

Louise Revell, *Roman Imperialism and Local Identities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xiii+221 pp. ISBN: 978-0-521-88730-4.

Ever since Francis Haverfield gave currency to the term 'Romanization' (*The Romanization of Roman Britain*, 1905), the concept has spawned a spirited and long-standing scholarly debate: some readily employ the term 'Romanization' as a convenient shorthand for various influences of the Roman imperial metropole on the colonized peripheries, while others are of the opinion that the term has created more interpretative problems than it has solved and should now be jettisoned. There are certainly basic problems in defining 'Romanization', but most would at least agree that it entails some degree of provincial adoption of the Latin language, Roman legal practices, Roman cultural forms, and above all urbanization. More problematic is the tendency of scholars to employ the term as a kind of typology. Implicitly or explicitly, scholars have discussed 'Romanization' as a matter of degree; there were allegedly more and less perfect manifestations of an ideal *Romanitas*. Alongside such an articulation of 'Roman-ness' (Revell's preferred term), we often find the implicit assumption that this was a one-way cultural transfer from imperial center to colonized fringe areas.

Revell (hereafter R.) calls into question these and other embedded assumptions, frequently found in works on Roman imperialism. As she states at the outset, her aim is 'a deconstruction of the term "Roman"' (xi). She examines, and problematizes, 'Roman-ness' in the archaeological record, studying a selection of sites from three Roman provinces: Baetica, Tarraconensis, and Britannia. In these diverse locations, she finds a shared, if variously articulated, idea of 'Roman-ness' in terms of urbanization, the emperor, and religious practices. Above all, R. attempts to tease evidence out of the archaeological sites for the structures of daily life in Roman provincial settings. For her 'to be Roman was a discourse rather than an absolute,' and she states at the outset that 'this book represents an exploration of what it was to be Roman: which structures were shared between the different groups, how they were enabled through the architectural surroundings, and consequently, how they are manifested within the material remains of the archaeological record' (2-3). The phenomenon of Roman imperialism, according to R.'s reconstructions, was in these settings a lived experience revolving around paradoxical similarities and differences in public architectural forms.

The opening chapter (1-39) provides the context of the argument. Basically R. advocates a departure from a study of Roman buildings carried out according to the paradigms of art history; she seeks to focus analysis not on aesthetic considerations, but rather on functionality (19: 'from the building as architectural aesthetic to the building as social space'). R. offers useful comments on the tempo of Roman imperialism, noting that the age of Augustus and onwards is a watershed for the adoption of Roman architectural forms in the provinces. Her study concentrates on the early second century CE, and her individual case studies are (from Spain) Italica, Munigua, Clunia, and Bibilis; and (from Britain) Londinium, Venta Silurum, Wroxeter, and Bath. R. stresses the agency of those who lived out their lives in these places in adopting and modulating Roman architectural and cultural forms. Here she draws on the agency and structuration theories of Anthony Giddens, which posit individual lives and social structures as an interactive duality of mutual dependency, rather than as a dichotomy privileging one member over the other. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* would also serve R.'s purposes well.

The second chapter (40-79), considers urbanization as more than simply the construction of buildings, arguing that we may more profitably view urbanization as ideology. 'Urbanism was more than the buildings: it was (and still is) an ideology about how to live, privileging one form of dwelling above any other, with a series of values attached to lessen the appeal of other alternatives ... Urbanism as a concept encompassed not only dwelling, but also the correct way of inhabiting a town: political participation and responsibility, communal events in religion and public spectacles, and the wealth of the community being reflected in the magnificence of the physical structures'

(76). Urbanization, however, was not uniform; it was a phenomenon 'reproduced as a dialectic between the rulers at Rome and the inhabitants of the provincial towns' (49). Most striking in the case studies are the great variations in architectural forms, from the highly articulated Italica to relatively unimposing remains at Caerwent (Venta Silurum). Causal factors in such discrepancies include degrees of imperial favor, the extent of the 'epigraphic habit', and the primary function of the site in the imperial matrix.

The third chapter (80-109), takes up the question of the Roman emperor as a crucial component in the creation and daily exercise of Roman provincial identity. Images of the current emperor throughout the Roman city were not only constant reminders of local forms of dependency upon the imperial metropole, but also contained implicit, unintentional cues to the 'tension between the institution [of the Principate] and the individual holding that power at any moment' (80). The Flavian municipal law (*lex Flav. 59*) reveals *duumviri*, *aediles* and *quaestors* swearing an oath upon election to Jupiter, Augustus, the deified Claudius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian and the Penates. Hence, this litany ran through so-called 'good emperors', who had been deified, right on through to the current emperor, thus reflecting the senatorial party-line emanating from Rome (conforming also in the deletion of emperors who had suffered *damnatio memoriae*). Again, the discrepancies across the case studies are striking; for example, public areas in Italica were replete with images of the emperor, whereas we find far fewer statues and dedications at Bibilis. We know something about the violent and abrupt changes of allegiance at times of regime change in Rome itself (cf., e.g., Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 52.3-5), and, even though it would be difficult and perhaps impossible to say anything definitive about the question based on archaeological evidence in these towns, in my opinion R. has nonetheless missed an opportunity to reflect here upon ideological and political implications of local provincial responses to news of such political changes in the capital, an especially fascinating line of inquiry, given the time-lag in communications in the ancient world.

