

## REVIEW–DISCUSSION

### AGAINST HYBRIDITY: WHEN GREEKS (UNDER ROME) WERE GREEKS

Frank Ursin, *Freiheit, Herrschaft, Widerstand. Griechische Erinnerungskultur in der Hohen Kaiserzeit (1.–3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.)*. *Historia Einzelschriften* 255. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019. Pp. 340. Hardback, €63.00. ISBN 978-3-515-12163-7.

Few concepts have been as important for historians over the past decades as the familiar pair of ‘identity’ and ‘memory’, and within Ancient History this has been especially true for those studying the Greek-speaking East under Rome. Keeping this in mind, a book about the period titled *Freiheit, Herrschaft, Widerstand* is bound to be swimming against the tide, and this is exactly what Ursin (henceforth U.) sets out to do. With palpable frustration at the dominance of the ‘identity’ research paradigm, he lays out his own approach ‘entgegen den neueren *multiple-identities-*, *hybridity-* und *bicultural-identity-*Tendenzen in der Forschung’ (44–5). U. has written an engagingly polemical book, which merits careful study from all who are interested in the Roman East. Over and against these *neuere Tendenzen* the author posits that an inclusive *Sowohl-als-auch* attitude towards identity, here dichotomously construed as Greek vs Roman, was unavailable at the time. Instead, U. argues that the distance between Greeks and Romans grew after the Augustan period, as much in the intellectual as in the political realm.

U.’s monograph is a revised version of his 2016 dissertation in Ancient History, which he completed at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. It is clear from the bibliography, which contains numerous items from 2016 onwards, that the author has updated his work to take recent scholarship into account. In addition to an introduction, a methodological chapter, and a short conclusion, the book contains four thematic chapters. It is completed by three indices listing persons, themes, and passages cited, respectively. Chapter 4, concerning the treatment of the Greek past under Rome, stands at the centre of the monograph, and is about twice as long as the other chapters. Ultimately, as he himself acknowledges, U. is concerned more with the attitudes of Greek-speakers living under post-Augustan Rome than with their acts. Readers have to wait until the very last chapter for the author’s discussion of the evidence for anti-Roman revolts and other forms of violent dissent, which takes up just fourteen pages. Given the limited evidence for such revolts the

brevity of this discussion is entirely defensible, but it does sit uneasily alongside U.'s stern criticism of lack of interest in them in earlier scholarship (265, 269).

In his first chapter ('Einleitung', 9–37) U. discusses the state of the question and the structure of the monograph, and he gives a brief overview of the texts and authors to be considered: Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, Lucian, Aelius Aristides, and Pausanias. He concludes this chapter with a transparent formulation of his *Grundthese* that 'some Greeks expressed fundamental criticism of the Roman rule of their time through the mode of an engagement with the past' ('dass einige Griechen im Modus des Vergangenheitsbezugs grundsätzliche Kritik an der gegenwärtigen römischen Herrschaft geäußert haben', 32). This criticism, U. writes, was rooted in a split between pro-Roman 'collaborationists and opportunists' on the one hand, and those who '(intentionally) stayed within the Greek world' on the other ('Kollaborateure und Opportunisten ... diejenigen die (bewusst) in der griechischen Welt verblieben', 22; cf. 15). But in order to trace an ancient debate which marked some Greek-speakers as *Kollaborateure* the critical voices of those who viewed their contemporaries in this light would need to have been preserved. U. offers two reasons why this is (largely) *not* the case: textual transmission was controlled by the 'Roman victors' and would suppress critical works, a fate possibly suffered by Appian's books about the Hellenic wars and Ptolemaic Egypt; second, the 'Greek losers' would not have dared to speak openly (if at all) for fear of sanctions. U., therefore, sets out to uncover 'implicit' and 'subtly veiled' criticism in the texts that he has chosen (34). I discuss below some examples of how U. executes this agenda.

