

## REVIEW

### GREEKS, ROMANS, AND POLITICS IN IMPERIAL LITERATURE: ELEVEN ESSAYS

Jesper Majbom Madsen and Roger Rees, edd., *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision*. Impact of Empire, 18. Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. vii + 303. Hardcover, €125.00. ISBN 978-90-04-27738-0.

This volume of eleven essays comes out of a conference held at the University of Southern Denmark (Odense) in 2009, in collaboration with the University of St Andrews, and its mainly British and Danish contributors include several recognised specialists in imperial Greek literature and several well-known Romanists who focus mainly on Latin literature. The literary subject matter addressed is thus disparate, including imperial prose authors from Josephus and *Luke-Acts* via Tacitus and Pliny to Herodian and Ulpian. It remains thematically coherent, however, though the nature of that theme takes some explanation. The first part of the title is difficult to parse, and one could be forgiven for supposing it was devoted to the much-discussed question of ‘what Greeks thought of Roman rule’. While that question is certainly present in many of the essays, it does not really take in the volume’s overall theme, which has rather more to do with the ‘Double Vision’ subtitle. It might inelegantly be phrased as ‘how the “Greek-Roman” opposition and similar binaries function in literary accounts of Roman politics from the second and third centuries CE’. This breadth increases the interested readership, but also has the virtue of bringing together topics that have a surprising amount in common, but are not generally seen between the same two covers, and benefit from that juxtaposition. Given the generally high quality of the individual articles, the volume is thus an important contribution to the study of identity politics in the literature of the high empire, and scholars of Latin and imperial Greek literature alike will benefit.

The ‘Double Vision’ subtitle also suggests the key methodological issue that the book as a whole addresses with general but not uniform success in the individual articles. In current scholarship, the Greek-Roman binary is not something one can take for granted. These labels can at times refer to juridical status, geographical origin, linguistic preference, or a whole series of less concrete ideas lumped under ‘cultural identity’. They can thus be defined in relation to all sorts of other forms of local, religious, and gender identities, to name but a few. When we call someone a ‘Roman’ or a ‘Greek’, we do not always mean the same thing as one another, especially when we refer to

our ancient sources. In some contexts, it makes sense to say that Arrian was a Greek and Alexander Severus was not (9–10), but in others they both qualify, and in many cases insisting on a strict yes or no answer obscures rather than simplifies the matter. Much of this volume's value lies in the sophisticated approaches (mostly literary) that its contributors employ, but some articles do fail to sufficiently interrogate the categories of 'Greek' and 'Roman', such that the double vision in question is not that of a culturally complex ancient author, but of an insufficiently critical modern scholar.

Rees and Madsen's introduction gives a good sense of how many different ways one can look at Greek-Roman opposition or its absence in both Latin and Greek texts. This is illustrated through a reading of Arrian's *Periplus* (1–6). On the one hand this Greek account of Black-Sea peoples is an ethnographic description of 'marginally Greek' communities by someone from a more securely Hellenic region; but it is also an act of self-representation by a provincial governor and is thus akin to the letters that Pliny sent to Trajan from Bithynia (Arrian's home province) or to Tacitus' account of Agricola in Britain. This raises the same question in two different forms: how fully could the 'Greek' Arrian adapt to the literary persona of the Roman administrative class, and how fully could the discourse of Roman imperialism adapt to being expressed in Greek? As the editors point out, 'Roman' culture never ceased to use Greece as a self-defining other, even after a substantial number of Hellenophones entered the Senate: Hadrian could still be called a *Graeculus*. There are thus a set of corresponding Roman Questions to match the basically Greek Questions broached by Simon Swain's 1994 *Hellenism and Empire* and subsequent work on the representation of Rome in Greek literature.

This critique of the 'imperial Greek literature as cultural resistance' model associated with Swain becomes more explicit in Madsen's own opening contribution on 'Patriotism and Ambitions'. Madsen addresses several key texts (notably by Dio Chrysostom and Cassius Dio, but also by Pausanias, Philostratus, Plutarch, and Aelius Aristides) that have been read as Greek criticisms of Roman domination, and he points out that in many cases the Greek authors' points about the existing power structure have quite close parallels in Latin. The two Dios object to emperor-worship, but so do Pliny and Tacitus, and for much the same reasons (29–31). Similarly, Dio Chrysostom's criticisms of the reign of Domitian have plenty of Latin parallels, and his *Kingship Orations* share much with Pliny's *Panegyric*. Madsen points out that specific historical (Domitian vs Trajan) or geographic oppositions (metropolitan vs provincial) can often cut across the Greek-Roman divide. Overall, the essay is a salutary corrective to the tendency to infer an author's (and audience's) views from single passages picked in isolation from very large corpora.