The fourth chapter (110-49), addresses the question of the role of religion in constructing 'Roman-ness' at the provincial level. Broad-based inquiries into this question have typically been dominated by a concern with the imperial cult, rather than by study of architectural forms in particular Roman provincial towns. In alignment with her general approach, R. eschews any attempt to hypostatize Roman religion, but rather she tries to understand Roman religion as a practice. 'Religious knowledge was created through practice in the guise of religious ritual: in the act of worship, people created both the preconditions for belief and the form belief took. Through these ritual acts, religious space became imbued with meaning, and this meaning was in turn read off in repetitive ritual use of these spaces' (116). It is unfortunate that R. has here employed the term 'belief,' which has led many into a methodological quagmire; fortunately, her overall approach avoids the problem; as in most recent studies on Roman religion, her analysis focuses on what Romans *did* in the religious sphere, rather than on what they *believed*. Bath, Munigua, Italica, and Bibilis are the principal case studies in this chapter. Once again, we find great variation from site to site; for example, at Bibilis and Caerwent inscriptions play a relatively unimportant role in negotiating religious discourse. '[A]lthough there was a form of religious ritual which could be broadly classified as "Roman" evident at all sites, it was not an identical phenomenon, but one subject to local variability' (149).

The fifth chapter (150-90) broadens the discussion to consider 'the multivocality of material culture'; that is, the different status registers (global and local) articulated in provincial public architecture. Dichotomies of elite/non-elite, free/slave, male/female, adult/child, and ethnicity and status hierarchies were all negotiated in political urban spaces and public ceremonies. Social relations are seen as a function of public discourse rather than any 'fixed given.' '[F]ragmentation of being Roman undermines the notion of a normative experience of being Roman. "Roman" is a discourse, a project which each person understands in a different way. The same material which

was used to create an elite Roman experience was also used to construct the experience of a Roman woman, a Roman child or a Roman slave' (189).

An epilogue (191-93) reiterates the main thrust of the argument: concerning 'Roman-ness' in provincial settings, 'any uniformity in meaning was constantly slipping, to create a multiplicity of meanings ... producing a paradox of similarity and diversity, both within individual communities and throughout the empire as a whole' (191). R.'s study is built on careful and detailed analysis of several archaeological sites, and she has intelligently applied ideas of agency and daily practice in producing a nuanced interpretation of Roman imperialism and the spread of Roman culture. But R. tells only part of the story. An important and essential complement to her study would examine the extent of cultural reflexes of indigenous and hybrid practices arising in provincial peripheries — as articulated in the material record — upon the imperial center.

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Andrew Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt, The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 262 pp. ISBN-13:9780521887892.

The *Acta Alexandrinorum* is a group of stories which present various versions of an archetypical narrative. In this narrative, a group of Alexandrian Greek ambassadors travels to Rome in order to promote the interests of their city at the imperial court. There, they confront a hostile emperor and other enemies — usually Alexandrian Jews. Their visit culminates in the heroic execution of at least some of the Greek nobles. As their name denotes, *Acta* texts are usually arranged as the official minutes of a trial. Modern scholars often include under the title of *Acta Alexandrinorum* various other pieces of related texts — letters, stories, speeches, and so on — and accuracy therefore calls for a differentiation between *Acta Alexandrinorum* proper, and *Acta*-related literature.

The year 1954 saw the publication of a long-awaited book on the *Acta* — *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs (Acta Alexandrinorum)*.<sup>1</sup> It included the texts of all known relevant papyri with a commentary and some translations, as well as a discussion of the numerous problems that are inherent in this curious collection. It was universally acclaimed as a scholarly achievement, and marked its young author, Herbert A. Musurillo, as a promising papyrologist. For Musurillo, the *Acta* was a body of literature that stemmed from official documents, that involved elements from the genres of the novel and the mime, and that was influenced — though to a limited extent — by late Hellenistic and Roman literature of heroic deaths. Unlike Rostovtzeff, Musurillo downplayed the importance of Cynic influence on the *Acta*; and, more importantly, he claimed against Von Premerstein that there was no single redaction of the texts, and that they are not a part of a continuous work or a single collection.<sup>2</sup>

Musurillo's authoritative interpretation was widely accepted, a fact which has left the *Acta Alexandrinorum* quite untouched since the publication of his book. This condition was then reinforced by the subsequent publication of a Teubner volume, also edited by Musurillo, in 1961. But the long period that had elapsed since then, and particularly the discovery of more relevant texts — some as early as in 1961, when the Teubner edition was already in print — have rendered a reassessment of the literary corpus long overdue. Harker (henceforth H.) is fully aware of this gap, and is therefore in constant dialogue with Musurillo. Indeed, as we shall see, the very title of

<sup>1</sup> H.A. Musurillo (1954), *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs (Acta Alexandrinorum)* (Oxford).

<sup>2</sup> M. Rostovtzeff (1957), *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., rev. by P. Fraser (Oxford); A. von Premerstein (1923), *Zu den sogenannten alexandrinischen Märtyrerakten* (Philologus supplement 16, 2) (Leipzig).