

EAGER TO BE ROMAN

MADSEN (J.M.) *Eager to be Roman. Greek Response to Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia*. Pp. x + 166, ills, maps. London: Duckworth, 2009. Cased, £50. ISBN: 978-0-7156-3753-1.

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This is the book not of but derived from the thesis: readable, not drowning in footnotes, and concise. It is based on written sources (literary and epigraphic), though it might have benefited from a consideration of what light archaeological evidence of acculturation could cast on its principal theme. It eschews not just the old view that provincial Greeks were clearer in their own identity and background than Gauls or Britons, and also possessed of a highly developed and sophisticated civilisation and thus less attracted to things Roman and less affected by Roman influence (F. Haverfield, M. Rostovtzeff), but also more recent acknowledgements that Greeks partook of some aspects of Roman cultural and civic life and that, pragmatically, members of the Greek elite pursued careers in the Roman administra-

tion, or even that the adoption of various elements of Roman (material) culture was either effected without a compromise of cultural identity (G. Woolf) or involved some political and social affiliation with the Roman world but not a general self-identification as Roman (S. Swain). Rather, it argues that Greek intellectuals (as M. terms them jarringly) and members of the local elite were actually keen to identify themselves as Roman and that imperial connections and the adoption of attributes of Roman culture lent them lustre and prestige in the eyes of fellow Greeks. The focus is on the response to Roman rule of the inhabitants of Pontus and Bithynia, i.e. the Black Sea coast of Asiatic Turkey as far as Amisus and its hinterland, from the end of the Mithradatic wars to Caracalla's edict of A.D. 212; and on a consideration of what is meant by 'identity' (how changeable?; how porous?) to eyes ancient and modern, in which M. draws on Amartya Sen's model of plural identities (pp. 4–5): 'individuals as well as groups were members of various collectivities at the same time, and therefore defined themselves in several different ways according to the context ... [and] community-based identity need not be the principal, dominant or even only factor by which individuals define themselves'. There was no legal need to opt between being Roman and Greek, leaving 'the opportunity to be Greek and at the same time feel a sense of belonging to the community of Roman citizens ...' (p. 6); whilst there was also a Greek communitarian identity, largely *polis*-based.

There are five chapters, plus introduction and conclusion: 'A Governor at Work', being Pliny the Younger, provides us with a Roman angle to open the discussion and balance the provincial views later encountered; 'Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia', including emperor-worship, temples, Greek autonomy and the *polis* constitution of Pontus and Bithynia, assesses how far Roman rule affected local life, how much or how little Rome interfered, and how far instead it focussed on formalising the connections between local elites and itself. 'Greeks in the Roman World' – Greek influence on Roman politics, Greeks in Roman service (the why and the how) and Roman Greeks – looks at those who left the province to forge careers in imperial service; 'Turning Roman in Pontus and Bithynia' – becoming legally Roman, Roman names, status and identity, Greek pragmatism and Roman identity, etc. – at those who stayed, and the changing nature of what it meant to be Roman. 'Responses to Roman Rule' are those of Dio Chrysostom, characterised as a 'bitter patriot', Arrian, 'a Roman authority and a nostalgic Greek' and Cassius Dio, 'a Roman from Bithynia' – i.e. critics and/or opponents, but not necessarily opponents on account of their Greekness.

How much was pragmatism, i.e. keenness to get on, and how much enthusiasm (and not just for Roman technology)? 'Had there been a general resistance to joining the Roman world of politics, it is difficult to explain why so many Greeks suddenly appeared in the Roman political and administrative arenas at a time [second century A.D.] when Greek culture was the subject of increased interest on the part of the elite community in particular' (p. 129).

The conclusion is that those Greeks who wanted to become 'Roman', or at least move from the status of subjects to membership of the empire's ruling community, often had to work hard at it – through long military service, for example; and that it was eminently possible to have a successful career in the imperial administration without giving up one's Greek identity: that a deficiency of much modern scholarship has been to adopt a 'solitarist' approach to identity, thus oversimplifying things, and giving priority to community-based identity – belonging to the 'Greek world' – over the manifold competing or serial identities manifest in social and

cultural connections and institutional affiliations, of which several examples are presented. Any detailed investigation of individuals in societies ancient and modern will reveal a web of connections through which an identity is forged. Which aspects are primary and which subsidiary? It is often less a case of skin, flesh and core than of peeling an onion.

Consideration of the dangers of imposing ‘a modern value-system on a complicated ancient nexus’ (p. 134) leads this reviewer on to the parallel terminological and conceptual problems of colonisation, Hellenisation and Romanisation, a word avoided in the book. What do they mean? – different things to different people, then and since – and are they useful analytical tools? We are not two-dimensional and never have been; nor are our societies. In the pursuit of career and status in the employ of an alien empire, might we not look for comparisons at Greeks in the Ottoman empire or Baltic ‘barons’ in the service of the Swedish and then Russian empires and how they accommodated various questions of identity, culture and loyalty – all before the onset of the horizon-shrinking nineteenth-century nationalism and the convulsions it brought about which forced people to choose an identity or have one prefabricated for them? Multi-national empires appear alien only when viewed through the prism of the modern (pseudo-) ‘nation-state’, itself the alien interloper. As we rediscover our own essential plurality, so now we seek out echoes in our predecessors.

This book is highly recommended. It allows theory its due but keeps its own feet firmly on the ground.

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