

## **Roman Greeks in Bithynia et Pontus- foreigners in native lands. A study of cultural identity in Greek provincial communities.**

### **Introduction.**

Bithynia et Pontus is one of the most cultural composed provinces in the Roman empire. The Bithynian part and the Black Sea coast was dominated by Greek colonies and cities founded by Hellenistic kings often based on preexisting Greek communities. The kingdom of Pontus, which in parts made up the other half of the province, was prior to the Roman conquest strongly influenced by Iranian culture. Although somewhat Hellenized, the Pontic kingdom did not base its power on a city-culture, as we know it from the Greek and Roman world. Instead the administrative structure was divided between different castles, where the Pontic court ruled an extensive number of villages and Iranian temple communities, which also had an extensive number of villages under their jurisdiction.

Then Pompey defeated King Mithradates IV in 66 BC a large reorganization of Pontus and Bithynia was needed in order to adapt the former Pontic Kingdom to Roman administrative standards. In this process the castles were abandoned and cities within the frame of the Greek polis was founded to provide an administrative form, which applied to Roman standards. The existing Greek colonies and Hellenistic cities were generally kept in the pre-Roman form but was made the administrative center for the royal land that previous was submitted the Pontic or Bithynian crown.

Despite the Greek form Bithynia et Pontus did experience significant changes in the way the political life was organized. One of the most significant changes was that magistrates at the age of 30, later from the age of 22, obtained permanent membership of the council after having ex officio.<sup>1</sup> Magistracies was since the Hellenistic age held by members of the elite and by favoring this grope Rome changes the Greek bule, where the members by lot were elected from demos and sad for limited period- normally a year, to a form of *ordo decurionis*, where the local elite ex officio membership for life. The favor of the local elite was even more apparent in the imperial period, where wealthy individuals could pay for admission to council.<sup>2</sup> As a

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<sup>1</sup> Pliny

<sup>2</sup> Pliny

result the political and public life in Bithynian and Pontic cities was more Roman than Greek.

No doubt Greek culture still dominated the cultural pattern in both the Bithynian and Pontic part of the province; Greek continued to be the language used in official matters and the Greek pantheon was still in the religious landscape- at least in Bithynian cities. But Rome's influence changed both Greek and variously Hellenized communities significantly.

The political power was even stronger than before placed within local elite, where both magistracies and seats in the council were gathered around the wealthiest part of the local population. Over time this group received Roman citizenship and was, at least in a juridical sense, Roman. Roman festivals were celebrated in many Greek cities where members of the local elite involved themselves in the imperial cult as priests or benefactors.

This local elite surely interacted with the Romans and tried to obtain the best possible position in the new world order but whether members of the local elite in Bithynia et Pontus also identified themselves as Roman is an entirely different question, which this paper aims to answer. How the local elite in our province responded to Roman hegemony has received little specific attention. The discussion of provincial Greeks and Roman identity has been conducted on a more general level comprehending Greeks as a group of relatively unified cultural identity a tradition in which this study takes its origin.

### **Previous thoughts.**

The cultural influence Roman hegemony had on daily life in the provinces has traditionally received less scholarly attention in the eastern part of the empire compared to the west, where the study of Romanization in for instance Gaul, Britain, Iberia or Germania is central subject in national as well as the international debate. The different focus on the influence of Roman culture in provinces such as Achaia, Asia and Bithynia et Pontus is to be found in a combination between the general accepted view that Roman culture as a civilization was inferior to its Greek and oriental counterparts and the comparatively less focus Roman history receives in modern Greece and Turkey, where focus tends to be more on the Classical and Hellenistic age or the early Islamic history accordingly.

That the coming of Rome had limited influence on the cultural pattern in the Greek provinces is related to the idea that changes in cultural identity was driven by a desire to reach a higher level of civilization. Romanization was, and often still is, defined as a phenomenon that mainly applies to the cultural encounter between Rome and the population of Iron Age communities in the western part of the empire. Here provincials felt a natural attraction to Roman culture because of the improved urban life, provided law and order, peace and stability and thereby offered by higher stage of development.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed as a process where provincial populations adopted Roman culture in order to reach a higher level of civilization, Romanization as a term do not apply to Greek or Hellenized provinces dominated by a Greek cultural pattern. Here Roman hegemony did not introduce the same cultural changes as in western provinces, Greek remained the official language and the civic structure was already in place and formed the backbone in the provincial administration. View as older a more civilized, Greek culture was believed to have been and largely unaffected by Roman hegemony and elements from Roman cultural.<sup>4</sup>