U.'s assumption that there was Roman (state) control of early textual transmission of literary works in the Empire is not well supported. Howley's recent study of book-burning shows that it was used 'intermittently and inconsistently' by the senate and the emperor, and that 'no instances of pre-Christian literary book-burnings are attested after the reign of Domitian'.<sup>1</sup> With respect to Appian's *Roman History*, it should be noted that the book about the Macedonian wars was still available to the Byzantine epitomator, and his treatment of the Illyrian wars even survives in full. Some of Appian's books about Roman conquest in the Greek-speaking East survived, which makes it unlikely that the ones that do not were lost due to Roman censorship. Generally speaking, book production and circulation were driven by the tastes of wealthy Roman *and* Greek elites in the Empire.

The use of the terms *Kollaborateur* and *Kollaboration* by U., which he introduces in his first chapter and returns to throughout his study, is problematic. These terms have very specific connotations, primarily in the context of the Second World War. While they are also known to have been used in European

<sup>1</sup> J. Howley, 'Book-Burning and the Uses of Writing in Ancient Rome: Destructive Practice between Literature and Document', *JRS* 107 (2017) 213–36, at 217–18.

colonies (e.g., the French occupation of Vietnam), what sets the Roman occupation of the Greek-speaking East apart is that it started several hundred years before the texts studied by U. were written. U.'s strongest example of a Greek who is criticised by another Greek for helping the Romans is probably Pausanias' account of Callicrates (261–4). Pausanias depicts Callicrates as a very bad man who only cares about his own gain. He describes Callicrates' relation to the Romans as flattery (*kolakeia*) and friendship (*philia*), but the notion of 'working together' (e.g., *synerdō*, *syntithemai*, *sympoieō*) is completely absent (7.10.5–13.8). It can, of course, be useful for historians to introduce concepts or terminologies in their analysis that are foreign to the period that they are studying. In this case, however, the author has not given a rationale for using *Kollaboration* as a category, and its application does not appear to have yielded insights that would have been otherwise unattainable.

The second chapter ('Methodische Vorüberlegungen', 38–76) deals primarily with the concept of identity, which U. views through the lens of conflict. Identity was a zero-sum game: Greeks who were too Roman ceased to be accepted as Greeks and vice versa. U. explains the emphasis that Greek-speakers with Roman careers placed, primarily in inscriptions, on their Greekness as desperate attempts to continue to be accepted as Greeks by their peers. Where other scholars have seen examples of a successful reconciliation of multiple identities, U. sees identity anxiety.

U. holds up Herodes Atticus as an example of a Greek who was viewed as being too Rome-orientated by his own people, and hence no longer considered a true Greek. Herodes did lose favour with the Athenians, but there is little indication his closeness to Rome was the reason, or that he was viewed as un-Greek. The Athenians actually appeal to Marcus Aurelius to deal with Herodes, and the emperor later on facilitates Herodes' return to the city.

Another problem with this zero-sum game is that many of U.'s protagonists, like Lucian and Aristides, were not from Greek cities, but from Syria or Asia Minor, respectively. U. discusses Lucian as an example of the importance of proving one's Greek identity, acknowledging his Syrian background and (likely) Roman civil service employment. Yet the chapter also includes a chart (68) distinguishing four types (Roman–Romans, Hellenised–Romans, Romanised–Greeks, and Greek–Greeks, 68). Lucian, of course, does not fit and is left out. U.'s book, as noted, is a book about attitudes and ideas, and in the discourse with which it engages, the most prominent dichotomy is certainly between Greek and Roman, which justifies his approach. Nonetheless, the fact that a significant portion of this discourse is carried out by authors who do not fit neatly into U.'s boxes merits a more in-depth analysis than it receives.

Aristides' *Praise of Rome* is cited for its description of local elites governing the cities of the Empire *for* the Romans: 'There is no need for garrisons holding the citadels, because the greatest and most powerful from each place safeguard

their own native cities for you' (*Or.* 26.64 = Jebb 214–15). Aristides here, argues U., interprets the Greek *Kollaborateure* as occupying Greece in the service of the Romans, which shows that Greeks who took up Roman offices had to fear no longer being viewed as Greeks by their peer group. U. suggests that the local elites here are identified with the garrisons (*phrouroi*), a word with negative connotations (48–9). But the passage does not suggest such an identification: garrisons are *absent* because the local elites are 'safeguarding' (*phulassō*) their cities; this verb has a broad meaning, encompassing both welcome and unwelcome safekeeping. Reading harsh criticism of provincial elites in the Roman service in this Aristides passage is too much of a stretch.

