THE FORMATION OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL CULTURES

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Summary. *- The provincial cultures of the Roman empire share a common formative period around the turn of the millennium. Republican imperialism seems to have been accompanied by very little cultural change, and although provincial cultures were never fossilized, change under the empire took place within a framework laid out in this formative period. This paper explores the implications of these observations for current views of Romanization, and attempts to account for the formative period and for some contrasts between the experience of different regions during it. The approach employed is a contextual one, setting the emergence of new styles and of new uses of material culture in relation to structural changes in the empire and to Roman notions of the civilizing process and of their own identity.*[1]

Zusammenfassung. *- Um die Zeitenwende erlebten alle provinzialen Kulturen innerhalb des römischen Reiches eine formative Periode. Den republikanischen Imperialismus begleitete allem Anschein nach nur eine geringe kulturelle Veränderung. Wenngleich die provinzialen Kulturen nie erstarrt waren, erfolgte der Wechsel während der Kaiserzeit innerhalb des Rahmens, der bereits während der formativen Phase angelegt war. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Auswirkungen dieser Beobachtungen auf die gegenwärtige Diskussion um die Romanisation. Darüber hinaus wird versucht, die formative Periode und einige unterschiedliche Erfahrungen verschiedener Regionen zu erklären. Die Überlegungen gehen von einem kontextuellen Ansatz aus, wobei das Entstehen neuer stilistischer Erscheinungen und neuer Anwendungen der materiellen Kultur in einen Bezug gebracht wird mit strukturellen Änderungen im Reich und römischen Vorstellungen des Zivilisationsprozesses und des eigenen römischen Selbstverständnisses.*

A formative period for provincial cultures

If Roman provincial cultures from Britain to Egypt are considered together, one of the most striking patterns to emerge is a chronological one. Whatever contrasts we might draw between different regions, provincial cultures shared a common genesis. Judged in terms of almost any index of material culture, the primary impact of Roman styles was extremely limited everywhere before the last decades of the last century BC. The architectural significance of those decades around the turn of the millennium has been noted both in the west (Ward-Perkins 1970, 1; Millett 1990b, 40) and in the east (Dodge 1990; Macready and Thompson 1987). The spread of gladiatorial games; of Latin (and even to a lesser extent Greek) epigraphy; and of ceramic and figurative styles, all confirm this impression. Some reservations are necessary. First, a distinction needs to be drawn between acculturation across a wide range of media, and the selective import of a few items of Roman or Italian origin to be used in new ways by alien societies. Second, the creation of provincial cultures was accomplished over decades rather than years. Finally, some areas do seem to have been affected a few years earlier than others. But when these developments are viewed against an appropriate scale - the length of time taken by Romans to acquire their empire, for example - the contrast is striking. The provincial cultures of the Roman empire shared a common formative period.

Recognition of a formative period does not imply that provincial cultures were created rapidly and then stagnated. Four developments in particular stand out:

(1) *An initial time lag* between the acquiring of new cultural aspirations and the capacity to realise them is very common. For example, in areas without a tradition of building in stone, new styles were first

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1 The ideas presented in this paper are to be developed and will be documented more fully in a study to be entitled *Becoming Roman in Gaul* . I am very grateful to the participants at the symposium for their comments on the original presentation and to Martin Millett for helping me clarify this text.

manifested in traditional materials until quarries and distribution systems had been established. Similarly, in areas where *terra sigillata* could not be made nor cheaply obtained, imitations such as Gallo-Belgic wares were produced for an initial period.

(2) *New elements appeared in provincial cultures* which owed more or less to developments at the centre. At one end of the continuum were those western monuments, which imitated Italian styles or even particular buildings in the city of Rome, while at the other were the very wide variety of new styles of rural residence (all confusingly termed *villae*) which were created by the adoption of Roman building techniques and materials to renew and transform previous structures.

(3) *New styles spread throughout local societies* as items appropriated or developed by provincial élites in the formative period were imitated by their social subordinates. Roman mortuary practices and funerary monuments provide a good example, originally rare but increasingly popular over the first two centuries AD (Meyer 1990). This process seems to be an expression of emulative practices within local societies (cf. Miller 1982), suggesting that these cultural traits came to be understood more as symbols of élite status than of Roman identity.

