

Kitap Eleştirisi / Review

Jesper Majbom Madsen, *Eager to be Roman. Greek Response to Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia* (London: Duckworth, 2009), pp. 166; ISBN 978 0 7156 3753 1; € 63.99.

In his book Madsen (M.) presents a rewritten version of his PhD dissertation accepted by Aarhus University (Denmark). His aim is «to study how the population in the province of Pontus and Bithynia responded to Roman rule» (1). For this purpose the book is divided into five chapters: (1) *A Governor at Work*, (2) *Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia*, (3) *Greeks in the Roman World*, (4) *Turning Roman in Pontus and Bithynia* and (5) *Responses to Roman Rule*, each chapter being divided into a number of sub-chapters in which various aspects of the overriding theme are discussed. The main body of the book is followed by eight pages of conclusions and by notes, a bibliography and indices. The book focuses on the period from the Mithridatic Wars (89–66 BCE), when the region came under Roman control, to Caracalla's grant of Roman citizenship to the free population of the empire in 212 CE.

In his introduction (1–9) M. offers a brief overview of research perspectives on the response of Greek communities to Roman rule before asking the question of how the concept of identity in respect of Greeks and Romans should be defined. Clearly influenced by the works of G. Woolf, J. Lieu and A. Sen¹ and referring to appertaining comments by various ancient authors (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Polybius, Diodorus, Dio Chrysostom, Aelius Aristeides), M. concludes that Greekness was determined by a shared culture with a common language and common cults and customs, whereas membership of the Roman community was determined by legal status, i.e. possession of the Roman citizenship. In consequence, the inhabitants of Pontic and Bithynian cities, particularly the members of the local elite, could at the same time belong to both Greek and Roman collectivities (5). Against this background M. asks the question «whether the population in Pontus and Bithynia identified themselves as Roman or preferred not to affiliate with the Roman collectivity» (7–8).

In his first chapter *A Governor at Work* (11–26) M. aims to discuss Rome's view of Pontus and Bithynia through Pliny the Younger's correspondence as governor of the province with the emperor Trajan. Defending, against Woolf², the genuineness of Pliny's Book 10 of letters to the emperor as administrative documents providing valuable insights into how Roman rule affected life in the province in the early second century CE, he uses this epistolary collection as a sort of travel guide to sketch out to the reader Pliny's itinerary through the province, describing the administrative tasks and financial problems Pliny was confronted with in some of the province's cities and occasionally quoting both from Pliny's letters to Trajan and from the latter's responses. M. concludes that Tra-

¹ G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman staying Greek. Cultural Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East*, in: *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994) 116–43. Idem, *Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge 1998). J. M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford 2004). A. Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny* (London 2006).

² G. Woolf, *Pliny's Province*, in: T. Bekker-Nielsen (ed.), *Rome and the Black Sea Region. Domination, Romanisation, Resistance* (Black Sea Studies, 5) (Aarhus 2006) 93–108.

jan on the whole respected local law and tradition, refusing to lay down general rules for the entire province. The emperor, says M., was interested primarily in the cities' economy and finances, which is why he asked Pliny to pay special attention to public accounts, but also in keeping the province calm politically, which is why M. believes that Trajan forbade the establishment of a fire brigade at Nicomedia, since such associations were, in the emperor's eyes, prone to turn political before long.

