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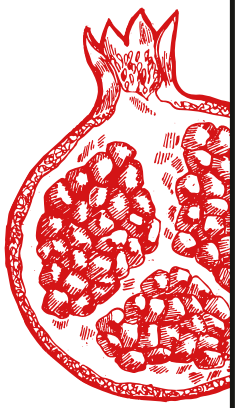

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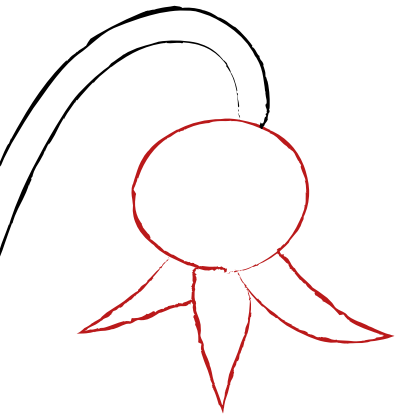
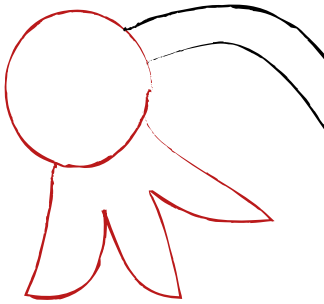


Thematic Issue: Global and Local Cultures in the Roman East



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GLOBAL AND LOCAL CULTURES IN THE ROMAN EAST: AN INTRODUCTION

Raimo Hakola and Nina Nikki

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Keywords: globalization, Greco-Roman culture, Roman East, Roman rule

Abstract

Globalization has linked distant and distinct societies and intensified social relations and transactions among them. The spread of Roman imperial rule offers an interesting parallel to modern globalization. In both cases, scholars have long been debating the consequences of this process; while many members of society can benefit from new cultural, social, and economic opportunities, it is also claimed that the exposure to global culture can undermine local identities and produce a sense of isolation and antagonism. The articles in this special issue examine various outcomes of the extension of Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean from the early Roman to the early Islamic period. The contributors, representing classical studies, archeology, history, early Christian studies, and Islamic studies, offer case studies that investigate how the introduction of Greco-Roman culture to the East changed local cultures and resulted in multicultural innovations and reinvented identities.

La mondialisation a créé des liens entre des sociétés éloignées et distinctes et intensifié les relations sociales et les transactions entre elles. L'expansion de la domination impériale romaine offre un parallèle intéressant à la mondialisation moderne. Dans les deux cas, les chercheurs et chercheuses débattent des conséquences de ce processus ; si de nombreux membres de la société peuvent bénéficier de nouvelles opportunités culturelles, sociales et économiques, il est aussi possible de dire que l'exposition à une culture mondiale peut ébranler les identités locales et produire un sentiment d'isolement et d'antagonisme. Les articles de ce numéro spécial analysent les divers résultats de l'extension de la domination romaine en Méditerranée orientale, du début de la période romaine au début de la période islamique. Les auteurs et autrices, venu·e·s des études classiques, de l'archéologie, de l'histoire et des études du Christianisme et de l'Islam anciens, proposent des études de cas qui analysent comment l'introduction de la culture gréco-romaine en Orient a modifié les cultures locales et entraîné des innovations multiculturelles et des identités réinventées.

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GLOBAL AND LOCAL CULTURES IN THE ROMAN EAST: AN INTRODUCTION

Raimo Hakola and Nina Nikki

Globalization has linked together distant societies and increased interaction between various distinct local cultures. While globalization in our time is perhaps more intense and deeper than ever, the spread of Roman imperial rule offers an interesting parallel to the modern phenomenon. In both cases, scholars have been long debating the consequences of this process; while many members of contemporary and ancient societies clearly benefit from new cultural, social, and economic opportunities, exposure to globalizing forces can also undermine local identities and produce a sense of isolation and antagonism.