In 'Becoming Wolf, Staying Sheep', the longest and in some ways most ambitious piece of the volume, Ewen Bowie argues that Greeks of the impe-

rial period were less eager than other provincials to enter Roman military service. This Bowie supports with existing prosopographical studies along with some data of his own gathered from literary texts.<sup>1</sup> He makes a concluding argument that this lack of military activity left young Greek men without an outlet for their *aretē*, which led them to emphasise athletics as ‘displacement behavior’. The prosopographical data do tend to bear out the intuitively plausible thesis about quantitative representation, but Bowie’s own arguments do not go much beyond anecdotal confirmation of what one was already inclined to believe. He tends to argue away inconvenient counterexamples by special pleading: a martial descendent of Pompey’s friend Theophanes ‘may ... have felt himself as Roman as Greek’ (57), while military service on the Parthian frontier ‘may indicate minimal commitment’ to the army (62). The somewhat brief argument about athletics as a substitute for war is (avowedly) an extension of Bowie’s influential 1970 argument about antiquarianism as a substitute for politics, and thus shares the strong and weak points of that thesis.<sup>2</sup>

John Moles’ ‘Accommodation, Opposition or Other?’ addresses the New Testament books of Luke and *Acts*, long recognised as a unit and as the most ‘Roman’ section of the New Testament, in that it is closest to the conventions of Greco-Roman historiography. This densely argued article goes through key scenes from both books to illustrate the sophistication with which the author establishes this closeness. Nonetheless, Moles refuses on this basis to label *Luke-Acts* a ‘pro-Roman’ version of the Gospel message; on the contrary, the gestures toward ‘Roman’ readers do nothing to detract from the radical and irreconcilable otherness of the author’s eschatological vision. Even if Roman imperial ideology and Greek classicism are invoked, it is only so that the coming Kingdom can be presented as an inverted version of them. In Moles’ view (103), the author ‘essays that most difficult persuasive task: that of maintaining peace and co-operation with the target, while emphasizing fundamental incompatibilities, and arguing the certainty of an outcome which will save the target but which ultimately requires his abandoning practically all defining aspects of his identity except his humanness.’ This analysis of the ‘Jewish/Christian’ versus ‘Greco-Roman’ binary is compelling, but it would have been good to hear more explicitly how Moles defines the second term. What he here refers to as ‘Romans’ seem to be a constructed reader who identifies strongly with both Augustus’ *Res Gestae* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*.

<sup>1</sup> The specific studies in question are J. C. Mann, *Legionary Recruitment and Veteran Settlement under the Principate* (London, 1983); H. Devijver, ‘Equestrian Officers from the East’, in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy, edd., *The Defense of the Roman and Byzantine East* (BAR International Series 297; Oxford, 1986) 109–225; H. Halfmann, *Die Senatoren aus dem östlichen Teil des Imperium Romanum bis zum ende des 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Göttingen, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Bowie, ‘Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic’, *P&P* 46 (1970): 3–41.

One cannot but ask to what social reality this construct corresponds, and whether it includes (say) Dio Chrysostom or Arrian, to say nothing of western provincials. Nonetheless, Moles makes a convincing case for *Luke-Acts* as a remarkable document of how a sub-élite provincial population viewed the empire's two dominant literary cultures.

The next several essays deal mainly with Latin literature, starting with Roger Rees's 'Adopting the Emperor', which explores the cultural politics of Pliny's *Panegyric*. In particular, Rees argues at length that Pliny aims to align Trajan with a rather exclusivist (not to say chauvinist) form of Romanness. This entails not only de-emphasising the emperor's Spanish roots, but also putting him and Domitian on the right and wrong sides respectively of the Roman-Greek divide. Much as Pliny can sometimes play the philhellene, Rees points out that he can still define himself against a devalued Greek other on questions such as public entertainment and above all the discourse of literary praise. He is anxious to identify his own speech with Roman learning, while coding the spurious praise demanded by Domitian as Greek. Rees makes several cogent points about how powerful a tool 'anti-Hellenism' could still be in the self-presentation of a senatorial orator. This point might be extended to consider the more general situation of the aftermath of a Roman coup, when an emperor has been overthrown by a fellow aristocrat from whose policies he will in practice deviate little. Artificially stressing the Greek-Roman cultural divide might well have appeared to emperor and orator alike as an easy, low-risk way to differentiate the current régime from its hated but inconveniently similar predecessor. One is thus left with Rees's final pointed question (122–3) of how the speech sounded in the ears of the small but growing number of easterners among Pliny's fellow senators.

