

BOOK REVIEW

The Kingdom of Priam: Lesbos and the Troad between Anatolia and the Aegean.
By ANEURIN ELLIS-EVANS. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 384. Hardback, \$105.00. ISBN: 9780198831983.

This book is an excellent study of Lesbos and the Troad taken as a coherent region together, primarily of the Hellenistic Period. The history of the Hellenistic Period even for the major states is patchwork and must be assembled from a hodge-podge of sources. The problems therefore for understanding a minor region in this period multiply quickly, and that Aneurin Ellis-Evans has written a readable account of the region through a prodigious number of sources (from numismatics to contemporary folklore) is commendable.

In the Introduction the author contends that Lesbos and the Troad formed a coherent region in the ancient world, using archives from before the Great Exchange of Populations to frame his study. He argues that this symbiosis between the island and the mainland stretched back into antiquity, only interrupted by modern politics. Furthermore, Ellis-Evans argues in favor of regional history at the expense of big history.

Chapter 1 (“Ilion and its Context”) investigates both the boundaries of the Troad and effects the *koinon* of Athena Ilias on Ilion within the wider region. Ellis-Evans usefully defines the Troad against Strabo’s geography of the region, arguing that it was much smaller. He argues that Strabo is a biased source, attempting to make the region conform to Homer. Using numismatic evidence, Ellis-Evans charts Ilion’s rise to regional prominence in the Hellenistic Period and argues that there were two sub-regions of the Troad, a northern one tied to trade through the Bosphorus and a southern one tied to trade south along the coast of Asia Minor.

Chapter 2 (“The Forests of Mt. Ida”) tackles the importance of the dense forests for the Troad and how access to timber shaped regional identity. Ellis-Evans especially relies on Theophrastus’ *Inquiry on Plants* on the Troad (included is an appendix with relevant plant entries). Theophrastus’ focus on timber-trees demonstrates the unique, local economy whereas olive-oil production was not

unique. He further shows how the local timber economy integrated the forested highlands with the lowland cities.

Chapter 3 (“Horse Husbandry and Empire in the Middle Scamander Valley”) examines the effects of an Achaemenid royal herd of war horses in the Troad. This unpersuasive chapter should have either been scrapped or condensed as an appendix. There is a single reference to the herd (Plut. *Life of Eumenes* 8.3-4). Consequently, the chapter gathers knowledge about horse herding from elsewhere (it was expensive and burdensome). Ellis-Evans, using numismatic evidence, argues for the rise and fall of a few cities in the Troad. He has no evidence to connect these changes to the herd (did it exist?). It would be unsurprising if the herd affected the Troad, but it is difficult to accept Ellis-Evans’s specific argument at face value.

Chapter 4 (“The Mytilenaian Peraia and the Aktaian Cities”) turns to investigate Ellis-Evans’s contention that Lesbos and the Troad formed a coherent region. He examines Mytilene’s *peraia* in the Troad and Athens’ decision to sever the *peraia* from Mytilene’s control in the aftermath of its revolt. Against the consensus, Ellis-Evans argues (persuasively) that the cities of the *peraia* were not city-states, but rather Athens tried to make them city-states for its own purposes. Again, there is essentially no evidence for the domineering relationship that the author argues for Mytilene having over its *peraia*, but he makes a stronger case (using numismatic evidence) for the likelihood of an extractive relationship.

Chapter 5 (“The Hellenistic Koinon of the Lesbians”) continues the investigation of Lesbian identity through the *koinon*. Pretenses are made that this chapter covers the 7th – 2nd centuries, but aside from passing remarks about Alcaeus and some investigation of the Classical Period, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to the Hellenistic Period. While much of the *koinon*’s text is preserved, there is again little direct evidence for its effects on Lesbians. Ellis-Evans applies what is known from *koina* elsewhere in the Hellenistic Period to interpret evidence on Lesbos, supplemented by local numismatic evidence. An appendix includes the *koinon*’s text.

Chapter 6 (“Aiolian Land”) examines Mytilene’s *peraia* in the Hellenistic and the Roman Periods. Here Ellis-Evans traces claims to Aiolian-ness and how and whether it helped to knit together Lesbian identities with those on the mainland. In particular, he argues that claims the Mytilenian elite made had to accommodate Roman domination and that Mytilenian claims could not have been seen as going against Rome.

Overall, this is an excellent volume that wrings a great deal of substance out of very little direct evidence. In particular, I learned much about how numismatics informs historical reconstructions. However, these are also some of the book's weaknesses. Because of this aporia, Ellis-Evans uses external theories or frameworks to interpret what little evidence is available. This material ranges from the Bronze Age to the 19th century CE, and no one can master all of that. Unsurprisingly, the effects can be uneven. Fitting my own particular interests, I note naïve use of the Ahhiyawa letters (22); methodologically unsound use of folktale narratives (59-61) and an odd overview of the scholarship on Mediterranean and Aegean islands (156). Moreover, framing is a frequent problem with this book. Most glaringly, the title suggests that the Archaic Period will form a substantial part of the book, not helped by the blurb: "Through a diverse series of case studies focusing on the regional history ... from the seventh century BC down to the first century AD." This book is really a history of the Hellenistic Period, with brief forays into the Classical and Roman periods. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this, but by framing the book incorrectly it sets false expectations even when the scholarship itself is exemplary; indeed, Ellis-Evans should have embraced his work, for he has surely done yeoman's work with this study and ought to be applauded.

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