In this special issue, authors use both literary and archeological sources to examine various outcomes of the extension of Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean from the early Roman to early Islamic period. The contributors, representing classical studies, archeology, history, early Christian studies, and Islamic studies, offer case studies that investigate how the introduction of Greco-Roman culture changed

local cultural expressions. The arrival of Rome introduced new institutions, new kinds of public buildings, architectural trends, and a new material culture. This may have sometimes triggered opposition but in some other contexts enhanced the attractiveness of the worldwide culture and invited participation in the Empire. Both in classical and early Christian studies some scholars have emphasized the resistance of native cultures to often violent Roman rule and to imperial discourses that were created by the Roman intellectual elite to legitimate this rule. However, others have urged that research should move beyond the binary opposites of Roman vs. native cultures and acknowledge how the spread of Roman power resulted in the formation of various types of cultural and ethnic identities. The articles in this special issue demonstrate how representatives of various local cultures reinvented their identities in relation to a new global culture and at the same time anchored these new self-understandings to various shared or distinct cultural traditions.

From Hellenization and Romanization to the Dichotomy between Roman and Native Cultures

Since Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire (333–323 BCE), Greek cultural stimuli began to spread more intensively across the eastern Mediterranean. Two centuries later, the grip of a new global force, Rome, was also increasingly felt in the region. The Romans envisioned that they had a civilizing mission in preserving and disseminating the best cultural inventions of the Greeks (Woolf 2001, 311–22), which meant that the exposure to Greek culture, now with a Roman twist, continued and produced new amalgamations of global and local cultures.

In earlier scholarship, these large-scale historical changes were often described with such broad concepts as Hellenization and Romanization. During recent decades, however, it has become obvious that these concepts were loaded from the beginning with subtexts emerging from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sociopolitical ideologies. In the nineteenth century, the emergent European nation-states wanted to

present themselves, and Western culture, as the continuation of ancient Greek civilization. In this context, Hellenization was understood as the extension of Greek culture and, in turn, the Hellenization of Rome was seen to lay the ground for the Hellenization/Romanization of the West, which was taken as the establishment of a Christianized Western civilization.[1] In the process, Jews and Judaism were marginalized from the history of Western civilization. This led to the long-standing notion of the incompatibility of Jewish and Greek cultures, even though literary sources as well as archeological and epigraphic evidence have all provided information that has demonstrated how Jews interacted with their environment in a number of ways (Hakola 2022).

The term "Romanization" emerged within a colonial context where Rome and its self-imposed role as the arbitrator of Greek culture to the barbarians served as a model for the attempts to draw conquered and allegedly uncivilized native cultures into the sphere of Western civilization represented by the British Empire (Morley 2010, 38–41). Since the collapse of the modern colonial empires, scholars have increasingly seen the value-laden character of the concept of Romanization. It is based on a simplistic distinction between the center and the periphery where historical and cultural reformations are understood to follow the military conquests of the Romans and their alleged will to civilize "backward" native peoples (Erskine 2010, 58). This conclusion is based on a one-sided view of Roman policy toward various imperial minorities. Even though the Romans were military imperialists and quite often ruthless in their use of violence, they were not cultural imperialists in that they did not impose a top-down cultural policy on the peoples they conquered (Galinsky 2015, 5). As a consequence, cultural interaction did not only spread from Rome to new peripheries. The incorporation of various eastern regions and cultures, especially, into the Empire, also gradually changed the definition of what it meant to be Roman.[2] Nowadays, it is common to conclude that the concept of Romanization privileges the role of Roman metropolitan culture in bringing cultural changes and ignores reciprocal exchanges between the center and its

[1] Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 20; Jokiranta et al. 2018, 5–6; Hakola 2022, 83–84.

[2] Erskine 2010, 61; Pieterse 2015, 232–35.

provinces. For this reason, the Romanization debate is generally regarded as having come to an unsatisfactory end, and scholars have since been experimenting with alternative concepts to describe the expansion of the Roman world.[3]