(4) *Provincial cultures participated in empire-wide changes.* A good example is the growth and subsequent decline of the classical city with its characteristic patterns of social space, monumental complements and associated customs, social structures and ideologies, which affected most provincial cultures.

Yet, although provincial cultures continued to develop after the formative period, they did so largely within patterns laid down around the turn of the millennium. The few new areas to be conquered after this period rapidly joined the cultural mainstream without recapitulating the experience of areas conquered during the Republic. Two clear examples are the construction of Fishbourne, within decades of the Claudian invasion, and the recently discovered archive of Babatha, which shows the use of Roman law and literacy within Arabia only a few years after it had become a province. The archaeology and epigraphy of Roman Dacia provide many more examples.

These observations are not new but their implications often seem forgotten. For example, it is unnecessary to seek special factors which may have retarded romanization in one Republican province (e.g. Keay 1992) when it was in fact a general phenomenon. Equally, differences between provincial Roman cultures cannot be simply attributed to the different lengths of time societies had been under Roman rule. The brilliance of Roman culture in Narbonensis relative to that of the Three Gauls cannot therefore be explained in terms of its earlier integration into the empire but must be accounted for by other differences, such as the density of veteran colonization, its favourable position in Mediterranean trade and communications networks or the nature of preconquest societies. Cultural change proceeded at much the same pace throughout the empire, irrespective of when each area was conquered.

The view from the Roman north-west, on which the most theoretically sophisticated work has been conducted over the last few decades (e.g. Brandt and Slofstra 1983; Barrett, Fitzpatrick and MacInnes 1989; Blagg and Millett 1990) can obscure this fundamental non-fit. From the perspective of any of the provinces brought into the empire by Caesar or Augustus, cultural change followed conquest so quickly that it is easy to make the mistake of regarding the two as inextricably linked. The term romanization itself is now used as often to denote the totality of post-conquest changes and accommodations as it is to refer to cultural change in the more narrow sense, of those transformations in style and in taste, in values and in beliefs that together assigned provincial cultures a place in a greater, imperial, whole and distanced them from the cultures that had preceded and now surrounded them (Freeman 1993). Yet in Sicily, Spain and much of the East, the extension of Roman power began between two and three hundred years before this formative period. In these areas at least, their eventual romanization was not a rapid response to Roman conquest. It follows from the near absence of Roman style artefacts in the Republican provinces, that cultural change in the northern provinces can no longer be sufficiently explained simply as a consequence of incorporation into the empire.

Further, these observations pose problems for the now orthodox explanations of romanization as the product of emulative strategies employed at a local scale by various élites in response to the stresses and strains imposed by conquest. That thesis always looked a little incomplete (Woolf 1992). First, it is not self-evident that cultural emulation was the only or even the best response to imperialism, other preindustrial empires having experienced very different cultural sequels. Second, it seems perverse to explain the cultural *convergence* of the western provinces as the product of a myriad of uncoordinated and separate local initiatives. Consideration of the chronological dimension adds to this critique. If Roman provincial cultures were created by local élites imitating Romans, why did the élites of southern and eastern Spain and of Narbonensis not begin to romanize themselves a

century earlier? Equally, if self-romanization did originate independently and locally, then why did the changes occur at a broadly similar pace all over the west?

The argument of this paper is not that local élite members' emulation of Romans, through the strategic use of material culture, did not contribute to the creation of provincial cultures. The arguments used against the now abandoned paradigm, that deliberate policies of romanization emanated from the emperors, remain valid ones. The Roman empire had neither the ability nor the desire to impose *terra sigillata* on its subjects. The arguments in favour of local initiatives also remain good. Inscriptions record local magnates funding the monumentalization of provincial cities, much cultural change took place in the more private areas of provincial life, and the running of the empire was in general based on an association of interests between the élites of Rome and those of the provinces (Brunt 1976; Millett 1990a). Nevertheless, it is still necessary to understand (1) why cultural emulation made sense and (2) why it suddenly made sense right across the empire at the turn of the millennium.

