

BOOK REVIEW

Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World. By NATHANAEL J. ANDRADE. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xxiii + 412. Hardcover, \$110. ISBN 9781107012059.

Andrade's *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* is an important work which should transform the way scholars understand and interpret the cultural expression of Greekness in the Greco-Roman Near East. Andrade's work is situated in the debate concerning the spread and penetration of Greek culture into the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In this debate, some scholars, such as Millar, have stated that Greek became the primary mode of cultural expression in the region, while others such as Ball, have argued that Greek culture was merely a veneer over indigenous influences which were predominate.¹ More recent authors, such as Butcher and Sartre, have stressed the hybrid nature of the Near East.²

Andrade's contribution to this debate examines the development of Syrian expressions of Greekness. He argues that Syrians, writing in Greek and engaging in debates about the nature of Greek culture, influenced the development of Greek identity in ways that have previously gone unnoticed. He sees Greek and Syrian cultural expressions as overlapping sets utilizing polyvalent symbols which interacted in complex ways. In short, to define the Near East as either Greek (and Roman) or indigenous or a mixture simplifies the complex intertwining of people's identities.

Andrade organizes the work into three parts. The first part, "Greek Poleis and the Syrian Ethnos (second century BCE-first century CE)," examines the different treatment of Greeks and Syrians under the Seleucid and Roman Empires. Andrade argues convincingly that in the Seleucid realm until the reign of Antiochus IV, Greekness was largely limited to the ethnic Greek descendants who had moved to the Near East. Under Antiochus IV, indigenous communities, such as the Jewish

¹ F. Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC – AD 33*. (Cambridge 1993); W. Ball, *Rome in the East* (New York 2000).

² K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles, 2003); M. Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome* (Cambridge, MA 2005),

community in Jerusalem, were invited to participate in Greek-style civic communities. As the Maccabean revolt demonstrates, such attempts were generally unsuccessful and led to the fragmentation of the Near East until the Roman organization of Syria under Pompey in 64–63 BCE.

Local dynasts, such as Antiochus I of Commagene, were able to cooperate with Roman officials to preserve security in the region, while also creating new cultural identities. Like others such as Herod, Antiochus I was able to “domesticate” Greek and Roman expressions for a Near Eastern context, eventually making local dynasts irrelevant for governance (92). The Romans were then able to support the development of these cultural expressions and rule based on Greek civic communities, largely inhabited by an acculturated Syrian ethnos. Unlike the Seleucids and Parthians, the Romans were able to unite the Syrian and Greek elements into a common governance structure of peer poleis, which enabled the consolidation of Roman rule in the region.

The second part, “Greek Collectives in Syria (first to third centuries ce)”, examines the spread of Greek civic structures throughout the Near East. Andrade stresses the use of “Greek” idioms and their development amongst members of the Syrian ethnos and uses the cities of Antioch, Apamea, and Gerasa (modern Jerash) as examples. Andrade argues that in Palmyra (and by implication elsewhere in the Near East) Greek and Syrian were categories that overlapped with both sharing and creating polyvalent meanings. In the final chapter of this part, Andrade examines how the Romans transformed the previously exclusive Greek civic structure of Dura-Europos to include non-ethnic Greeks and more diverse cultural expressions.

While part two focused around archaeological and epigraphic evidence, the third part, “Imitation Greeks: Being Greek and Being Other (second and third centuries CE)”, contains close readings of several literary works, including Dio Chrysotom’s *First Tarsian Oration* and Lucian’s *On the Syrian Goddess*. In these chapters, Andrade discusses the development of *doxa*, an appearance or perception that seems to be true but distorts reality, concerning Greeks and Syrians in the Near East. He argues that Syrian authors both consumed and created Greek *paideia* for their own ends. Whereas other scholars have previously taken as truth the statements by some Greek authors that Syrians distorted “true” Greek *paideia* (such as with sexual deviance and androgyny), Andrade convincingly argues that such statements should be understood in the context of debates over Greekness, which Syrians, such as Lucian, were intimately involved in. The final chapter demonstrates the attraction of Greek cultural expressions in the changing world of

the third century, when Palmyra challenged Rome and Greece for both political and cultural hegemony.

This book is well argued and intellectually sophisticated. It is a work of complex scholarship and not suitable for use in a classroom, except for the most advanced graduate students.

Occasionally, I felt that Andrade stretched his interpretation of the evidence a little too far. For example, in his discussion of the tattooing and self-castration of participants at Hierapolis as recounted in *On the Syrian Goddess*, Andrade suggests that the readers themselves become participants in the very same rituals. In doing so, he argues that even the most cultured Greek readers would have become Syrians and androgynous themselves (304–312). These are relatively minor quibbles compared to the intelligence and persuasiveness of the work, which this review can barely do justice.

WALTER D. WARD

University of Alabama at Birmingham, wdward@uab.edu