

BOOK REVIEW

Experiencing Dodona. The Development of the Epirote Sanctuary from Archaic to Hellenistic Times. By DIEGO CHAPINAL-HERAS. Berlin, DE and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2021. Pp. xii + 264. Hardback, \$126.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-072751-7.

Ancient Dodona was a sacred locus and oracle of the Epirotes and the Greeks in the heart of the Epirus hinterland, on the periphery of the Hellenadic world. It spans two thousand years of intense human activity from 1600 B.C. to A.D. 400 and has a rich mythological tradition (Trojan War, Flood of Deucalion, Argonaut Campaign etc.). It shows signs of prehistoric cult already in the 13th century B.C., to evolve gradually from the 8th century B.C. onward into the Pan-Hellenic Sanctuary and Oracle of Dodonaean Zeus. In the early Hellenistic period it was embellished with several monumental buildings (Sacred House of Zeus and smaller temples or treasures, bouleuterion and prytaneion, theatre and stadium). At the same time, it became the political center of local tribes, when the Epirote Alliance was formed and subsequently of the federal Epirote League, up until the Roman occupation of Epirus in 168/167 B.C. In Roman times the sanctuary and oracle continued to be active until its abandonment in the 4th century A.D. Although there is international research interest in its various aspects, Dodona still remains quite under-researched. Therefore, every new book about Dodona is always good news.

Chapinal-Heras sets out to describe the evolution of the Epirote sanctuary of Dodona from the less known Archaic and Classical times to the better documented Hellenistic period. The book unfolds across six chapters, opening with an introduction and ending with the conclusions. The second chapter, after the introduction, focuses on the history of Epirus and Dodona in the Archaic and Classical period, touching upon topics of geography and topography, colonisation and cities, tribes and ethne, finds and the monumental building programme of Dodona.

The third chapter proceeds with the Hellenistic period of major changes in Epirus, discussing the Alliance and the League of the Epirotes, the Aeakid dynasty and the monuments of Dodona, reaching up to the Aetolian destruction of

Dodona and the Roman occupation of Epirus. In the fourth chapter issues of the cult are examined along with other rituals and celebrations, relations and contacts with other regions, such as Boeotia, Athens and Olympia. In the fifth chapter an effort is made to detect the communication paths between Dodona and Molossia, as well as their connection with other areas of ancient Epirus to the south and north of Dodona. The sixth chapter deals with the pilgrimages to Dodona on the basis of oracles, inscriptions or philological testimonies through a phenomenological approach to the available evidence. The last chapter, preceding the conclusions, documents the multi-functionality of the sanctuary as religious, political and economic center, but also the function of sanctuaries as managers of various activities (animal husbandry, agriculture, trade etc.).

In his book, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, Chapinal-Heras delves into many topics that relate specifically to Dodona and more broadly to Epirus. His aim is not to analyze them in depth, but to combine their evidence in order to gain insight into Dodona as a dynamic scenery of cultic, political, economic, social or cultural enactments. Finally, what is set as the utmost scope of the study is the exploration of the multi-functionality of the Dodonaean Sanctuary and Oracle by applying a phenomenological approach, which investigates the complex experience of the pilgrim or visitor of Dodona. A problem is observed regarding the transliteration of quite a few Greek terms or place names into English. Minor incorrect details (i.e., page 8: the Epirote Karapanos is referred to as a French scholar; page 11: the lake of Ioannina was formed in the early Holocene, not in the Byzantine times; page 12: Louros and Acheron, not Arachthos, are the nearest main rivers to Dodona; page 16: Ambracia is placed in Epirus, not in Acarnania) do not essentially affect the reasoning of the text.

He advances the previous discussion on treasures instead of temples and identifies the so-called temple of Heracles with the treasure of the Molossians, the so-called temple of Aphrodite with the treasure of the Chaonians, the so-called older temple of Dione with the treasure of the Thesprotians, the so-called newer temple of Dione with the treasure of the Epirote League and, finally, the so-called temple of Themis with the temple of Dione and possibly Aphrodite. Despite the fact that his argument is based on indirect evidence, this main proposition of the book appears to be interesting and establishes Dodona as the great sanctuary of the tribes and ethne of Epirus (equivalent to what Dion was for the Macedonians). He also points out the drastic reduction of dedications during the Hellenistic period, as part of the parallel transformation of Dodona into a political center of the Epirotes. Furthermore, his linking it with smaller peripheral sanctuaries is

interesting. These sanctuaries were intentionally founded on key passages of the Molossian territory, delineating also the boundaries of other smaller tribes.

Chapinal-Heras in his new book succeeds in demonstrating that the journey to Dodona and the return back was an important experience. The experience has to do mainly with the participation of visitors in diverse rituals and activities, from the prayer and the offering of gifts to the more composite divination. At the same time, the awe-evoking natural landscape of Mount Tomaros and the Dodonaean valley in earlier times or of the monumental edifices of the radical 4th century B.C. onwards was also decisive in creating the outside ambience. After all, Dodona is characterised as the oracle of the people, given that the bulk of questions to the oracle were private, but also as a place of exchange and transmission of ideas and knowledge. Dodona was above all a sacred place, where many facets of the cultic, political and economic, social or cultural life of Greek antiquity were manifested, each one of them with distinct targets. Nevertheless, there is still substantial research to be done to clarify these aspects.

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