Recent research has made it very clear that in order to interpret any particular manipulation of material culture, it is essential to appreciate the contexts which made it meaningful (e.g. Hodder 1982; 1986; 1989). In any society, social structures and shared understandings about culture provide two important sets of contexts which allow individuals to use material culture creatively and understand the significance of others' use of it. For example, understanding the early Roman imperial prohibitions on rich ex-slaves wearing rings depends on knowing (1) that Roman society was hierarchically ordered into a series of estates, juridically defined status groups and (2) that many of these estates were marked by privileges including badges of status, such as a particular style of shoe for a senator or a ring for a knight. Those contexts (and others) allow us to interpret the use of these rings as an attempted appropriation of symbols denoting high status by a group who in some respects (for instance, wealth and political influence), but not all (for example, birth and cultural distinction) challenged the position of Roman aristocrats. The emperor's prohibition may also be interpreted as an assertion first of support for the traditional social order, and second as a claim to control the symbols that created status in Rome.

It is striking how much easier it is to conduct such investigations on contemporary or historical societies as opposed to prehistoric ones. Recovering some sense of the original significances of different styles and artefacts can be difficult (cf. Conkey and Hastorf 1990), especially since stylistic choice may be used to construct almost any aspect of identity - ethnicity, gender, nationality, individuality - or none at all. But a good deal is known about Roman society and about how the relationship between culture and identity was perceived both by Romans and by a variety of their subject peoples. It is those contexts that permit us to go beyond the old dichotomy of "romanization from above" versus "self-romanization" to conduct an investigation into the creation of provincial cultures, at the turn of the millennium, as the products of individual responses to a specifically Roman series of social and ideological structures.

Context 1: The structures of Roman imperialism

The legal institutions through which the Roman empire was administered were among the earliest subjects of investigation by ancient historians and are consequently fairly well known. Recent discoveries have added a few footnotes, and there have been some important revisions, but the major advances of recent years have been in two different areas, both relevant to this subject.

First, it has become increasing apparent that the imperial system, as reconstructed from epigraphy, legal sources and a few literary sources, emerged very late in the Republic, out of a chaotic series of *ad hoc* and local administrative expedients. Warfare extended Roman control over the Mediterranean and its hinterlands, but little infrastructure was generated in response, and as a result, many of the major wars of the second and last centuries BC were the product not so much of aggressive imperialism, as of a chronic political instability that resulted from Rome's tendency to destroy regional powers without putting anything in their place. The Roman hegemonic conquest state transformed itself into a tributary and territorial empire only after a number of crises in which "pacified" areas suddenly went into revolt, usually with the assistance of peripheral powers that had expanded into power vacuums created by Rome. Often these revolts were aggravated by Rome's attempts to limit the running costs of empire by making use of tax-farmers and supplying little effective provincial administration. The slowness with which Rome responded to these failures partly reflects the limitations imposed on co-ordinated action by a state run by aristocrats locked in conflict with each other and with other social groups, and the systematization of the empire was in fact largely achieved by dynasts temporarily in control of the state (men such as Sulla, Pompey and Caesar) and by the emperors who followed them. The central institutionalization was the replacement of competing dynasts, with their unstable power bases and questionable legitimacy, by the emperors. Evidential

problems make it impossible to define a precise periodization for the systematization and institutionalization of Roman imperial structures, but it began to accelerate markedly in the second quarter of the last century BC and was probably largely complete by the middle of the first century AD.

The second major area of research has been on the less formal aspects of Roman imperialism. Alongside law, magistracies and taxation we can now set patronage, the imperial cult, patrimonialism, itinerant monarchy and a new sensitivity to the importance of representations of the emperor and his family in every conceivable medium. It is difficult to weigh the relative importance of each of these institutions, but their pervasiveness suggests they should be taken just as seriously as the spread of the citizenship or the elaboration of the procuratorial service in accounts of how the empire worked. Like the more formal institutions of empire, most can be traced back to experiments conducted by dynasts and those around them in the last days of the Republic. Both at the formal and the informal level, the structures of the imperial period are now widely seen as the result of an institutionalization of emergent trends, whether that process is viewed as a structural transformation (as here) or (more traditionally) as the work of the first emperor Augustus.