Bruce Gibson's 'The Representation of Greek Diplomacy in Tacitus' deals with the several episodes, mostly in *Annals* Books 3 and 4, in which the Senate deliberates about the claims of subject Greek cities, notably about asylum-rights and emperor-worship. Gibson aims to give a proper literary context to these passages, which have often been ascribed to an idiosyncrasy of Tacitus. Gibson points out important relationships with earlier authors, especially Livy. More fully, he reads the episodes as presenting different and potentially conflicting versions of the authoritative Greek and Roman pasts, with the Senate playing a rôle parallel to Tacitus' own authorial task of dealing with the legacy of Republican history and the historiographical tradition.

In 'Fractured Vision: Josephus and Tacitus on Triumph and Civil War', Rhiannon Ash concentrates mostly on the former author, and specifically his depiction of the triumph in which the Flavians celebrated their victory over Josephus' countrymen and (less overtly) their own. Josephus gives us an unparalleled account of this event, and one that has often struck readers as oddly dispassionate, and thus in some sense 'pro-Roman', given what one would assume to be the author's natural feelings as a Judaeon. Ash's piece attempts

to read between Josephus' lines and to see several aspects of his description (his claim that he was unable to describe the triumph; his evocation of *peripe-teia* in the visual representations of Judaeans victims and of Homer's *ekphrasis* of Achilles' shield) as ambiguous or covertly critical. This is briefly compared (160–1) with what we can reconstruct of Tacitus' account of the siege of Jerusalem from Book 5 of the *Histories*, which in Ash's view may have portrayed the Judaeans in a pathetic light. This last comparison adds a notable twist. If Josephus is covertly criticising his colonial masters, he is doing it by adopting their own discourse of Roman imperialism, which allowed for beaten foes to be objects of pity even as on the explicit level it still affirmed that their destruction was right and necessary.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Howley's '*Heus tu, rhetorisce*' presents a most fruitful analysis of Gellius' *Attic Nights* as analogous to the modern experience of 'study abroad', and the ways in which it causes students (above all American ones) not only to reconsider their ideas about foreign countries but also to reformulate their own national identities. Howley explores how Gellius constructs his relationships with Taurus and Herodes Atticus and his interactions with both Greek and Roman fellow students, and concludes that Gellius is surprisingly sensitive to the cultural and power dynamics at play, more so than either Cicero in his letters or Plutarch when he portrays Roman statesmen encountering the Greek world. Howley's comparisons are revealing, and his readings of some key scenes in Gellius (the Saturnalia *chez* Herodes; Latin literary games played in the Academy) are excellent illustrations of how much Gellius has to tell us about the various forms of cultural duality that emerged among the Antonine élite.

In 'Triple Vision', Jill Harries looks at the cultural status of Ulpian, a fascinating figure at once Roman, Greek, and Syrian. For her, Ulpian is a successful outsider, someone who was too Syrian for the Greek élite and too Greek for the Roman élite, but skilled enough at the 'Roman' art of jurisprudence to create 'a new kind of cultural space' for himself (209). This Harries illustrates through examination of his *De Officio Proconsulis* (read alongside Cicero and Pliny's writings on a governor's duties), his views on the authority of legal discourse, his use of Greek, and his possible portrayal in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*. The first of these arguments is compelling; Ulpian certainly shows more awareness of provincials' mentality than either of the Italian writers. The others contain some details that will give pause to cultural historians of the high empire. In Harries' view, Ulpian in his writings 'educates and thus empowers' people similar to himself who are facing new opportunities as a result of Caracalla's mass grant of citizenship. Thus Harries demonstrates convincingly that Ulpian avoids the kind of literary games based on

<sup>3</sup> The article might be profitably read alongside Myles Lavan's, *Slaves to Rome* (Cambridge, 2013), evidently too recent to be available to Ash.