In the same chapter U. introduces his concept of *Defizienzerfahrung*: this is an expression of dissatisfaction with the present order by means of references to the past. Criticism of the here and now is inherent in such *Vergangenheitsbezüge* because of the sharp contrast with the present that they expose. The concept is of great importance to U., because it allows him to read the well-known preoccupation of Greek imperial authors with the past as constituting criticism, rather than escapism, antiquarianism, or acquiescence, as many earlier scholars would have it. U. rightly emphasises that such criticism can stand alongside a presumption of immutability of the Roman world order.

The third chapter ('Plutarchs *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*', 77–103) applies the model of *Defizienzerfahrung* to Plutarch's well-known *Precepts of Statecraft*. Plutarch's explicit comparison of the present political situation to various past(s) in this work fits U.'s method well. The author shows clearly how Plutarch focuses not on the *whether* of dealing with Roman rule but rather on the *how*. It is especially relevant that Plutarch cautions local rulers on which historical examples or, perhaps, *Vergangenheitsbezüge* to use in appealing to their citizens (*Mor.* 814A–C). According to U., Plutarch establishes an alternative *Erinnerungskultur*, the components of which all point to dealing prudently with aggressors from outside, and the value of forgetting traumatic defeats. These historical examples implicitly signal how to deal with the current aggressors, the Romans—namely in a measured, tactful way—and to forget the trauma inflicted by them, in this case the Roman conquest of Greece. As an example of something to be forgotten U. mentions Sulla's sack of Athens, the memory of which, he writes, would still in Plutarch's time have caused conflicts between Greeks and Romans.

U.'s argument that Plutarch comments on *Erinnerungskultur* in the *Precepts* with an eye to the present is persuasive. There is nonetheless a discrepancy between Plutarch's examples, which concern responses to crises and conflicts as they are happening, and the fact that Greek-speaking communities had been under Roman rule for centuries. Further, to suggest that the memory of Sulla's sack of Athens would divide Greeks and Romans in Plutarch's time is to disregard how negatively many Romans remembered Sulla. Plutarch's *Life*

of Sulla hardly constitutes a ‘forgetting’ of this event, and it may in fact have been influenced by the treatment of Sulla by the Roman historians.<sup>2</sup>

The central, fourth chapter (‘Griechische Vergangenheit in einer römischen Gegenwart’, 104–79) looks at how communities and individuals (elite and non-elite) engaged with the past. U. casts a wide net here and ‘the past’ encompasses all mythical and historical events before Roman rule took hold in Achaëa. He considers the historical awareness of ‘the masses’ through sophistic performances, local (oral) traditions, and festival culture. Of particular interest is U.’s discussion of lists of world empires (*Weltreichslisten*) in the second part of the chapter. From Polybius onwards such lists often include at the very least some discussion of Greek powers (Spartans, Athenians, or Thebans). Even though most authors concede that these cannot be counted *as* world empires, their being considered at all, U. argues, is likely rooted in an ongoing discussion about the relative historical importance of the Greek cities vis-à-vis Rome. In the third part of the chapter U. addresses explicitly what he refers to as the ‘*Eskapismus-These*’. He lays out convincingly that the repercussions of being engaged with the past for living in the imperial present were too great for this to be cast aside as mere escapism. Connections with the past through language, monuments, or myths had major consequences for one’s position in Roman society or the renown of one’s city.

For U., instead of escapism there is resistance: recalling the past is, through his model of *Defizienzerfahrung*, by definition criticism of the present and therefore of Rome. In the third part of the chapter he discusses the memory of the fall of Corinth in Greek epigram and the Greek historians. As with his discussion of Sulla’s sack of Athens, U. distinguishes between Greek and Roman memory too sharply. When Diodorus writes that ‘no one’ would be able to travel through destroyed Corinth ‘without crying’ (32.27.1), U. remarks that Diodorus ‘emphasises the reactions and emotions which the destroyed Corinth caused to the Greeks’ (‘betont ebenfalls die Reaktionen und Emotionen, die das zerstörte Korinth bei den Griechen erzeugte’, 169). But Diodorus is not talking about Greeks specifically: the tragic fate of Corinth is measured exactly by its capacity to rouse pity in *anyone*. Diodorus immediately goes on to describe how Julius Caesar had the city rebuilt after seeing its ruins.