How should we relate these aspects of Roman imperialism to the creation of provincial cultures? One immediate connection that suggests itself is chronological. The formative period of provincial cultures coincides very closely with the period during which the empire was undergoing the institutionalization described above. Territorial provinces, the office of governor, the equestrian service, a standing army and centralised decision making by *imperatores* all attained their definitive form in the same period in which the first Roman style buildings appeared in west and east and as *terra sigillata* and Latin epigraphy became widespread. A first hypothesis suggests itself, then, that the formative period of Roman provincial cultures be seen as a part of a broader transformation of the empire in this period.

The impact of these structural transformations on provincial societies took many forms. Several broad categories may be identified, to illustrate the range of potential intrusions:

(1) *New exactions*, in particular taxation and the levy. These exactions were not only intrusive in depriving provincial communities of produce and manpower (which had in any case been extracted less systematically in many areas for some time). The early imperial system also required local élites to act as agents of the imperial government in organizing many of these exactions, forcing them to collude (not always unwillingly perhaps) with the ruling power (Millett 1990a).

(2) *New impositions* were made in support of this new regime. New ruling classes were created in many areas, at the expense of previous political forms. Among the casualties were democratic institutions in the Greek world and independent priesthoods in Gaul and Egypt. In tandem with this process, civic institutions were promoted in areas such as Anatolia and Germany, which were previously relatively un-urbanized, and were entrenched in other regions.

(3) *New prohibitions*. A number of customary practices were forbidden to all Roman subjects (e.g. human sacrifice, slaving within the empire) or citizens (e.g. polygamy). One of the more dramatic changes was the definitive separation of the civilian and the military sectors of imperial society. For societies in which warfare had been important in economic terms and/or in social reproduction and integration, the Roman peace was potentially extremely disruptive (Roymans 1993).

(4) *New opportunities*. Service in the new standing army, the spread of Roman citizenship and the economic opportunities offered by security and political unification represented a more subtle threat to subject societies, as some provincials were empowered to escape local constraints. One good example is the growth of some urban centres at the expense of others (cf. Alcock 1993). Another case is the effect on local economies of incorporation into larger and more highly commoditised systems (Hodder 1979a; Buchsenschutz/Ralston 1987).

One way of considering the totality of these changes is to regard the institutionalization of the empire as proceeding through and resulting in a deeper and deeper penetration of provincial societies by Roman power. The earliest dealings between Rome and surrounding societies had dealt with little more than war and peace. The expansion of imperial infrastructure served to control societies more and more closely, with control exercised over a wider and wider range of activities. As Roman power penetrated subject societies, new relations of dominance and dependence began to be established: patronage and law brought the imperial state into contact with individual provincials as well as with entire subject states. These processes may be illustrated, on the legal level, by the detail and scope of imperially issued municipal charters (Galsterer 1988), and less formally by the personal links established between governors and provincial notables (Saller 1982). This penetration of local societies by Roman power may also be seen in terms of their incorporation into a new, imperially differentiated and structured order.

The extension of imperial power, over and into provincial societies, presented challenges and opportunities to those who found themselves located at the new, wider interfaces between empire and community. Those positions were uncomfortable during revolts, when leaders found themselves torn in both directions, but as long as peace and security was maintained, control of those mediating positions was potentially valuable. The most obvious mediators were prominent members of local élites, whether wealthy aristocrats, tribal grandees or client kings, especially those who had acquired Roman patrons or the emperor's ear. But other mediators existed, for example, those who lived close to Roman colonists or served alongside Roman soldiers.

It was at these mediating points that material culture might be manipulated with maximum leverage, and it is precisely at these points that new cultural forms appeared first and most prominently. Gladiatorial games, for example, first appeared both in Gaul and Asia in those areas where local élites had most contact with Roman administrators and travellers. A connection with the imperial cult seems likely in that case, but the same phenomenon is noticeable in relation to private housing. It is true that imports and models for imitation were more accessible at these mediating points and that local élite members were more able to afford them than most other members of provincial societies. But the idea that these goods were being deliberately chosen for their potency as symbols is strengthened by the public contexts in which they were used. The prominence of gladiators hardly needs to be signalled but the phenomenon is more general. *Sigillata* was used as a display tableware and also in burials, while kitchen wares remained relatively unaffected by Roman styles, and the outsides of rural residences often conformed to Roman taste more than did the insides (Smith 1982; Hingley 1989). Even the use of towns, rather than the countryside, as stages on which Roman material and moral culture might be exhibited, may be seen as an indication of the essentially public context of Roman material culture in the formative period.

