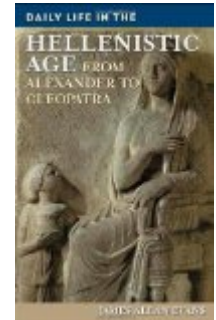


**James Allan Evans.** *Daily Life in the Hellenistic Age: From Alexander to Cleopatra.*

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. Illustrations. 272 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8061-4255-5.



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James Allan Evans's *Daily Life in the Hellenistic Age: From Alexander to Cleopatra* is a collection of brief case studies on Hellenistic society, culture, economy, art, and religion. Evans separates these areas of emphasis into an introduction and sixteen chapters. He also offers one appendix on the reins of the Hellenistic kings from the three main successor states: the Seleucid Empire, Ptolemaic Egypt, and Antigonid Macedon. These three kingdoms, which were the heirs to the massive empire of Alexander the Great, are the focus of this book. Additionally, Evans provides a map showing the extent of the three successor states at the near height of their power in the third century BCE. Helpful to nonspecialist readers will be the chronology section on Greek events from 408 BCE to 27 BCE and the small glossary of important terms and people. Evans also includes a section of pictures of interesting examples of Hellenistic architecture.

In the introduction, Evans encapsulates the political landscape of the Hellenistic world in a brief discussion of Philip II, the Persian Empire,

Alexander's conquests, the formation of the successor kingdoms, and the decline of those kingdoms in the face of growing Roman power and influence in the early second century BCE. The focus of the book "is the social, cultural, and economic life of the man on the street experienced in this age, created by Alexander" (p. xxx). Although Evans recognizes expansion and advancement in each of these categories, his underlying emphasis is on the general continuity of life for the vast majority of people in the Hellenistic period.

Chapter 1, "The Landscape of the Hellenistic World," offers geographical background on the diverse regions occupied by Greek settlers and conquerors. "The Features of the Hellenistic City-State," the second chapter, introduces the harsh economic realities of ancient Greek cities and their organization. Evans demonstrates that in the Hellenistic period cities became larger and more diverse. In the following chapter, "The Dwelling Houses," he attempts to bring the Greek home to

life through an investigation of archaeological evidence.

In chapter 4, "Clothing and Fashion," Evans briefly illustrates how Greeks used clothes to signify status and nationality, while in chapter 5, "Education," he discusses how Greek society used education to reinforce Greek cultural practices and ideas, such as the reading of Homer or physical contest in the gymnasium. Chapter 6, "Social Life," investigates sections of Herondas and Polybius in order to demonstrate social relationships between citizens. The following chapter, "City and Country Living," focuses on class distinction and slavery.

Evans emphasizes the heightened equality, power, and education of women outside of classical Athens in chapter 8, "Hellenistic Women." "Making a Living," the ninth chapter, addresses the vibrant trade networks and the growth in banking found in the Hellenistic world, with particular emphasis on Ptolemaic Egypt. Chapter 10, "Eating and Feasting," discusses the importance of communal meals to Greek society, while chapter 11, "Sports and Spectacle," focuses on the Greek love of festivals, games, and celebrity athletes. In "The Theater," chapter 12, Evans explains the importance and popularity of theater to Greek society. He argues that in the crowds increasingly preferred the performance of comedies.

In chapter 13, "Hellenistic Kingdoms," Evans investigates the military and religious roles of the Hellenistic absolute monarchs. These kings were supposed to win battles, rule as gods, and champion Greek culture through building projects and patronage. He also briefly discusses Jewish resistance to Greek rule. The next chapter, "Religion," examines how in the Hellenistic period, the divine world of Greece, with its traditional Olympian gods, expanded to include immigrant gods and cults from conquered lands. It also introduces the buildings, rituals, and festivals of pagan Greek worship. "Science, Technology, and Medicine," the fifteenth chapter, charts the advances made in

pure and applied science and machinery during this period. Research into the nature of the human body also expanded at this time. Evans calls it a "golden age for science and technology" (p. 172). The final chapter, "The Persistence of Hellenistic Culture," emphasizes the broader, more diverse intellectual horizons of the third century BCE in the Hellenistic world. Although Evans argues that "this atmosphere became chillier" in the second century BCE with the rise of Rome to Mediterranean hegemony, he argues that the Romans did not replace Hellenistic culture (p. 176). Instead, it flourished under Roman patronage for centuries.

Evans's work covers a vast amount of subjects over a large span of time in a short amount of space. He only accomplishes this by limiting details and simplifying arguments. Some chapters are ridiculously short and should have been condensed into other chapters. For example, chapter 4 is less than four pages long. Generally, the book is a well-organized, easily readable overview of Hellenistic life; however, its format severely limits its usefulness to anyone outside of the nonspecialist reader.

A few specific items need attention. Firstly, he makes too many obvious comments about how the Hellenistic world and modern Western society are different. Secondly, on page vii, Evans states that Alexander IV was murdered at the age of twelve. We only know that he was murdered sometime after the pact of 311 BCE. Meanwhile, he was born in August 323 BCE. Thus, Alexander was more likely thirteen at the time of his death, and in fact, some argue that he could have been fourteen years old.<sup>[1]</sup> Next, Evans's Hellenistic chronology also seems potentially problematic. He includes the years 408-27 BCE. Whether or not we can call the events from 408-323 BCE "Hellenistic" is highly debatable. Further, Evans calls the translation of polis as "city-state" inadequate. Yet he offers no alternative and continues to use the term "city-state" throughout.

The largest shortcoming of the book by far is its almost complete lack of citations. In almost two hundred pages, covering dozens of areas of study, there are only fifty-two short citations. Evans's bibliography contains numerous works of interest, but almost none of these works make it into his notes. He too often leaves the reader unable to check the source of his information. There is little room in this study for academic debates or competing scholarly opinions. The lack of citations is continually frustrating. Further, there is no preface explaining why these decisions were made and to what purpose. Evans is a well-published and accomplished scholar so this notable weakness in his work is disappointing.

For these reasons, a nonspecialist audience must have been the primary target of this book. It will appeal only to those concerned with a rapid, rather cosmetic understanding of social, cultural, economic, artistic, and religious history in the Hellenistic world. Perhaps it might prove useful in an undergraduate course if it is supplemented with source materials and lectures. The unacceptable state of the citations makes this work of questionable use to graduate students and scholars.

Note

[1]. See James Romm, *Ghost on the Throne: The Death of Alexander the Great and the War for Crown and Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 315.

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