The second chapter *Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia* (27–57) is concerned with the question of how the advent of Roman rule and the introduction of Roman institutions affected the political, social and cultural setting in the newly established province. M. discusses Pompey's efforts to unify Pontus and Bithynia into one Roman province with the aid of the *lex Pompeia* which, M. says, was meant not to replace existing city codes but «to standardise the civic constitution to ensure common practice in the new province» (33). It placed political power in the hands of ex-magistrates and the cities' wealthiest citizens, thus legalising what was de facto the reality within the civic communities. M. next discusses the nature of Roman emperor-worship and the way it was established in the provinces, seeing the cult not as a continuation of Hellenistic ruler-worship but as something set up and organised in dialogue with the Roman authorities, who took an active part in the shaping of the cult. He also ponders the question of «the number of temples consecrated and the combination of deities receiving worship within them» (46). In a rather lengthy discussion that has little bearing on his conclusions he considers the pros and cons behind the erection of temples for the joint cult of Dea Roma and Julius Caesar. This is followed by a brief outline of when and under what circumstances Bithynian cities were awarded and subsequently perhaps stripped of their status of *neôkoros* in the second and third centuries. M. concludes that the emperor and the Senate were heavily involved in deciding whether suggestions by provincial cities to set up an imperial cult were acceptable, how the cult was to be organised and where it was to be located. Consequently, this was, according to M., not a Greek cult for worshipping the emperor after a Greek fashion but a «system of exchange» in which Rome's dominating influence «underlined the provincial communities' submission to Roman order» (53). The final aspect of this chapter concerns Greek autonomy and Roman rule. By way of various examples from Pliny's aforementioned book, M. claims that Roman rule meant a high degree of interference in the cities' local affairs and thus a significant loss in what had previously been essential to Greek identity, namely freedom and autonomy, as decisions ultimately rested with the emperor.

The third chapter *Greeks in the Roman World* (59–81) focuses on whether the rather late appearance of members of the Greek elite in the Senate and in top positions in the Roman administration indicates a general Greek scepticism towards Rome and a resultant reluctance to embark on a political or administrative career in the Roman world. M. discards this idea of reluctance and rather believes that under the first emperors the integration into the Roman world of the elites in the western provinces had a higher priority. The advent of the Flavian dynasty then brought about a gradual shift in focus from the west to the east. As further reasons for the late appearance of members of this province's elite on the imperial administrative scene M. adduces the constitutional differences between a Greek βουλή and an *ordo decurionum*, which he says rendered the former less apt as a «basis for the recruitment to imperial administration» (78), the scarcity of Roman colonies in the province and its inferior economic potential. According to M., the fact that members of the Pontic and Bithynian elite proper reached the Senate and top imperial positions later than their peers in Gaul or Spain does not suggest any prejudice against Greek participation at the highest level in Roman imperial politics and administration. To prove his point, he adduces Arrian and Cassius Dio, who as members of the provincial elite, were «part of the Roman community on equal terms with the rest of the

empire» (81) and therefore had similar rights and opportunities in the imperial administrative apparatus.

In his fourth chapter *Turning Roman in Pontus and Bithynia* (83–102) M. looks into how deeply Roman institutions, religion and culture influenced the life of the provincial population and what the local responses were. He examines the use of Latin names and their mention in inscriptions as a way for provincials to demonstrate their identity as Romans and comes to the not altogether surprising conclusion that whereas the use of Roman names may indicate an individual's legal status (that bestows on the bearer legal, economic and political benefits), it says nothing about the person's ethnic affiliation or his or her motives for mentioning their Roman names – whether this was done for pragmatic reasons to sport their privileged status as members «of the empire's ruling community» (90) in their home town or because they identified themselves as Romans in a cultural sense. To get a clearer picture, M. turns to the imperial cult and to various offices or tasks (Bithyniarch, Pontarch, archpriest, Sebastophant, ambassador, logistês) as activities or posts through which members of the local elite could advertise their affiliation to the emperor. He mentions a number of inscriptions in which members of the local elite of various Pontic and Bithynian towns highlighted the offices they held and concludes that the elite were keen to display their activities in Roman collectives to the local public and thereby their affiliation and loyalty to Rome. This desire, says M., can also be learned from the use of Roman names, particularly among female members of the provincial elite, for whom it would not have been necessary to adopt Latin names. According to M., the constellations in which Latin names were used show both a lack of understanding of how the Roman *tria nomina* system worked and an «over-eagerness to appear Roman» (132). Since all these inscriptions were set up in Greek and therefore addressed to a Greek audience, M. concludes that this was done in the expectation that Roman citizenship and participation in elite Roman culture were regarded as highly prestigious political and social achievements.

