

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)*.¹ 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.²

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

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

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

his book reflects not so much his own discoveries as his opposition to one of Musurillo's more controversial conclusions. In his 178 pages of discussion of the *Acta*, H. is able to analyze the issues and reveal their complexity far more thoroughly than was possible for Musurillo in his appended analysis of 50 pages.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the book. It provides the necessary delineation of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* proper, and of *Acta*-related literature; it explains the papyrological medium through which the testimony was preserved; and it lays out the Alexandrian setting in which the narrative of the corpus takes place. Regretfully, the reference to the modern controversy with which the chapter ends is superficial, and does not include so much as a hint regarding the hypothesis instructing H.'s own research. The second chapter — 'The Embassies to Gaius and Claudius' — sets the standards for the book as a whole in its detailed approach to all relevant evidence. The chapter discusses the Alexandrian embassies to Gaius and Claudius in the years 38-41 CE, during the heated conflict between Alexandria's Greek and Jewish communities. It proceeds to claim that 'the ways in which people reacted to the historical events of AD 38-41 led to the creation of the first *Acta Alexandrinorum* stories' (10). This literature, according to H., would in turn serve as a "literary model" for later writers of similar stories.

Chapter Three — 'The *Acta Alexandrinorum*: Augustus to the Severans' — is where the uninitiated reader will finally come to grasp the full scope and significance of *Acta* literature. Despite its title, the chapter is organized thematically rather than chronologically, and it surveys the various categories of this literature, starting with *Acta*-related material (imperial letters, official edicts, "documents" inspired by imperial visits to Alexandria, reports of Alexandrian embassies to Rome, trials of prefects, and trials set in Alexandria) and culminating with the *Acta Alexandrinorum* proper — allegedly documenting the trials of Alexandrian citizens at the imperial court in Rome. A thorough examination leads H. to conclude that, while various parallel motifs appear in a great number of the stories, variations presented by the authors prevent the designation of a 'neat, homogenous group' (96). Significantly, only the glorification of the city of Alexandria and the patriots who struggle for its rights are identified here as a theme common enough to characterize the entire corpus of the *Acta* proper.

Chapters Four and Five contain the main novelty presented by the book. Chapter Four — 'The *Acta Alexandrinorum*: The Historical Background' — surveys the historical background of the composition of *Acta* literature. It examines the various official documents that would have informed and inspired writers of *Acta*, as well as those of other genres of writing and performance — such as oracular prophecies and mimes — genres that shared various features of contents and style with *Acta* literature. This chapter also shows why the provenance of some *Acta* papyri must persuade us that the readership of this literature existed also among Egyptian (as opposed to Greek) circles outside of Alexandria; these groups saw in Alexandrian citizenship a means by which to gain the coveted Roman citizenship. H. aptly deduces that it is for this reason that the social, administrative and legal initiatives of the Severans — effectively making all aspirations to Roman citizenship redundant by 212 — brought about the decline of the *Acta Alexandrinorum*. Chapter Five — 'Between Loyalty and Dissent: The *Acta Alexandrinorum* and Contemporary Literature' — continues to survey possible points of contact between the *Acta Alexandrinorum* and other similar corpora of literature, particularly ones that may be seen to have involved ideas of martyrdom. Alongside the obvious Jewish and Christian traditions, *Acta* motifs are compared here to traditions regarding Classical Greece's Socrates, as well as Rome of the principate, with its elaborate *exitus* literature.

The main conclusion in this part of H.'s research is perhaps the book's most important message, and will certainly be its main innovation to readers familiar with Musurillo's work. The latter ascribed the emergence of *Acta* literature, and its survival through the second century CE, to steadfast local resistance. According to Musurillo's interpretation, *Acta* literature was produced by Alexandria's aristocratic class as a 'most violent anti-Roman propaganda,' emanating from

dissatisfaction with Roman rule and the way it interfered with the city's autonomy.³ Naturally, such a reading puts great emphasis on the Roman administration's persistent refusal to allow the convention of the city-council — the *boulē* — which was disbanded under the Ptolemies; and on the arbitrary emergence in Egypt of corrupt Roman officials.

Even in eventful Roman Alexandria, there is precious little to support the ascription of rebelliousness to the city's leading circles. Haas has shown why we should reject modern notions of an Alexandrian "inborn propensity" towards violence and rebellion.⁴ More generally, recent representations of provincial routine which have emphasized the aspect of local resistance to Roman rule have met with acute disapproval. The willing assimilation of indigenous populations into the texture of the empire produced peace and provincial calm whose impact far outweighed that of occasional bursts of violence. Musurillo, of course, cannot be suspected of having been a partisan of post-colonial historiography; but his line of reasoning may appear to the inadvertent scholar of Roman imperialism to match that of such self-avowed post-colonial histories of the provinces as Benabou on Africa or Mattingly on Britain.

H.'s refutation of Musurillo's ideas regarding Alexandrian resistance to Roman rule is persuasive in its specific analysis of the real situation in Alexandria. For H., the *Acta Alexandrinorum* fits perfectly in the wider context of the Hellenic Mediterranean world. It is not anti-Roman, but equally hostile to Romans, Jews, Egyptians, 'that is all non-Greeks' (175); and it accentuates above all the differences between the Alexandrian heroes and these non-Greek *barbaroi*. H. rightly emphasizes the absence of 'the quest for a *boulē*' from most of the stories, as well as the fact that, unlike oracular literature, the *Acta* is not known to have been taken by the Roman authorities to represent dissent.

As the book convincingly demonstrates, the stories in the *Acta* mostly revolve around the Alexandrian Greek heroes, their services to their fatherland, and their spectacular, glorious deaths; and these stories were read across Egypt by men who considered themselves Hellenic by culture. The book's title, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt*, is therefore inaccurate, if not misleading. This title merely reveals the subject of the research's most significant amendment to the prevailing view. It does not so much as hint at the nature of the book's greatest contribution to our understanding of an important aspect of Alexandrian — indeed, Egyptian — culture under the principate: that patriotism and Hellenic identity were the *Acta Alexandrinorum*'s most probable spark and fuel.

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³ Musurillo (1954), 258.

⁴ C. Haas (1997), *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore - London), 12.