When the former colonies gradually became independent and modern worldwide empires collapsed after World War II, the portrait of Rome started to change from the harbinger of civilization to a ruthless oppressor that the native people had to resist or revolt against. Both in classical and early Christian studies, several scholars have applied postcolonial approaches to describe how newly subjugated peoples were incorporated into the Empire and its ideology.[4] According to some readings, Rome's domination helped some among the local elites gain privileged economic and social positions, while most of the population experienced Rome's rule as oppressive and exploitative. However, we quite rarely have direct evidence that Roman rule was understood as oppressive because, especially in the Roman West including Britain, scholarly conjectures are based largely on non-literary material evidence, while the voice of the Roman subjects is more audible through the authors in the Roman East (Erskine 2010, 50). But even in such a detailed work as Josephus' *Jewish War*, one looks in vain for evidence of sustained or militant anti-Roman attitudes or ideology.[5] Neville Morley (2010, 58–59) has intriguingly suggested that once the conquest of new territories was past, "Romans ceased to be the clear enemy" and "their domination was effectively invisible to the majority of the population, a matter of regular concern only to the client ruling class." This all means

[3] Cf. Mihajlović and Janković 2014; Pitts and Versluys 2014.

[4] In classical studies, see, e.g., Mattingly 2006; Webster and Cooper, 1996; Mattingly 2011. In early Christian studies, see, e.g., Campbell 2008; Horsley 2004a; Horsley 2004b; Horsley 2008; Tucker 2010; Tucker 2011. The classic formulations of postcolonial theory include Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1999. In this connection, we cannot do justice to the many studies applying postcolonial perspectives in classical and Biblical studies. With these studies, we share the aim of complexifying the relationships within the Empire and highlighting the ambiguities in power relationships.

[5] Goodman 2007, 395; Mason 2016, 279.

that, for the most part, the people's experience of being ruled was local and very much in continuation with what they had experienced earlier.

Studies depicting Rome as the oppressor and various native people as the oppressed often build upon James C. Scott's publications, particularly on Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). In Scott's thinking, the purpose of domination lies in appropriation, which "unavoidably entails systematic social relations of subordination that impose indignities of one kind or another on the weak" (1990, 111). At the core of Scott's thinking is the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, and in ancient applications of this dichotomy, imperial Rome appears as the force violently dominating various native minorities. While postcolonial approaches have been a way forward from the Romanization debate, these approaches have been criticized in classical studies because the narratives of colonialism and imperialism only reproduce, and even strengthen, the Roman–native dichotomy (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 6). Similarly, there has been a dissatisfaction with anti-imperial interpretations of early Christianity, since this paradigm describes the relationship between Rome and imperial minorities like Jews and Christians exclusively in terms of conflict, clash, and opposition (Lehtipuu and Labahn 2015, 9). To avoid this simplistic inclination, Greg Woolf (1995) suggested some time ago that scholarship should move beyond the binary opposite of Roman vs. native cultures and consider how the expansion of Roman power invited various responses and contributed to the emergence of manifold cultural and ethnic identities. In his often-cited article, Woolf proposed that we should not think of the growth of the Empire as the expansion of one culture at the expense of others, but as "the emergence of a new, highly differentiated social formation incorporating a new cultural logic and new configuration of power" (1995, 347).

Globalization in the Ancient World

To clarify diverse and complex dynamics between various local cultures and the expanding Roman Empire, many scholars have recently used perspectives first developed for the study of globalization in the

modern world.[6] The term "globalization" is commonly understood to denote various forms of "connectivity and de-territorialisation" (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 11), a "trend of growing worldwide interconnectedness" (Pieterse 2015, 235), and even the idea of limitlessness, which chimes well with Virgil's idea of Rome as *imperium sine fine* in *Aeneid* 1.278–79. The application of this concept to the ancient world is helpful for both historical research and globalization studies, because a deep, historical perspective helps to dismantle presentist and Eurocentric views of world history (Pieterse 2015, 226, 235–36). Globalization perspectives complement earlier cultural and archeological studies on antiquity that have already emphasized the "mobility, connectivity and mélange" of the Roman world (Pieterse 2015, 229).

The perspective of globalization deconstructs the above-presented dichotomy between Rome and native cultures by stressing the plurality of identities, interconnectedness between different areas and peoples, and the importance of cultural transmission alongside economy and politics. Romanization studies and later anti-imperial readings differed in their evaluation of whether Roman rule was civilizing or oppressive, but they both moved from the center to the provinces and emphasized state-centric actions, institutions, and ideologies as unifying the Mediterranean world. A globalization perspective moves the emphasis from top-down ideologies to "connectivity, mobility, objects, and knowledge networks" as creating a unifying culture (Pieterse 2015, 229).