élite *paideia* (in both Latin and Greek) that one sees in other jurists, but it is still a big leap from there to saying (203) that his massive and still technically challenging corpus is consciously directed at a non-élite readership made up heavily of newly enfranchised provincials. Such a populist version of Ulpian is more counter-intuitive and more difficult to fit into a larger cultural-historical picture than Harries acknowledges.

The volume returns to Arrian with Jesper Carlsen's 'Greek History in a Roman Context', in this case looking at Arrian's *Anabasis*. Carlsen gives an overview of how we can trace in that work the effects of the Hadrianic-Trajanic milieu in which its author was so active and successful. This includes a discussion of dating, and of the very few (four) instances in which Arrian explicitly refers to Roman history and culture. Carlsen also explores two episodes (the *proskynesis* controversy and the murder of Cleitus) in which Arrian does not mention Rome, but tells the story in a way that makes more sense if one takes into account both the ruling ideologies of Trajan and Hadrian and the more general ethos of the high-imperial governing élite. The essay as a whole provides a good, concise starting point for those interested in the 'Roman' background to this essential work of Greek history.

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen's 'Herodian on Greek and Roman Failings' focuses welcome attention on that under-studied mid-third-century author of an eight-book history of the period from 180 to 238. Bekker-Nielsen has several related points to make about Herodian's cultural status and narrative technique, but the main argument of the article relates to the author's political theory.<sup>4</sup> In particular, he examines how Herodian (or more specifically characters in Herodian, speaking in *oratio recta*) discuss the ethical issues involved in overthrowing and assassinating emperors. These particularly include speeches or letters by Macrinus, Maximinus, and Pupienus. Their various justifications tend to position the action as a change between several categories of régime, including *tyrannis* and *basileia*, but above all *aristokratia*, which Bekker-Nielsen links (244–5) with the form of idealised monarchy presented in Dio Chrysostom's *Kingship Orations*. This in turn Bekker-Nielsen contrasts with the more 'constitutionalist' vision of Pliny's *Panegyric*. Bekker-Nielsen's question and several of his readings of the speeches are intriguing, but his conclusion, that Herodian is 'too blinkered by his impressionistic approach to be capable of analyzing the march of history in terms of anything but personal emotions and loyalties' (245) perhaps mistakes the kind of political statement Herodian is trying to make. Herodian is above all a narrator rather than a theorist of politics. He wants to present Roman politics as a certain kind of entertaining narrative, to use Bekker-Nielsen's own apt com-

<sup>4</sup> The section on narrative technique would have been all the stronger if it incorporated the work of Thomas Hidber, including his 2006 monograph *Herodians Darstellung der Kaisergeschichte nach Marc Aurel* (Basel).

parison (230), ‘a sitcom’, and characters in sitcoms are governed by personal emotions and loyalties rather than political ideologies. But this is a literary choice, not a reflection of a limited mentality. Perhaps the most important clue about Herodian’s own political stance is not in any ideological sentiments that he expresses, but in the fact that he saw imperial politics as something that was best presented as this kind of drama.

The final essay of the book, Jason König’s ‘Images of Élite Community in Philostratus’, is among the strongest, and makes an important contribution to the study of the relationship between ‘Greek’ cultural prestige and ‘Roman’ political power. König begins with a reading of the preface to the *Lives of the Sophists*, in which the narrator posits a very harmonious relationship between himself and his addressee, a senior senator named Gordian, based on his assimilating the latter into his own sphere in which ‘Greek literary culture does at least temporarily drown out the political world’ (252). König spends the rest of the article showing places in the body of the *Sophists* that call this harmony into question. In particular, he focuses first on encounters between sophists and emperors in which, for all the apparent coziness, the inherent power differential between ruler and subject intrudes itself even in cases involving such philhellenic emperors as Hadrian and Marcus. König then moves on to a very original reading of the entire Philostratean performance milieu. He traces a technique whereby Greek cultural figures from Isocrates to Peregrinus Proteus use Panhellenic festivals as a means of constructing an audience of ‘all Greeks’: in König’s view Philostratus expands this to include sophistic performances and audiences in general, such that a cultural space is created that includes (and defines) all Greeks and excludes others, most obviously Romans. This key aspect of Sophistic performance gets lost in those episodes of the *Sophists* that take place in the imperial capital itself, thus once again calling into question the harmonious relationship laid out in the preface.

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