Up though the 20<sup>th</sup> century the view of Romanization changed radically and the idea of the natural attraction was abandoned. Romanization was now explained as either a deliberated Roman policy aimed to take over especially the local elite in order to consolidate Roman rule<sup>5</sup> or as a voluntary adoption of Roman culture as a way to maintain social status or achieve better once.<sup>6</sup> In the second half of the century, the idea of Romanization changed again and was viewed as an acculturation between Roman and provincial cultures, where the coming of Rome promoted a new cultural pattern containing element from both Roman and native culture.<sup>7</sup> The cultural pattern in western provinces was now seen as a fusion between Roman and pre-Roman culture and the cultural pattern in the provinces was now seen as a Gallo-Roman or Romano-British culture rather than just Roman or pre-Roman culture indicating that Romanization was multi lateral process with regional differences.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mommsen Haverfield 1923 ()

<sup>4</sup> Haverfield 1923 ()

<sup>5</sup> Bénabou 1976

<sup>6</sup> Brund MacMullen

<sup>7</sup> Millett 1990; Webster andre.

<sup>8</sup> Woolf

The cultural influence from Roman hegemony in Greek provinces was in the same period relatively little redefined. Based on the view that Roman civilization was a product of Greek culture and therefore unable to offer a higher stage of civilization the relation between Greek and Roman culture was still viewed in the light of Greek culture as more civilized.<sup>9</sup> And due to a high level of urban development Rome had no need to implement her own urban structure in the Greek provinces. As a result the number of Roman colonies founded was too few and too spread to have held any permanent influence on the cultural pattern in Greek communities.<sup>10</sup> Instead of having a Romanizing effect on life in the Greek provinces, Roman colonies were put under a significant pressure Greek Culture and gradually Hellenized.<sup>11</sup>

Parallel to the idea of Greeks lack of interests in Roman culture a number of new studies was presented showing that the influence from Roman culture had on Greek communities was much stronger than previously suggested. A study of civil servants of eastern origin showed that Greeks, after a slow start, were elected magistrates and pro-magistrates in high numbers, indicating that from the beginning of the second century members of the Greek elite was just as engaged in imperial carriers as their western kinsmen.<sup>12</sup>

A study on the imperial cult in Asia Minor argued that the imperial cult in Asia Minor was an entirely new form of ruler cult and had little in common with earlier form of Greek celebration of Hellenistic kings.<sup>13</sup> It was argued that the initiative to perform imperial cult in Asian communities often was local and promoted by a desire to achieve higher status both as an individual within a single community and between cities on a provincial level.<sup>14</sup> Finally a number of studies showing that architectural trends and public buildings, known as original Roman, reached the conclusion that elements from Roman urban life were more widespread than previously believed.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these studies a new understanding of how Roman culture influenced Greek provincial communities developed. It was now generally accepted

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<sup>9</sup> MacMullen

<sup>10</sup> Bowersock ()

<sup>11</sup> MacMullen

<sup>12</sup> Halfmann

<sup>13</sup> Price

<sup>14</sup> Price.

<sup>15</sup> Thomson, Alcock, Romanization of Athens and Roman in the east. Inge Nielsen

that Roman rule made a significant impact on the cultural pattern in the Greek provinces and made it appropriate to talk of a Graeco-Roman cultural pattern rather than Greek or Roman culture.<sup>16</sup>

To view the cultural pattern in the Greek in the provinces as an acculturation between Greek and Roman culture broke in part with the old paradigm and the idea of Greek provincial culture as crystallized and largely unaffected by the presence Rome. It was general accepted that Roman institutions such as public baths, gladiatorial games and imperial cult as well as Roman technology, arts and artifacts was adopted and integrated with Greek culture.<sup>17</sup>

But despite the fact that Roman influence on public as well as religious life in Greek communities was generally recognized this did not lead to the assumption that Greek provincial communities were Romanized. Romanization was in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century generally related to identity and defined as a process, where provincials came to identify themselves as Roman.<sup>18</sup> Romanization was in this respect seen as provincials imitation of Roman lifestyle and Roman identity and, as a result, closely related to provincials adoption of material culture, institutions or public buildings of Roman origin.