Seen from a globalization perspective, local cultures are not "static, 'authentic', immured against change but in constant dialogue with … the 'globalising' forces that create, structure and (to an extent oppose)" them (Whitmarsh 2010, 3–4). The expansion of a global culture quite evidently produces a significant degree of cultural homogenization, but this process also quite often increases cultural variation and, in this way, promotes cultural heterogeneity (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 14). Cross-cultural communication and connectivity can increase the per-

[6] Whitmarsh 2010; Jennings 2011; Pitts and Versluys 2014; Hakola 2022. While the term "globalization" was invented to describe a modern situation, these studies argue in their own way that the phenomenon itself is not restricted to modernity.

ceived similarity between cultures, but, at the same time, it can evoke articulations of imagined boundaries between different groups affected by globalization (Hodos 2014, 242). The process of globalization thus has the potential to heighten the awareness of distinct local identity that can lead to the reaffirmation of one's cultural roots in the form of symbolic and/or real resistance (Whitmarsh 2015, 3).

The above-presented perspective does not superficially assess the outcomes of globalization only as positive. There is room for the sense of resistance, but the forms of resistance are not seen as being separate from the process of cultural adaptation and exchange. The globalization framework has made it possible to recognize seemingly contradictory tendencies that occur hand in hand when representatives of local cultures try to cope with the exposure to globalizing forces. Cultural adaptation and resistance can be understood as two sides of the same process when local communities claim to possess the same global cultural capital as their various contemporaries but, at the same time, portray themselves of loyal custodians of their indigenous traditions.

Articles in This Special Issue

The articles in the present special issue reflect the developments summarized above in a variety of ways. In his article "Jesus and Poverty in the Context of Imperial and Local Economies in First Century Galilee," Raimo Hakola argues that the models presenting Jesus and his fellow Galileans as living close to a subsistence level are based on an outdated view of the Roman economy and ignore recent archeological findings in Galilee. Recent advances in the study of the Roman economy challenge the view that the Roman global economy as it manifested itself locally in Galilee was primitivist and served only the interests of the small elites. Recent studies have also clarified the significant role of local economic agents (agricultural producers, manufacturers, artisans, traders, fishermen) in the shaping of local and regional economic networks. Jesus's rhetoric of the poor and the destitute, on the other hand, can be explained as an identity construction trope that draws on the ancient idealization of voluntary poverty. The article revisits the portrait of the

Galilean population as oppressed and Rome as the ultimate oppressor, and argues that Galileans including Jesus and his followers benefited from the progress of the regional and global economy.

In her article, "Divinely Sanctioned Domination: Accommodating Roman and Native Identities in Dionysius's *Roman Antiquities* and Josephus's *Jewish War*," Marika Rauhala investigates two authors who belonged to a people subjugated by the Romans and attempted to reconcile their native and ethnic identities with Romanness. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek author under Roman rule, seeks to demonstrate in his *Roman Antiquities* that Romans were, in fact, Greeks as far as their best qualities were concerned. The Jewish historian Josephus, on the other hand, offers in his *Jewish War* a divine rationalization for the Roman victory over the Jews. Both authors exemplify ways in which a lower status group can achieve positive distinctiveness either through social mobility—by moving from one group to another—or social creativity—by redefining ingroup identities in a beneficial way. Josephus and Dionysius exemplify members of the local elites who renegotiated their identities as members of the nations subjugated by imperial Rome.

Nina Nikki's article, "A Multicultural Paul in the Globalized Roman Empire," looks at the apostle from the perspective of multiculturality. Multiculturality is defined as a person's access to more than one knowledge system and acculturation as the mutual adjustment of these systems on the level of groups and social identities. The article takes Paul's robust Jewishness as a starting point but argues that Paul has access to other knowledge systems as well, such as a Roman one, which becomes salient when Paul views Jewishness critically and stereotypically. Together with the recent advancements in the globalization studies of the Roman Empire, this argument complicates any simplistic anti- or pro-imperial readings of Paul. In Nikki's reading, Paul becomes an example of a lower-level agent who was at home in multicultural Rome and, at the same time, holds fast to his inherited native identity as a Jew.