U. concludes his longest chapter with another discussion of passages from Aelius Aristides’ *Praise of Rome* about the Greek cities. Aristides praises the Romans for the way they rule the cities, the fact that conflicts are absent, and the rich votive offerings and artworks to be found in them, which contribute to the glory of the Romans (26.94–7 = Jebb 224–5). For U. these are implicit criticisms of decreasing Greek autonomy, ongoing conflict between Greek

<sup>2</sup> On the reception of Sulla see now A. Eckert and A. Thein, edd., *Sulla: Politics and Reception* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), esp. 107–72 (articles by Santangelo, Rosenblitt, Kuin, and Eckert).

cities, and Roman looting of Greek art, respectively, because ‘Aristides’ seemingly positive account of the present must on closer inspection rather be addressed as an inverted *Defizienzerfahrung* (‘Aristides’ positiv wirkende Gegenwartsdeutung, die bei genauerer Betrachtung wohl eher als invertierte Defizienzerfahrung anzusprechen ist’, 176). Here U. goes much further than understanding Aristides’ praise of Rome as exaggerated for the sake of rhetorical flourish, or even as mostly insincere. The reading illustrates the risks of U.’s method of uncovering implicit criticism: only by assuming beforehand that Aristides is oppressed by *Defizienzerfahrung* can one propose to read these words to have the opposite import of their stated meaning.

The fifth chapter (‘Freiheit’, 180–217) traces the theme of freedom through imperial Greek literature. U. argues that the predominance of narratives about Greeks defending their freedom against foreigners (Persians, Macedonians) and one another is motivated in part by *Defizienzerfahrung* with respect to freedom under Roman rule. Nero’s grant of freedom to Achaëa and the Peloponnesos was understood politically by Greek audiences and highly valued; Vespasian’s retraction was, conversely, seen as a real loss, and may have been brought about by conflicts between Greek cities. The final section of this chapter asks the question of whether or not the Greeks’ understanding of freedom, *eleutheria*, changed. U. argues vehemently against this, which means that Greeks were well aware that, after Vespasian, they were once again unfree, even if many of them became Roman citizens. Although this argument is persuasive in its own right, it fits poorly with the high appreciation of the *eleutheria* granted by Nero. If freedom is freedom, it cannot be granted but has to be won, just as in the storied battles for freedom from the past. The fact that what Nero gave could be retracted so quickly and easily shows that it was not ‘real’ freedom to begin with. It seems unlikely that someone like Plutarch did not understand that. Can it be that Nero was praised as philhellene rather than as true liberator?

The question of freedom and its symbols is as complex as the question of memory in general. U. opened his fifth chapter with Cassius Dio’s story that at Athens Caesar’s assassins Brutus and Cassius received statues next to the statues of the famed tyrant-slayers Harmodius and Aristogeiton—who, of course, only killed the brother of the tyrant. U. attributes Brutus’ popularity in Greece to an expectation that he might restore the Achaeans to ‘politische Freiheit’ (180). Setting up his statue next to these powerful symbols of the fight for freedom was presumably meant to motivate him, much as the statue of his own tyrant-slaying ancestor had at Rome, at least according to Appian and Plutarch. But the meaning of the Athenian statues, as Azoulay has pointed out, was at best ambiguous: even if the Athenians were indeed hinting at freedom from Rome, Brutus and Cassius needed to be able to interpret them as symbols of Greek support for their fight against Mark Antony and Octavian. Furthermore, Harmodius and Aristogeiton had already been used as ideological

symbols by Romans for some time. The statue of Aristogeiton on the Capitol has been notoriously hard to contextualise, but there is a strong case for attributing it to Sulla, who sought to represent himself as having liberated Rome from the tyranny of Marius and Cinna. This, finally, fits very well with the Athenian 84/83 BCE coin depicting the Harmodius and Aristogeiton statues: the mint masters Moschion and Mentor likely used it to please Sulla, who, in this case, presented himself as having ‘liberated’ Athens in 86 BCE from the Mithridatic tyrant Aristion.<sup>3</sup>