The argument so far, then, is that dramatic changes in the structures of Roman imperialism around the turn of the millennium resulted in major disruption of provincial societies while at the same time opening up new possibilities for some provincials at least. Cultural change emerges from these disruptions and new possibilities, culminating in what has been termed the Roman Cultural Revolution. Chronological considerations makes this hypothesis preferable to the idea of cultural change as a response to or concomitant of conquest. Yet the account is still incomplete in several respects. Most importantly, it provides no explanation for why emulation was employed much more widely in the north and west than in Egypt, Asia, Syria and Achaia. To gain a fuller explanation it is necessary to turn to our second set of contexts, the symbolic and cultural systems of Romans and of their subjects.

Context 2: Symbolic and cultural structures

It is a truism that an object has no absolute meaning or significance, yet in most societies the meanings of things are circumscribed by convention and by shared understandings that in their totality may be thought of as regimes of value. It is a good deal more difficult to uncover the structures of these regimes, than those of imperial administrative systems, yet cultural or symbolic systems are just as important contexts for understanding the use of material culture.

Let us consider for a moment the variety of attested cultural responses to imperialism. Only a few generations after the Manchu had conquered China they were barely distinguishable in cultural terms from indigenous dynasties. The Germanic rulers of sub-Roman successor states preserved a Latin speaking cultural élite alongside a German speaking warrior nobility, while they ransacked imperial and Christian symbolism to create a ceremonial powerbase. The Islamic conquest of north Africa was followed by the appropriation of architectural traditions, but also by a near complete amnesia of the pre-Islamic period. Modern European imperialisms in the Near East resulted in both a fascination for "Oriental" culture in the imperial metropoles and an impulse to "modernization" among the subjects of empire. No uniform pattern emerges: the specificity of each of these responses was at least partly a product of the cultural systems of both rulers and ruled.

The cultural diversity of the Roman provinces requires explanation in similar terms. Certainly, some of that diversity reflects the ecological and geographical variety of the regions united under Roman control, especially in the very different hinterlands of the Mediterranean basin. Equally, the high levels of urbanism experienced by central Italy, western Asia Minor and the valleys of the Rhône, the Guadalquivir and the Nile, all reflect to some extent geographical factors. To these must be added the differences between the administrative structures employed in each part of the empire, even after the late Republican/early imperial systematization: the staggering contrasts between the taxation systems used in different regions provides a good example of heterogeneity in a field which might have been expected to have been of central concern to the emperors (Brunt 1981). Finally, we might add the

impact of the strategic structure of the empire. Frontier regions were endowed with a distinctive infrastructure and experienced localized economic stimulation from the presence of soldiers and veterans (Whittaker 1994), while interior regions were constrained by their role as tax exporters to attain the new levels of prosperity enabled by the imperial peace (Garnsey/Saller 1987, 95-97).

Yet not all the cultural patterning discernible in the provinces can be accounted for solely as the product of intersecting physical, human, administrative and strategic geographies. Other differences reflect symbolic and ideological structures. Language provides a good example. The empire can be neatly divided by a line, that bisects modern Libya, passes up the Adriatic and then vers to the northeast. Latin to the west of this line and Greek to its east were the languages used by the civic élites of the empire in their inscriptions, literature, education and public speaking. Alongside them Latin was the international language of the military and of Roman law, while Greek performed a similar function for some religious and intellectual groups. A very wide range of other languages were also spoken, a few of which also appeared in literary and epigraphic form. Up to a point these patterns do reflect imperial power structures - high languages widely used for a cosmopolitan élite, low languages localised and unwritten for their social subordinates, and so forth. But the Latin/Greek divide and the existence of Egyptian demotic and Syriac literacies illustrate the limitations of any reductionist approach to the socio-linguistics of the empire. By extension Roman provincial cultures cannot be accounted for entirely in terms of economic or political determinants. This assertion of the autonomy of culture is far from original, but surprisingly rarely acknowledged in discussions of romanization.

