

Introduction

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen

Domination

In 89 BC, Roman legionaries intervened in the Black Sea region to curb the ambitions of Mithridates VI of Pontos. Over the next two centuries, the Roman presence on the Black Sea coast was slowly, but steadily increased. The annexation of Pontus and Bithynia as a Roman province (63 BC), the transformation of the Bosporan Kingdom into a client power (42 BC) and the establishment of Roman garrisons in the Crimea (AD 64) mark stages in this protracted process. The campaigns of Trajan in Dacia and Armenia (AD 105-114) represent the last great effort of Rome to bring the Pontic area under her sway, and the *Periplus* of Arrian (AD 130) a stock-taking of Roman domination at its greatest extent, when Rome controlled, directly or indirectly, more than two-thirds of the Black Sea shoreline. Unlike the Mediterranean, the Black Sea never became a Roman lake. Even at the height of Roman power, political control was enforced through a variety of mechanisms, from outright annexation to alliances with native rulers, the details of which have not always found their way into the historical record.

The range of different political and diplomatic instruments used by Rome in the Pontic region reflect her underlying reluctance to undertake a permanent annexation by military means. With large numbers of regular soldiers already committed to the defence of the Rhine, the Danube and Syria, Rome had no need for yet another frontier in the Pontos, nor a *limes* in the Caucasus. They also, however, reflect the variety of political, geographical and demographical realities that faced Rome on her first encounters with the Black Sea region – where the nomads of the north Pontic steppe zone and the mountain pastoralists of Anatolia coexisted with the Greek-speaking citizens of the coastal cities, ancient Milesian colonies whose inhabitants took pride in their urbanity and civic heritage.

The advent of Rome brought immediate and tangible changes in local power relations, taxation, local administration, to take a few examples. Over time, it entailed innumerable minor and major changes that were not limited to the sphere of economy and politics, nor to the districts under Roman rule. The new order of things came to permeate social life, religion, lifestyle, architecture, language and patterns of consumption.

Romanisation

At least since the time of Theodor Mommsen, *Romanisierung* or 'Romanisation' has been used as a convenient catch-all term to describe these changes. Though the term has remained in use for over a century, its content and implications have changed. The historiography of Roman expansion and its consequences offer striking proof of Benedetto Croce's dictum that in the last analysis "all history is contemporary history". In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Roman expansion in Italy was viewed as a "natural" historical progress analogous to the formation of modern European nation-states; Roman expansion outside Italy as the "natural" domination of a higher race analogous to the formation of the European overseas empires; and Romanisation as the "natural attraction of a higher form of life" (Rostovtzeff 1927). For "Roman", read Russian, Dutch, British or French; for "barbarian", read Algerian, Indian, Indonesian, Cossack or African.

To most thinkers of the early twentieth century, even the more profound ones, imperialism was if not justified, at least compensated by the advantages in terms of law, order, morals and religion imposed by the new masters on their willing or unwilling subjects. Continued European domination under "mandated" colonial administration, not self-government, was the League of Nations' gift to the liberated territories of the vanquished German and Ottoman Empires. The former subjects of the Austrian Empire, on the other hand, were allowed to govern themselves; but then of course they were Europeans.

As with European expansion, the justification of Roman expansion was rarely called into question, and Romanisation was seen to justify Roman dominance or at the very least, as a beneficial spin-off effect of Roman expansion. In the graphic formulation of Francis Haverfield, the Roman empire was an oasis of peace and order; outside its borders "roared the wild chaos of barbarism" (Haverfield 1924).

The comfortable assumptions on which European imperialism was based were already called into question during the inter-war period and definitely shattered by World War II. The breakup of the colonial empires had begun during the war, gained momentum in the 1950s and was largely complete by the mid-sixties. This did not, however, translate into a reappraisal of Roman imperialism. On the contrary, Rostovtzeff's *Rome*, firmly rooted in the ideological perceptions of pre-1914 Russian liberalism, was still being reprinted and translated in the 1960's. To solve this seeming paradox, it needs to be remembered that in its early post-war phase, decolonisation was largely imposed on the European powers by the two new superpowers, both strongly anti-colonialist (though for very different reasons). What eventually made the intellectual establishment of western Europe turn its back on colonialism, however, was the rise of local resistance movements from the mid-1950s on-

wards, often led by an educated and Europeanised elite who could no longer be dismissed as “barbarians”.