The sixth chapter (‘Herrschaft’, 218–64) concerns Greek representations of Roman rule. U. traces a transition from early authors, such as Polybius, Strabo, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who explain the Romans’ success through their strength and virtue, to later authors such as Plutarch and Pausanias, for whom the favour of fortune (*tychē*) becomes important as an explanation. He convincingly analyses the ambivalence towards ‘tourism’ in the Greek East on the part of Greek imperial authors as a challenge to the clichéd juxtaposition of Roman military prowess to Greek cultural achievement. Especially Plutarch, in his *Parallel Lives*, insists on past Greek military success, and casts some Roman military successes in a negative light. The last section of this chapter discusses the theme of Greek leaders betraying their own cities. Pausanias’ ‘catalogue of traitors’, as U. calls it, is at the centre, with the already mentioned Callicrates as main character. U. shows how Pausanias places Callicrates in a long line of Greeks who betrayed their cities to foreign aggressors (the usual suspects) or other Greek cities. Giving Callicrates this highly charged genealogy then frames Romans as aggressors too, while at the same time casting aspersions on their victory in the Achaean war.

The seventh and last substantial chapter (‘Widerstand’, 265–86) discusses both ‘discursive’ and ‘violent’ resistance. U. has taken the notion of discursive resistance from Whitmarsh, who in turn borrowed it from Momigliano’s work on Jewish and Christian resistance to Roman imperialism.<sup>4</sup> Discursive resistance is akin to U.’s use of implicit readings, but here the *Defizienzerfahrung* need not be expressed through references to the past; it tests out alternative truths by means of literary imagination. U. cites Plutarch in *Precepts*, where he writes that more freedom ‘would perhaps (*isōs*) not be better for local assemblies’ (*dēmoi*, *Mor.* 824C). U. reads *isōs* here as a ‘counterfactual allusion’ (‘kontrafaktischen Anspielung’, 271) through which Plutarch, he argues, shows his conviction that more freedom *would* be better for Greece. Plutarch is not specifically referring to Greece here, but U. is right to point out that at the very

<sup>3</sup> V. Azoulay, *The Tyrant-Slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues* (Oxford, 2017), esp. 139–62.

<sup>4</sup> T. Whitmarsh, ‘Resistance is Futile? Greek Literary Tactics in the Face of Rome’, in P. Schubert, P. Ducrey, and P. Derron, edd., *Les Grecs héritiers des Romains: huit exposés suivis de discussions* (*Entretiens sur l’Antiquité classique* 59; Geneva, 2013) 57–78.

least the author can (still) entertain an alternative form of Roman rule for all cities.

In the remainder of the chapter U. discusses the evidence for violent resistance. He includes examples from outside of Achaëa here, as well as mentions of local social unrest that are not specifically anti-Roman. Even when casting such a wide net, it does not add up to much. It seems that there were few revolts in the provinces, and very few in Achaëa. The old adage that absence of evidence does not equal evidence of absence has of course some application here. As U. and Whitmarsh note, Roman rulers worked hard to project unity, peace, and ‘governmentality’; these efforts must have impacted what kinds of information were available to inhabitants of the provinces, and thereby the state of our sources. Nonetheless, from our vantage point we are constrained by these sources, and the number of attested armed revolts remains surprisingly small.

U.’s conclusions (‘Ergebnisse’, 287–92) are very brief, but they clearly state the achievement of the book as envisaged by the author. The impetus of the work was to push back against the *Harmonisierungstendenzen* among other scholars, whereby Greco-Roman coexistence in the High Empire is interpreted as free of conflict, using such catchwords as ‘biculturalism’ and ‘multiple identities’ (287). Against this model, U. places his analysis of the preoccupation with the past of imperial Greek literature as representing an underlying sentiment of loss and dissatisfaction vis-à-vis life under Roman rule. The post-Augustan period is different in this regard from the first two centuries after the battle of Pydna: the pro-Roman stance of Strabo and his contemporaries gives way to distancing and implicit criticism.