This however was generally not applied to the population in Greek communities where the adoption of Roman institutions and material culture was believed not to have affected Greek identity,<sup>19</sup> which was, as has been argued, more related to myth of origin than a question of adopting material culture.<sup>20</sup> According to this view, Greeks could due to the flexibility in Hellenism easily surround themselves with artifacts and different types of buildings originating from Rome or other cultures without exposing their identity as Greek.<sup>21</sup> A conclusion that acknowledged the cultural influence of Roman culture in Greek communities and thereby posed an alternative to the idea of Greeks reluctance to interact with the Roman world but at same time continues to see the Greek provincial population as particularly resistance towards the adoption of cultural identity.

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<sup>16</sup> Millar

<sup>17</sup> Woolf

<sup>18</sup> Woolf

<sup>19</sup> Woolf MacMullen

<sup>20</sup> Woolf Hall

<sup>21</sup> Woolf

To question the relation between identity and material culture in the Greek world marked an important step forward in the study of cultural identity in antiquity, and should apply not only to the population in the Greek provinces but to the rest of the empire as well. No doubt provincials could have surrounded themselves with Roman artifact or worked to introduce Roman institutions and public building, in order to present themselves as Roman, but it need not have been the case. The choice of artifacts depended heavily on supplies and the presence certain artifacts can easily have had more to do with what was available than how the owners' identified themselves. The same applies largely to public building of Roman origin or erected by the help from Roman technology, which in many cases offered both technological improvements that alone can explain why they were introduced.

Further more, to decide whether or not Greek provincials identified themselves as Roman out of material culture and the existence of public buildings alone is problematic. This, however, is not due the relationship between Greek identity and myth of origin but because the sentiments behind different choices of artifacts, institutions and the architectural form of public buildings is often unknown. As such we have know way of knowing whether individuals who surrounded themselves with certain artifacts or stood behind the construction of buildings raised in a Roman architectonical fashion regarded themselves or were regarded as Romans. It can bee argue that such individuals wished to present themselves as Romans, but it most bee taken into consideration that trends and availability of architects played a significant role in how urban landscape was formed.

That local architects in Bithynia et Pontos did construct buildings raised in fashion normally regarded as Roman is apparent in Pliny's letters to Trajan, where the emperor is asked to send an architect but order Pliny to use local expertise.<sup>22</sup> This and other letters from Bithynia, mentioning local architects, make it clear that Greek architects had a large influence on how Roman architecture indicating that architectonical trends from Rome were not in any way crystallized but influenced by trends, fashion, and impulses of both Mediterranean and oriental origin and therefore problematic as a source to determent cultural identity.

A different way to understand how Roman hegemony influenced cultural identity in Bithynia et Pontos is to focus on how the local population chose to appear

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<sup>22</sup> Pliny

in public and see whether there is a tendency to present oneself as Roman. In the imperial period members of Greek communities in Bithynia et Pontus defined themselves in a number of different ways. An individual from Prusias ad Hypium could define himself in a number of ways: member of a certain family, from the *φολησ Τιβεριανησ*, as citizen of Prusias ad Hypium and maybe even as a members of the council and magistracy of the city. Their cultural inheritance was dominating and Greek language remained the official language in both public and private matters. But the question is whether a man from Prusias ad Hypium despite his Greek cultural heritages also identified as Roman himself and thereby part of the Roman world.

### **Roman identity in Bithynia et Pontus.**

One way to answer this question is to focus on how individuals in Bithynia and Pontus presented themselves in public for instance by using Latin names or referring to carries in the imperial cult or Roman administration. Another way to appear Rome was to use statues and relief arts to picture oneself or family in scenery from Roman every day life, this was especially apparent on grave monument, where the deceased often together with family members appears in Roman close laying at a table surround by wife and children. Not in a few cases are status objects such as horses and togas clearly visibly on the relief's indicating the individuals' social standing. To appear in public with Latin names or pictured as Roman on reliefs indicates a wish to be identified as Roman. As the remaining part of this paper aims to show this was a common type of behavior in Bithynia et Pontus, where and population in public did present themselves in a fashion closely recognizably as Roman.

One example of a man who clearly identified himself as Roman is Catilius Longus from the colony of Apameia. Longus had an extraordinary imperial career, where he served first as military tribune in the IV Scythian legion under the emperor Claudius and later as admitted to the senate and appointed as legatus pro praetor to the province of Asia.

