

Why an “irregular koinon” on Eubolia?

In Larsen's 1968¹ work on Greek federal states the Eubolian League took up just a few pages. By 2015 the situation had improved somewhat with Knoepfler² able to devote a whole chapter to the island's league. Yet still the inclusion of the phrase the “irregular koinon” in his title points to the fragmentary nature of both our evidence and the league itself. However, the study of this lesser known federal organisation can offer insights into one of the main political developments of the late Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Eubolia was one of the areas of the ancient Greek world which experimented with federalism. Over these centuries the Eubolian League appears to be one of the more intermittent of the federal states and unlike a number of better attested examples much of the debate is around if and when the league existed. From the time of the island's revolt against Athenian domination in the late fifth century down to the Roman occupation Eubolia's various *poleis* showed a fluctuating level of cooperation which at times involved the creation of a federal league while at other times any closer bonds dissolved.

My aim is to determine what lay behind the irregular nature of the Eubolian league. Eubolia had the misfortune to be an area of strategic interest to the larger states that shaped political developments in the Aegean from the time of the Athenian empire onwards. At times more powerful states hindered the league's development while at others they brought about its formation dependant upon their own interests. Beyond outside pressure, internal factors may also have played a role and we can not discount the possibility that a lasting federal league was difficult to establish because there was not enough desire for it. Despite their shared island the communities of Eubolia were geographically separated and attached to different ethnic identities. My work will assess the relative importance of the interaction with outside powers and ideas and expressions of ethnic identity in the formation of federal states. These factors can explain why despite periods of federal organisation and shared activity and identity the Eubolian league remained an “irregular koinon”.

Fragmentary as it is the history of the Eubolian League will be able to tell us about the factors which contributed to the formation of federal states in the ancient Greek world.

1 Larsen, 1968

2 Knoepfler, 2015

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