Resistance

At the same time, the success of the colonial resistance movements inspired a new interest in the historical sociology of resistance and revolution. The case for the existence of hitherto-overlooked movements of social revolt in history was forcefully made by Eric Hobsbawm’s *Bandits* (1971) with the claim that those whom history has recorded as brigands, bandits, robbers and vandals were motivated by a wider social or political agenda. Whatever the merits of Hobsbawm’s thesis, it kindled an interest in *resistance* to Rome and Romanisation. The sixth International Congress of Classical Studies (Pippidi (ed.) 1974) was entirely devoted to the theme of “Assimilation and resistance to Graeco-Roman culture” and was followed by Stephen Dyson’s study of native revolt patterns in Gaul (1975) and Marcel Bénabou’s monograph on resistance in Roman Africa (1976). As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, however, a declining interest in ancient resistance movements could be observed. A Crocean reflection of the changing political climate, or merely a general sense of surfeit and tedium after so many words had been expended on the subject?

The postwar phenomenon of global cultural Americanisation also brought the realisation that a dominant power might impose changes in culture, language, lifestyle and patterns of consumption even without the formal political and economic control framework that had characterised the colonial era. Within the study of Roman history, this new insight translated into a dialectical analysis of the relationship between domination and Romanisation and the rediscovery that Romanisation could be an *instrument* of dominance rather than a consequence.

The study of Romanisation in its Mommsenian sense (as a process of linguistic and institutional assimilation) thus gave way to a concept of Romanisation closer to that of Francis Haverfield (whose classic *The Romanisation of Roman Britain* was republished in 1979). On the other hand, the new generation of researchers rejected Haverfield’s optimistic dualism of Romanity and barbarism as emphatically as they rejected Mommsen’s vision of an empire unified by common norms, laws and institutions. In the postmodern world of cultural relativism, there is no place for the notion of “higher” and “lower” cultures, and the worn-out idea of cultural diffusion has given way to concepts such as ethnic strategy, identity choice or cultural *bricolage*. The individual – to paraphrase Appian Claudius Caecus – is the maker of his own identity.

Romanisation remains a controversial and much debated concept. In the last decade, many researchers have felt that the whole notion of “Romanisation” is burdened down by so many imperialist connotations that it should be discarded. Instead of “Romanisation”, we now talk of “Kulturwandel unter

Roms Einfluss" (Haffner and Schnurbein 1996), "Becoming Roman" (Woolf 1994; 1998), "cultural interaction" (Creighton and Wilson (ed.) 1999), "italianisation" (Lomas 2000, 165) or "Creolizing the Roman Provinces" (Webster 2001). Others concede that Romanisation "could be allowed to stand as a term, as long as some fundamental preconceptions about the processes it purports to describe are altered" (Alcock in Hoff and Rotroff (ed.) 1997). Romanisation has become the R-word of ancient history, banned from polite academic conversation.

As the twenty-first century dawns, it is being argued that the moral deficit of British imperialism was compensated by its modernising influence on the subject peoples (Ferguson 2002). It remains to be seen if this view will gain acceptance among contemporary historians, whether there will be a Crocean trickle-down effect on the perception of ancient imperialism and Romanisation, and whether the R-word will once more become a buzzword.

Romanisation and the Black Sea region

The fifth international conference of the Centre for Black Sea studies was dedicated to the impact of Rome on the Black Sea Region. In this volume, nine of the papers presented at the conference are published, but like any conference volume, the present book fails to do justice to the inspired discussions after the papers, in the intervals, at dinner and over drinks.

In the opening paper, "From kingdom to province", Jakob Munk Højte traces the strange political metamorphosis of Pontos as it is revealed in the patterns and practices of everyday life. Within two generations, Pontos went from a late Hellenistic kingdom ruled by a warlord with expansionist, indeed imperial ambitions to a peaceful provincial backwater ruled by the ex-magistrates of late republican Rome. Swords were turned into ploughshares and the Pontic hammer became an anvil. What visible effects did this have locally? Højte traces the evolution of three aspects of daily life: settlement patterns, calendar systems and the development of the "epigraphic habit" – the last is a topic that is taken up by several other contributors.

The imposition of Roman rule is also at the centre of the chapter by Liviu Petculescu, examining in detail not only how the Roman army achieved and maintained control over Scythia Minor, but the cultural and economic consequences, first and foremost in the sphere of urbanism, that followed. Militarised and Latinised, the military zone of Scythia Minor provides an instructive contrast not only with de-militarised and un-Latinised Pontos but with the Greek cities on the coast of Scythia Minor, which were far less affected by the advent of Rome.