Having appreciated the significance of cultural systems, how are we to describe them? One approach is to focus on symbolic centres, those key symbols, concepts, practices and institutions that integrate and order the common stock of beliefs and habits that together comprise a culture (e.g. Geertz 1983, 121-46). Those central areas of culture are also the sites of fiercest cultural conflict, to the extent that a cultural system may be largely defined in terms of what is spoken, because contested and controversial, as opposed to what is left unsaid (Bourdieu 1977).

Among the most important of these integrating concepts are the beliefs that a group collectively hold about their own identity. Identity has both content and location. A group may be characterised (by itself or by others) as those who possess the qualities x, y and z (or negatively as those who do not possess qualities a, b and c), but their identity also depends on their location in the cosmic order, a location that may be defined in relation to a place, a past, a future, to the divine or to any other symbolically charged reference point. A group's identifying qualities are regarded as *naturally* consonant with their place in the cosmic order, just as they regard the different qualities of others as reflecting their different cosmic locations.

Both the content and location of a group's identity may be expressed in cultural terms. Particular customs and styles may define and describe a group, while its relationship to others is commonly expressed in terms of ideas about the shape of culture itself, ideas like "civilization" and "race" which provide a cultural map of the cosmos, on which a groups' own location is prominently marked. Understanding those beliefs is essential if we are to understand how (and how far) any people will use culture to mediate their relationships with others.

A note of caution is appropriate. Beliefs of this sort inhibit as well as enable cultural change. Many definitions of culture include strong prohibitions, based on anything from diet to language, the violation of which may imperil the identity of the user, and some groups' cultural maps not only describe but also prescribe their cosmic location, promising dire consequences for any who stray from it. To take a concrete example, if language is not particularly central to one's sense of identity the acquisition or use of a new one to gain some pragmatic advantage may be unobjectionable. As far as we can tell, most of Rome's subjects regarded language in this way, but for the Greeks language was absolutely central to their self definition. As a result Latinization was resisted at a literary level however many loanwords crept into everyday speech. Jews, by contrast, had little objection to speaking Greek rather than Aramaic (so long as the scriptures were studied and read in Hebrew) but regarded diet, cult and to some extent the body as areas where acculturation would compromise their identity. Taking the autonomy of culture seriously means accepting that some subject groups will have persisted in cultural practices that were politically, economically or physically undesirable or even dangerous. Typically groups integrated imperfectly, attempting to keep faith with what was central to them, yet become more acceptable to their new masters.

A final caveat is necessary: it cannot be assumed that all groups hold onto their identity with equal tenacity. Put otherwise, an individual's identity may be more or less strongly defined in terms of her or his membership of another group. Different factors might be suggested to account for the variable durability of collective identities - the extent to which an identity is underwritten by religious affiliation,

education or political or familial institutions, for example, or the ways that deviants, dissidents and apostates are treated by other group members - but for present purposes it is enough to recognise this variability. The process of becoming Roman will have been accompanied to very different extents by the desire to preserve a sense of being Greek, Jewish, Turdetanian, Zegrense or Batavian.

What then were Roman notions of their cultural nature and of the nature of culture? A good place to begin is with Roman conceptions of the moral order of the world. Much recent work has explored ideological changes in the periods conventionally designated as Ciceronian and Augustan, that is from the middle of the last century BC to the first decades of the first century AD, and the manner in which these were communicated, through images as well as words, to the inhabitants of the empire (cf. Brunt 1978; Nicolet 1988; Zanker 1988). Up to a point these developments parallel the institutional changes outlined above: ideas that were already emerging in the late Republic were combined, reconciled, systematised and given authoritative and enduring formulations. This period was also a key moment in the long interaction of Roman and Hellenistic Greek cultural systems. The new ideology that emerged from these linked debates included a new imperial past, a new imperial destiny and a new imperial mission in the present, alongside new representations of the cosmic and moral order and of the place within it of the emperor and of the imperial élite.

