

BOOK REVIEW

Between Kingdom and Koinon: Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis and the Pontic Cities. By SØREN LUND SØRENSEN. Stuttgart, GR: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 1-224. Paperback, €48. ISBN: 978-3-515-11312-0.

Although this book appeared in 2016, it has received little attention from review bodies. As the rich volume deserves more attention, I volunteer my thoughts on it here.

Sørensen's book, which started as a dissertation, grapples with limited but tantalizing evidence from Roman imperial Pontos. This region's early interactions with the Roman state involved such figures as Mithridates, Pompey and Pythodoris, but its later integration into the Roman Empire has garnered less attention in English-language scholarship. This volume thus explores the process by which the region developed Hellenistic-style *poleis*, which were then incorporated into a Roman province (1st century BCE – early 3rd century CE). Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis is the primary case study.

The book consists of six chapters plus a short introduction and conclusion. The first chapter focuses on an inscribed imperial oath and the following five largely concentrate on institutions of various scales (e.g., *koinon*, *polis*, province). In short, Sørensen seeks to answer how a region with a famous history of antagonism towards Rome reached the point that its inhabitants celebrated the cult of Roman emperors, held Roman citizenship and did not rebel against Roman authority (13-15). The volume traces transitions of areas from kingdom to province to client kingdom back to province (107-108). As the title suggests, a major part of this story is the *koinon*, glossed as "league" but left largely untranslated (which makes sense given the imperfections of the common translation "provincial council"). Sørensen considers the *koinon* as a primary instrument of the concomitant Hellenization and provincialization of Pontos. He follows the argument of Marek that the region hosted multiple *koina* (versus the "unitary" theory of Deininger). In other parts of the empire, a former ruling class often held onto power during the transition to Roman power. However, based on onomastic study, Sørensen proposes that the Hellenized bouleutic class holding Roman

citizenship that established itself through the new civic and federal institutions of Pontos was a foreign one, as in nearby Bithynia (176-177).

The questions and concerns of the book will look familiar to those used to reading about “Romanization.” Here, however, the stress is fittingly on Hellenization and institutions, given the role granted to the *koinon*. The book also consistently employs the term “provincialization” to describe the ultimate outcome of this process. This choice of language makes sense given trends in Roman imperial studies to treat the creation of a province as a process—and a non-linear one at that—rather than an event. The *koinon*-ization (please forgive the clunky neologism) of the region serves as an intermediary step on the way to provincialization. The implications of this intermediary step could use more teasing out, especially given that the book recognizes that a province and *koinon* are not the same thing. Indeed, I suspect that the *koinon* was more real than the province for local groups. The process of forming more locally oriented *koina* thus had different valences than forming a Roman administrative province, even if Rome imposed the *koinon*. The “commonness” expressed in the term *koinon* (and recognized by Sorenson briefly, 172) seems especially fitting for Roman stakes in the coherence of this region. Indeed, Roman stakes in the *koinon*-ization of Pontos arguably set the region apart from other parts of the empire where *koina* existed.

Understandably, as its expressed intent, the volume is very focused on the Pontic region. Yet, its conclusions raise intriguing comparisons with other regions. In Pontos, Sørensen sees a close connection between the *koinon* and Roman power, and he consistently defines the primary purpose of the *koinon* as the organization of provincial-level imperial cult (e.g., 11, 13, 54, 57). It is worth noting that recent scholarship has expanded the purposes of *koina* across the eastern Mediterranean. Notably, Babett Edelmann-Singer’s *Koina und Concilia* (2015) de-centered imperial cult from the functions of the *koinon*, and it considered the *koinon* as a more holistic socio-economic institution. While Sørensen cites Edelmann-Singer’s work, the publication timing may have been such that he could not fully grapple with its reworkings of Deininger’s model for the *koinon*. If the Pontic *koina* indeed had closer ties to Roman authority than did others, then the *koinon* may have operated differently in Pontos compared to elsewhere.

In this regard, I wonder if more could have been made of Pontos’ peripheral position within the Roman world. Arguably, Roman officials had much at stake to Hellenize and *koinon*-ize (and not just provincialize) this region. Elsewhere, such as in the Greek mainland and in Asia, a longer legacy of Hellenism existed and the initiative of forming a *koinon* may have resided more with local groups

than with the imperial power. In more central areas, Romans may not have wanted a *koinon* and its constituent Hellenes to be too cohesive, since that could pose a challenge to the Senate at Rome. Comparatively, in Pontos, Sørensen implies that cohesion may have been a goal to integrate the region into the Empire. Hellenization and the *koinon*-ization that accompanied it could foster Pontos' connections to regions to its west, rather than its east.

Of course, the scant available evidence (and realities of the local epigraphic habit) obscures the view of what the *koinon* accomplished more broadly in this region. For instance, I am also intrigued about how the more constant presence of the Roman military on the doorsteps of Pontos might have shaped the functions of a *koinon* in this region. Did local *koina* have any sort of relationship with the Roman military? Sørensen poignantly reminds the audience of the violence of Roman conquest in his account of what happened to traditional local temple states under Pompey (110-113) and in his following "excursus" to Judaea (113-116). He later briefly mentions the presence of legions in Cappadocia (177). To what extent was the presence of troops, alongside memories of earlier violence, a driver for the conformity sketched in the concluding chapters of the book?

The book often refers to various cities and it takes pains to delineate shifting political boundaries. As someone not as familiar with Pontos as other regions of the Empire, I would have appreciated more maps to help follow these arguments. In this regard and others, the book is aimed primarily at a specialized audience of ancient historians. Helpfully, it exposes Anglophone audiences to ongoing debates of French and German scholarship. Having come out in 2016, it has already set the stage for further scholarship on the region. For example, I draw interested readers' attention to the work of Chingyuan Wu, who has built on its arguments. Indeed, those steeped in scholarship of Pontos, the *koinon*, processes of provincialization and Strabo will find Sørensen's book a valuable and necessary reference.

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