In his article, "Global and Local Narratives at Palmyra," Eivind Heldaas Seland argues that ancient Palmyra has been defined as either Eastern, Western, or local, depending on the interests of the respective researcher. Palmyrenes have often appeared at the periphery of either the Roman or Persian world and not at the center of their own world.

Seland gives a voice and agency to the Palmyrenes by looking at their epigraphy, iconography, and architecture as performative speech-acts, identifying five kinds of narrative that the Palmyrenes told about themselves: the family, the lineage, the city, the desert, and the world. Seland's Palmyrenes show that the identity of an individual or a group is always multilayered and cannot be reduced to a single trait.

Jussi Rantala's article, "Citizenship and Ethnicity in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*," discusses the senator and historian Cassius Dio's views on Roman citizenship especially in light of Emperor Caracalla's contemporary edict, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Through the edict, the emperor granted citizenship to almost all free men in Rome, affecting especially the situation in the Roman East and raising the question of the relationship between ethnicity and citizenship. Dio remains critical of citizenship granted or sold beyond "natural" Italian origins and resists the changes he witnesses in the Empire, clinging to an ideal of the monarchical rule of Augustus. Rantala's article demonstrates that the issues related to ethnic identity and its boundaries were controversial already in antiquity.

Jarkko Vikman's article, "Letter from Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne as a Diaspora Quest for Authenticity," deals with a letter that has survived in Eusebius's *Church History*. The letter is sent from the Roman West, but it expresses the sentiments and values of a diaspora group whose historical origins are in Asia Minor. The letter can be read as a message to an idealized native land emphasizing how a diaspora group of Asians and Phrygians living in Lyons and Vienne hold fast to the honorable behavior of their ancestors. Vikman applies modern diaspora studies that have shown how diaspora groups often become obsessed with the authenticity of their way of life by claiming how closely they follow the perceived "original" cultural system of their native lands. This process often leads to essentializing caricatures of both the majority culture and the idealized native minority culture. The letter thus gives voice to an ethnic minority group living in the diaspora in an imperial context.

In her "From Bad Barbarians into Good Romans? Themistius and the Case of Goths in the Fourth Century," Maijastina Kahlos examines Themistius's argumentation concerning Goths in his speeches in the changing contexts of Romano-Gothic relations from the 360s to the

380s. Kahlos shows how the concept of the barbarian was versatile and could be modified in varying ways for different purposes. Themistius's speeches belong to a host of Greco-Roman accounts of the incorporation and acculturation of peoples into the Roman Empire. These discourses were an intrinsic part of understanding Romanness. Barbarians, in these cases usually Goths, mirrored Roman writers' values and notions about how things should be, what Romans should be like, what the emperors should be like, and how the government and army should be organized in the late Roman Empire. Kahlos's article thus gives an example of how imperial self-understandings are not stable but often adjusted to the politics of the day.

In his article, "The Seed of Abraham: Gentile Ethnicity in Early Christian Texts and the Quran," Ilkka Lindstedt moves east of the Byzantine Empire and south of the Sasanian Empire to the birthplace of Islam and the Quran. Lindstedt asks why the Quran invokes Gentile Abrahamic ethnicity as an identity that the believers participate in, as a *positive* marker of identity, and what this Quranic Abraham meant for the Arabian religious map, social categorizations, and ethnic legitimization before Islam and in early Islam. Lindstedt conjectures that by showing appreciation to the Gentile (*ḥanīf*) Abraham, the Quran appropriates a term used pejoratively by some Jews and Christians about the communities where Muhammad lived. The Quran makes the label a positive one denoting membership in the ingroup. Despite this focus on the gentility of Abraham as a prototypical character, the Quran allows some Jews and Christians into the group of believers (*al-muʾminūn*), thus putting forward a novel believer identity in which the different followers of Muhammad were accepted as part of the same group regardless of their existing identities (which could be understood as sub-identities) as Jewish, Christian, or Gentile. Abraham was esteemed by many non-Jews already in antiquity and appropriated by many Jewish and Christian groups, but Lindstedt's article shows how Abraham's legacy continued to be discussed. This justifies the designation of the early Islamic period as the continuation of late antiquity, one which scholars are now starting to make more frequently.

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