms the conclusion reached by Thomas (2001) and Vignolo Munson (2014).

represents a good summary of the state of the art on the development of kinship diplomacy and ethnic discourse in the archaic Greek world. Sammartano's book thus succeeds in filling the gap left by the works of Jones and Patterson with regard to the archaic period by providing a broad overview of the topic and gathering a wide range of sources. Given the nature of the sources, much of the interpretation is bound to remain speculative. Scholars in future might want to read the evidence in different ways and choose to formulate different answers to the questions of the emergence of ethnic feeling and its impact on politics and diplomacy. However, the rich collection of sources and the meticulous investigation make Sammartano's book a good starting point for further enquiries. The author's comprehensive and fine-grained analysis of traditions in the archaic Greek world and his recapitulation of the development of the discourse on ethnicity would be helpful to anyone working on these and related topics.

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