The fifth and last chapter *Responses to Roman Rule* (103–126) focuses on intellectual criticism of Rome in Pontus and Bithynia. For this purpose M. looks into the life and works of three prominent intellectuals from the province (Dio Chrysostom, L. Flavius Arrianus and Cassius Dio) in an effort to put their criticism of Rome into the right context. He argues that their criticism was directed at phenomena (e.g. worship of living emperors, incompetence of emperors to rule) not peculiar to a Greek perspective but taken up by Latin intellectuals as well, which, so he says, suggests that «this sort of criticism was more politically and socially motivated than cultural» (125). On the whole, M. believes that the attitude of Dio Chrysostom, L. Flavius Arrianus and Cassius Dio towards Rome was in general positive and their keenness to proclaim both their connections to the Roman world and their achievements therein was in line with that of the local elite. As regards the question of cultural identity, M. convincingly pleads for a cautious approach, warning against oversimplification and imposing «a modern value-system on a complicated ancient nexus» (134).

Madsen has written a readily readable book and presented his line of argument in a straightforward and coherent fashion. One can find little fault with his insights and conclusions. This, however, is partly due to the fact that some of his findings – e.g. on the local elite's eagerness to advertise their affiliation to Rome; the social advancement through service in the Roman army; the adoption of Roman names or Roman involvement in the organisation of the imperial cult in the province – are neither surprising nor exactly new but can be found scattered in various previous studies, some of

them absent from his bibliography.³

In some respects Madsen's approach is too narrow. For example, in his chapter *A Governor at Work* he uses Pliny's letters as virtually the sole source for describing a governor at work in this province. Important though these letters are, they by no means suffice for Madsen's objective of examining the period from 89 BC to 212 CE. For example, the fact that the relationship between various governors and the Bithynians was fraught with tension that repeatedly resulted in the provincials' bringing charges of extortion against their governors is not mentioned at all. A thorough examination of the relationship between the Bithynians and Rome's highest representative in the province has to be diachronic and requires the inclusion of the relevant epigraphic and numismatic evidence absent from the discussion.⁴ In addition, it would also have been a good idea to set the findings in a wider context and draw systematic cross-provincial comparisons for the various aspects discussed.

Yet, on the whole, the merit of Madsen's short and concise book lies in that it presents a succinct study with a clear if not exclusive focus on how the Greek-educated and Greek-speaking provincial elite in Pontus and Bithynia responded to Roman rule, mainly on the sociopolitical and cultural levels. The book invites comparative studies with other provinces in the Greek east.

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³ Not mentioned in his bibliography are, e.g.: M. K. Torchia, *Trajan and Civic Autonomy in Bithynia. A Study of the Governments of Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Prusa* (Yale [Ph.D. 1969] 1970); E. Dabrowa, *L'Asie Mineure sous les Flaviens. Recherches sur la politique provinciale* (traduit par E. Willman) (Wrocław 1980); P. N. Langer, *Power and Propaganda. Relations between Rome and Bithynia under the Empire, 27 BC – 260 AD* (Virginia [Ph. D.] 1981); H. Devijver, Equestrian Officers from the East, in: Ph. Freeman / D. Kennedy (eds.), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East. Proceedings of a colloquium held at the University of Sheffield in April 1986* (Oxford 1986) 109–225; M. Sartre, *L'Asie Mineure et l'Anatolie* (Paris 1995); E. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, Πολιτικῶς ἀρχεῖν. *Zum Regierungstil der senatorischen Statthalter in den kaiserzeitlichen griechischen Provinzen* (Stuttgart 2002); Th. Witulski, *Kaiserkult in Kleinasien. Die Entwicklung der kultisch-religiösen Kaiserverehrung in der römischen Provinz Asia von Augustus bis Antoninus Pius* (Fribourg 2007).

⁴ A great deal of this source material is conveniently compiled in M. K. Torchia (see fn. 3), who also discusses in great detail Pliny's activities as governor.