One aspect of this new formulation involved relocating Rome and Roman identity on the cosmological map. Roman identity had long been defined in terms of a common set of moral, cultural and religious values and practices. The long term implications are well known: since Romans did not claim a common genealogical descent, it was relatively easy to become Roman so long as one had no objection (for example religious) to adopting their customs. But this definition of identity rubbed shoulders uneasily with the fascination which Greek culture and customs exercised on many Romans in this period. The resulting interaction was manifested in a long series of adoptions, imitations, adaptions and spectacular rejections of different aspects of Hellenism, with condemnation fiercest in precisely the periods of maximum contact and borrowing, often from those most involved in cultural imitation (Beard/Crawford 1985, 12-24). The dilemma arose from the threat posed to a central area of Roman culture - self-definition in terms of common customs and morality (*mores*) - by acculturation, especially when the other culture claimed the status of civilization.

The resolution that emerged around the turn of the millennium took the form of an alternative ethic of civilization. The Roman cultural and political élite appropriated as much of Hellenism as possible, adapting it where necessary to respect other ideological prerogatives, such as those represented by Roman religion and ancestral custom, and disengaging it from any single ethnicity. The result represented civilization as an absolute good which, even if it had been invented by the Greeks, might in principle be acquired by anyone. One of the terms most often used to designate this conception of civilization was *humanitas*. Like nineteenth century European ideals of civilization, these ideals were regarded as universally valid and as the condition in which humans might best realise their moral potential, and they carried with them a set of moral and aesthetic preoccupations which were held to be best exemplified by the educated ruling élite of Rome. *Humanitas,* like civilization, may be thought of as an integrating concept that ordered, linked and ranked other concepts. For example (again like its nineteenth century analogues) it provided a retrospective justification for Roman conquest: *humanitas* was held to be spreading throughout the world as a consequence of Rome's limitless power. That formulation is in fact the closest thing in Latin literature to a description of cultural change in the west: what we call romanization, in other words, was regarded by Romans as the civilizing process. Finally, the ideology of *humanitas* was naturalized (its contingency denied and its part in the cosmological order asserted) by asserting that only in this condition were men were in harmony with nature and balanced between the two opposite extremes of barbarism and decadence.

The Roman élite, the most perfect exemplars of *humanitas*, were situated midway between the two, conscious of their barbaric past and fearful of their future decadence. But more importantly in this context, *humanitas* imposed on Romans obligations towards their various subjects. Westerners, wild, unpredictable and semi-bestial were to be encouraged towards *humanitas*. That encouragement might take the form of practical help and advice, of constitutions designed to impose and inculcate civility or simply of recognition of those deemed to be striving to realize their human potential by patronising them or by giving them citizenship and posts of responsibility. Greeks did not need to be taught *humanitas*, but to be reminded of it and restrained from decadence. Roman emperors and governors laboured to preserve the Greeks' ancestral customs and virtues (as Romans imagined them) by careful surveillance and occasional reform of Greek cities. *Humanitas*, in

other words, supplied Roman rulers with a cultural vocation as promoters and guardians of civilization.

This formulation of the relationship between empire and civilization was enormously influential. Most affected were those who had undergone the Roman education system in which Latin was taught through classics that embodied these views. But these ideas were also influential because they cohered so well with other aspects of imperial ideology as propagated through monuments, ceremonies and images. Like all effective ideology, the ideal of *humanitas* seemed to be confirmed by Romans' experiences of the world, yet also presented a partial and interested view of it, which contributed to justifying the political and social order. Rome civilized the west and restrained the decadence of the Greeks, a feat only made possible because of the unique moral qualities of the Roman élite. It is easy to see why these views rapidly moved into the universe of the undiscussed to become part of the unexamined assumptions of the imperial ruling class.

It would be satisfying to be able to explore the cultural maps of Rome's subjects in as much detail, yet with the exception of the Greeks and the Jews, little can be told for sure about the terms in which provincials conceived their identities. It is far from clear even what identities many subject peoples owned for themselves. Recent challenges have been made to the idea of any indigenous consciousness of being either Gallic (Goudineau 1981) or Semitic (Millar 1993). Some ethnicities assigned by Greeks and Romans may have eventually been adopted by the groups they referred to, just as more recent colonial classifications have been transformed into ethnic and national consciousnesses. But in most cases we are ignorant of "the native's point of view" (cf. Geertz 1983, 55-70) in the Roman empire. Up to a point Rome's subjects were rendered "people without history" by an imperial power which did not value the traditions through which their identities were preserved (cf. Wolf 1982). But again recognition of the autonomy of culture suggests that we should at least entertain the possibility that Greek and Jewish voices survived not simply because Romans respected or tolerated them (as up to a point they did), but that perhaps Roman respect and tolerance was a response to cultural systems that displayed a certain resistance to dissolution. We may know more about Greek and Jewish views of Roman rule, in other words, because they cared more about their identity than did some others among Rome's subjects.