With the contributions by Daniela Dueck, Thomas Corsten and Jesper Majbom Madsen, we move back to Asia and into the cultural sphere of Pontic Hellenism. The Roman province of Bithynia et Pontus is particularly interesting for the study of Roman influence and Greek reactions. The cultural complexity

of this composite province offers a rare possibility to compare the response to Roman hegemony in different societies with different cultural patterns. An important question is whether there are significant differences between the ways in which people in the Greek colonies, in the Hellenistic city-states and in the communities colonized by Rome reacted to the Roman presence. For instance, were the residents of the ancient Greek colonies more reluctant to live and identify themselves as Romans than citizens of the communities that were founded in the Hellenistic or Roman periods? From the preserved fragments of his history, Dueck brings the historian Memnon of Herakleia to life before our eyes and shows how, despite living in a vast Empire divided between Greek and Roman, Memnon is first and foremost Pontic and Herakleian in his outlook. For all the cosmopolitanism of a world empire, parochialism was still a powerful force.

More literary figures make their appearance in the following chapter by Jesper Majbom Madsen. Was the literary revival of the first and early second century known as the Second Sophistic a reaction against the spread of Roman influence in Greece and Asia Minor (Swain 1996; Goldhill (ed.) 2001) or an attempt on the part of the Hellenised elite to demarcate themselves from their social inferiors? Madsen takes a two-stage approach to the problem. In the first half of his paper, he critically examines the case for the second Sophistic as an example of cultural resistance, and in the second part, he uses epigraphic behaviour to diagnose the cultural preferences of the literate middle and upper classes. As we have already seen in Højte's paper, names are important; to name something is to appropriate it. The voluntary acceptance of Roman names by the Greek elite implies that they had been appropriated by the dominant Roman culture. Abandoning a perfectly good Greek name in favour of a Roman or Latinised one was a serious matter, and though well received by the Romans, it could earn the disapproval and derision of one's peers – Apollonios is credited with the witty remark that "it is a disgrace to have a person's name without also having his countenance" (*Letters*, 72). While intellectuals such as Plutarch or Dion viewed the spread of Roman *mores* with some scepticism, the onomastic evidence indicates that their sentiments were hardly representative of the provincial elite as a whole.

Thomas Corsten addresses the same source material as Madsen, but with a different point of departure and a different interpretation. To Corsten, the transition from Greek to Latin names in the Bithynian inscriptions does not reflect the enfranchisement of the elite and the adoption of Roman names by Bithynians, but a wholesale replacement of the old Thraco-Bithynian gentry by a new class of Roman entrepreneurial landowners. The idea that Romanisation was carried into the conquered provinces by a class of *immigré* kulaks has respectable antecedents; it was central to the analysis of the western provinces by Rostovtzeff (1926/1957) but rejected by Hatt (1959). It addresses complex issues concerning the social structure and ethnic differentiation of provincial society, a subject that would merit a conference or a volume of its own.

While the preceding contributors have seen the Roman Black Sea from an indigenous perspective, Greg Woolf and Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen try to view Bithynia et Pontus through the eyes of a Roman recently arrived, Pliny the younger. Woolf strongly warns us against the perils of treating Pliny's correspondence as a slice of Roman gubernatorial life. Pliny shows us his province and the Roman Black Sea region as he wants us to see it, and himself as he would like to appear to our eyes. Bekker-Nielsen is less concerned with what meets the eye, or what Pliny wants to meet our eyes; instead he searches for the invisible factors of local politics, rooted in the twilight world of back-room deals, rumour-mongering and pasquinades.

Conceptualising cultural interaction as a process between cultural traditions that are themselves developing and changing introduces an extra dimension into the model and reveals the limitations of the classical theories of Romanisation. It also leads to the realisation that cultural change is rarely a zero-sum process: becoming *more* Roman does not necessarily mean becoming *less* Greek (or less Gaulish, less Scythian, less Bosphoran, etc.). The last two contributions in the volume, by Anne Marie Carstens and Jørgen Christian Meyer, both deal with such (in Meyer's phrase) "multi-identity cultures". Modern populist-xenophobic politicians see cultural diversity as a threat to the stability of society, but the analyses of Carstens and Meyer indicate that the social resilience of Achaemenid and Roman structures of dominance owed much to their cultural diversity and the readiness of the dominant population to accept and even adopt the *mores* of their subjects when the situation called for it; the "ability to have several identities" (Meyer) and the possibility of "creative negotiation" (Carstens).

Reading through this volume, the reader will find diversity, multiple cultural identities and occasional disagreement. It is hoped that it will provide food for creative reflection on cultural change in the traditionalist and parochial, yet dynamic and cosmopolitan environment that was the Roman Black Sea region.

University of Southern Denmark, Esbjerg

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Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen