

BOOK REVIEW

Jesper Majbom MADSEN, *Eager to be Roman: Greek Response to Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2009. Pp. ix +166. Cloth, \$80.00. ISBN 978-0-7156-3753-1.

Based on the author's doctoral dissertation, this book investigates the ways in which the population of Pontus et Bithynia, a province of the Roman Empire in the northwestern part of Asia Minor, engaged culturally with the Romans. Drawing on detailed investigations of literary works and epigraphic evidence, Madsen, who is on the faculty of the Institute of History and Civilization at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense, seeks to demonstrate that Greek intellectuals and members of the local elite in this province were in fact keen to identify themselves as Roman, and that Roman culture and imperial connections were prestigious in the eyes of their Greek readers and fellow-citizens.

In his Introduction Madsen states that his aim is to look at the impact that the coming of Rome had in a province dominated by Greek culture and how Rome affected the ways Greeks perceived themselves. Modern scholars have varying points of view on this matter which Madsen summarizes here.

In Chapter 1 Rome's view of Pontus and Bithynia, as seen through the eyes of Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan, is detailed. Madsen sees this correspondence as a "fruitful antithesis" to the local view of Rome which sheds light on the views and ways of the provincials as seen from the center. Other surviving literary evidence written by Romans from the Bithynian part of the province and epigraphic material found in the province are examined. Some might wish that more attention were given to the extensive non-epigraphic material remains of Roman rule in Asia Minor and what they tell us. Madsen's focus though is heavily on literary and epigraphic evidence.

Chapter 2 assesses to what extent Roman rule modified the local way of life. Here is discussion of the two views of how the coming of Rome changed Greek civic communities. One view is that the influence of Roman rule was minimal. The other view sees the *lex Pompeia* as a radical revision of the Greek constitutions. After Pompey's series of victories in the East, he initiated a comprehensive reorganization aimed to stabilize and secure Roman control in Anatolia and the

Levant. Emperor-worship as another institution introduced into Pontus and Bithynia is also discussed.

Chapter 3 is a treatment of Greeks in the Roman world. Examples are provided of elite Greeks who left their hometowns in order to take up careers as army officers, politicians, and members of the imperial administration and even senators based in Rome. Arrian and Cassius Dio, among others, are cited as seeing themselves as very much belonging to the Roman community.

“Turning Roman in Pontus and Bithynia” is the title of Chapter 4. Though there were Roman colonies in this province (*viz.*, Sinope and Apamea) cultural influence from Rome was counterbalanced by the continuity of Greek institutions and traditions. Roman citizenship improved an individual’s legal, economic, and political rights and was essential to reach specific priesthoods and magistracies of higher social standing. This chapter includes an interesting study of the distribution of imperial *nomina gentilia* in Bithynian cities which may suggest that Claudius, perhaps Nero, and the Flavians focused more on the distribution of citizenship than previous emperors (p. 88). He mentions Antinous, Hadrian’s lover, one of Bithynia’s most famous citizens at least in terms of *Nachleben*, but gives him short shrift and does not even index his name. Madsen points out that though the Greek and Roman worlds continued to be two separate cultures with different values, as time passed the line between them softened.

Chapter 5 treats responses to Roman rule. The general attitude to Roman rule in Pontus and Bithynia is best seen according to Madsen as a spectrum with total acceptance and total rejection as the extremes. This chapter focuses on criticism of Rome since this has been the center of modern scholarly debate. The author is aware that classical scholarship is dependent on elite sources and that the voices of political dissidents can be as elusive as those of other groups such as women, the poor, slaves, children, or foreigners. The bitter patriot Dio Chrysostom, the Roman authority who was a nostalgic Greek, L. Flavius Arrianus, and the Roman historian from Bithynia, Cassius Dio, are the focal points of Madsen’s discussion.

In his well-argued Conclusion Madsen states that that the writings of three very different intellectuals and governor’s report on one side and a large amount of epigraphic material on the other, offers a unique opportunity to see Roman rule both from a central and a local point of view. He cautions that each province of the empire is unique when one seeks to determine how the relationship between Rome and the community in question developed.

He underscores in the Conclusion how scholarship has changed recently on the subject of Greek provincials. For over a century the consensus was that Greek provincials were highly devoted to their Greek background and thus less likely to be affected by the advent of Roman rule. Recent studies, however, show that elements of Roman culture and civic life found a way into Greek communities and members of the elite gradually obtained Roman rights, seats in the Senate, and appointments in imperial administration. In Pontus and Bithynia the population, most notably the elite, showed a great interest in the Roman world. Apart from accepting Roman material culture and technology, members of the local elite were eager to announce their active participation in Roman institutions and to demonstrate their affiliation with Rome, Roman power and the Roman sphere in general. (p. 128)

The book breaks fresh ground in its emphasis on newer scholarship regarding Greek provincials and will be valuable to teachers and students alike reading Pliny's correspondence with Trajan or studying the provinces of the Roman Empire. The extremely high price (\$80.00) seems unfortunate for such a short book (166 pages plus ix) and will be an obstacle to the wide circulation the book deserves.

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