The Greek case provides a good illustration of the example of the interplay between two cultural systems in this formative period (Woolf 1994). Most Greeks were extremely reluctant to admit the civilized status of non-Greeks or to surrender their sense of identity, even when they acquired Roman citizenship and high office within the empire. Their own collective identity was underwritten by language, a literary high culture and a strong sense of two common pasts, one classical (characterized as a period of never to be rivalled cultural and political achievements), the other mythical through which all Greeks were linked to each other and to the gods by descent. Material culture (when it did not express cultural institutions such as the polis or the gymnasium) was, however not so central to their sense of identity, nor were political forms. Romans, for their part, were prepared to acknowledge the civilized status of Greeks although they deplored many Greek institutions, such as democracy. As a result Romano-Greek culture can be crudely characterized as Greek in language and cult, but Roman in terms of political and social structure. Material culture, however, was a central issue for neither Roman rulers nor Greek subjects. The public architecture of the Romano-Greek cities displays an eclectic blend of elements of Roman, Greek and other origins and there is little sense that this mélange either reinforced or posed problems for the identity of their inhabitants.

The creation of Roman provincial cultures

These contexts - imperial and cultural - interacted to produce the unities and diversities of provincial cultures. The penetration of subject societies by Roman power and their reordering into imperial patterns provides one important context for the sudden changes of the formative period. If we superimpose, onto this pattern, Roman notions of a world differentiated by degrees of civilization, more of the variation is explained. The new order created a series of mediating points where Roman rulers and their subjects came into contact. At those points, provincials had the chance to confront Roman prejudices and to exploit Roman beliefs in their favour. For Greeks that meant demonstrating support for Rome, political reliability and an absence of what Romans regarded as tell-tale signs of decadence. Greeks who showed themselves reliable could look forward to privilege, posts of responsibility or at least freedom from interference. To gain the same goals, however, westerners had to demonstrate the acquisition of civilized qualities. Emulative strategies, often involving the manipulation and transformation of material culture, had a part to play in these self-representations, presenting subjects as sharing the tastes, values and ideals of their masters. Romans encouraged this behaviour by displaying discrimination in favour of those who, in their eyes,

aspired to civilized values. It is important not to exaggerate the importance of things as a means of creating new personas. The notion of "material" culture, if pragmatic, is analytically unsatisfactory insofar as it suggests that bathhouses were regarded separately from bathing and cleanliness, or amphitheatres from games, civic pride and the cult of the emperor. Gesture, language and manners also played a part in self-representation, and in some parts of the empire may have been more significant than the adoption of artefacts of Roman style. But a sense of the imperial and cultural contexts involved makes it easier to understand why Roman things had the significances they did.

Finally, on top of imperial configurations of power and Roman notions of civilization we need to superimpose local perceptions of culture and identity. In most cases that is difficult, but in some cases - such as those of the Greeks, the Jews and the Egyptians - it is possible to show interaction between Roman and indigenous cultural priorities. Other examples might be hypothesized, for example the persistence of the worship of some western deities, even if their worship was conducted, as Romans largely insisted, through Roman style cult. The identities and cultures that emerged from these process were very different. Greeks, for example, remained Greek and Hellenism continued to pose problems for Romans until the third century AD. Other local identities were shattered or abandoned under the stresses and strains imposed by the institutionalization of the empire. Little of the pre-conquest past seems to have been remembered in much of the west, where third and fourth century separatists represented themselves as wholly Roman rebels. Equally, however, the issue of Roman versus non-Roman identities may have become of less importance as the stresses and strains of the formative period receded (cf. Hodder 1979b). The cultural system of the empire was, after all, a system of structured difference and, as the provinces became part of this system, provincials discovered other oppositions to engage them and other identities to challenge and usurp, rich versus poor, educated versus ignorant, soldier versus civilian, Latin versus Greek and eventually pagan versus Christian.

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