Distinctions between pro-Roman Greeks and anti-Roman Greeks, and specifically the negative attitudes towards pro-Roman Greeks harboured by their contemporaries, are a major component of U.’s approach. Pausanias’ narrative of Callicrates as a treacherous friend of the Romans has loud reverberations for the second century CE, because ‘contemporary Rome-orientated Greeks’ could ‘count as “traitors” of Greece’ (‘zeitgenössischen Rom-orientierten Griechen ... die als “Verräter” an Griechenland gelten dürfen’, 289). For U., Pausanias uses his *periēgēsis* here to tell his peers: ‘do not be a Callicrates’.

On the same issue the author returns to a passage from Plutarch’s *Precepts* (*Mor.* 814D), where Plutarch asks rhetorically whether there can be any comparison between obtaining imperial favour for one’s hometown through friendship with a Roman leader, or toiling away working for the Roman administration ‘growing old at other men’s doors’ (291). U. has already discussed this passage three times (63, 86, 216) as evidence of Plutarch’s negative view of Greeks pursuing careers in the administration of the Empire. But he puts more weight on it than it can bear: Plutarch merely points to the hardships that such careers entail, juxtaposing them with staying at home while promoting the good of one’s own city, which is clearly more choice-

worthy. For Plutarch, being ‘Rome-orientated’ is unavoidable; what is at stake is finding the most honourable and safe way to do so.

U.’s argument for the second century CE relevance of Pausanias’ interest in Callicrates is convincing. So is his insistence that being a Roman citizen does not preclude the possibility of dissatisfaction with and criticism of living under Rome. It is problematic, however, to take the story of Callicrates from the Achaean War, whether told by Pausanias or Polybius, and make it map directly onto the lives of Greeks living under Rome over three centuries later. The Romans who subjected Greece in the second century BCE were conquering, but by the time Plutarch and Pausanias come around they are ruling. Simply being too friendly to Rome does not make you a traitor or *Kollaborateur* anymore. It is possible to do a bad job of interacting with Roman rule, and such behaviour, depending on the consequences, will be judged distasteful or risky. Callicrates’ story serves as a negative model in so far as it underlines that Romans will use anyone who cares to be used thusly for their own political purposes. But the stakes for Pausanias’ contemporaries are lower. Even if one wanted to, it had become impossible to be a Callicrates, as U.’s own model of *Defizienzerfahrung* shows so clearly.

Let us return to the twofold *Grundthese* laid out by U. in his introduction. The author often succeeds in making the difficult case for growing criticism of Roman rule in post-Augustan Greek-speaking authors. The second part of his thesis, that there was a significant divide between pro-Roman *Kollaborateure* and pro-Greek Greeks, does not find strong footing, but this does not necessarily undermine the strength of the first part of his argument. If, for understanding what the Empire really was, we rely entirely on the instruments of empire themselves, we inevitably find a harmonious and integrated state. This evidentiary problem has certainly contributed to the dominance of the paradigm of viewing the Roman East as conflict-free. Because imperialism operates, as Whitmarsh writes, precisely by ‘dividing subjects’ loyalties, by setting their affective loyalties against their pragmatic commitments’, we cannot expect to find Greek opposition that is fully detached from Roman power.<sup>5</sup> With this book U. not only swims against the tide of received scholarly opinion, but also takes on the extremely difficult task of excavating resistance from texts that are deeply implicated in the system of empire. The risk of proposing readings that do not fully convince is inherent in such a complex undertaking, but this should not detract from the value and importance of making voices of resistance heard.

U. must be praised for writing a book that forces readers to rethink their understanding of empire, freedom, oppression, and dissent in the Roman East. One question remains in the background: *Why* did this discursive resistance

<sup>5</sup> Whitmarsh (n. 4) 62.

increase over time? Was it, paradoxically, as a consequence of their implication and integration in the structures of the Roman Empire, that Greek authors became more knowledgeable and more wary, and felt a greater need to reach beyond imperial control through imaginative literature?

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