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(Review) Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire

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Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. Pp. xiii, 208. ISBN 0-415-35176-6. $29.95.

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In this new book, Richard Hingley, a prominent scholar of Roman imperialism, offers an extended discussion of the nature of cultural change in the Roman world, with a particular focus on the age of Augustus. Hingley, an archaeologist who acknowledges his indebtedness to postmodern theory throughout his work, in part aims to connect the kindred topics of Romanization and Roman imperialism to the vicissitudes of the modern world. Attuned to numerous contemporary theoretical perspectives, Hingley argues that scholars must abandon the term "Romanization," and avoid its inherent Romanocentric bias by championing a more nuanced view based on a "globalized" empire.

The first chapter (pp. 1-13), entitled "The Past in the Present," offers the framework to Hingley's study. Hingley rightly asserts a connection between the ancient and modern world, and stresses the influence of modern politics on scholarly assessments of Romanization and Roman conquest. To this end, he criticizes a Rankean notion of the historian's task. Hingley does not believe that one can offer a value-free depiction of the past; even so, he does not go so far as to assert that the study of history is an entirely subjective enterprise.

Hingley turns in the second chapter, "Changing Concepts of Roman Identity and Social Change" (pp.14-48), to a review of scholarly assessments of Romanization, with the explicit purpose of demonstrating the need to jettison this term. He details the nationalistic assumptions that underlie Theodor Mommsen's vision of a Romanizing empire, as well as the pro-imperialistic outlook behind Francis Haverfield's discussions of Romanization. More expansively, he argues that scholarly assessments of Roman imperialism have been tied to conscious or subconscious support for European and American imperialism. Hingley perceives that in recent decades discussions of Romanization have become increasingly sophisticated and less tainted by pro-imperialistic views; he characterizes a focus on regional variation within the Empire and on native agency as a positive development.

In chapter three, "Roman Imperialism and Culture" (pp. 49-71), Hingley examines the nature of Roman elite culture, and details the ways in which it served to justify Roman expansion. Hingley stresses the Roman elite's exclusivity; Roman culture was the prerogative of the educated wealthy, who silenced and demeaned those without a sufficiently high level of cultural attainment. This, in turn, "placed a particular premium upon the adoption" of Roman culture by local elites (p. 50). Throughout the chapter, Hingley highlights the complexities associated with defining Roman culture, and draws attention to local variations of Roman identity.

In the third chapter, Hingley essentially discusses textual evidence; in the fourth chapter, he discusses Roman culture in the context of material evidence. In "The Material Elements of Elite Culture" (pp. 72-90), he aims to demonstrate "the ways in which Roman identity was projected across the empire through the adoption and adaptation of material culture" (p. 72). Partly by means of case studies using archaeological evidence from Tarraco and Verulamium, Hingley again stresses regional variation in the adoption of Roman culture. Regarding the overall impetus for cultural change in the provinces, Hingley emphasizes both central motivation and the desires of local elites.

In the fifth chapter, "Fragmenting Identities" (pp. 91-116), Hingley examines non-elites' adoption of elements of Roman culture. He offers an interesting look at the spread of Latin among common soldiers and traders, arguing that practical matters may have loomed large in provincials' acquisition of Roman culture. Hingley uses this focus on non-elites to support his overarching thesis: the concept of Romanization, intertwined with elitist notions, is an insufficient, outmoded way of studying cultural change. We would be far better served, thinks Hingley, by turning to a model of Roman imperialism based on globalization theory.

The short final chapter, "'Back to the Future'? Empire and Rome" (pp. 117-20), is a summation of the book's main arguments. Hingley explicitly connects his view of the nature of cultural change in the Roman Empire--and, more generally, his view of the nature of the Roman Empire itself--to contemporary politics.

In general, there is much to recommend in *Globalizing Roman Culture*. Throughout the book, Hingley cites sundry contemporary studies pertaining to Romanization, rendering his extensive bibliography a veritable start-up kit for aspiring students of the topic. Hingley, furthermore, approaches his discussion of Roman cultural change with impressive nuance, questioning simplistic dichotomies of Roman and non-Roman and justly emphasizing regional diversity. For all his regard for postmodern theory, he tends to favor middle-of-the-road conclusions. To Hingley, Roman culture did not spread entirely as a result of an organized, dogmatic Roman state; nor did it rely solely on the impetus of eager provincial elites. Rather, he sees the process of cultural change as variegated and complex. This seems eminently sensible. Many of Hingley's criticisms pertaining to Romanization theory are also well founded. One need not fully embrace Hingley's views of scholarly complicity in a "discourse of the dominant" (p. 92) to agree with his discussion of various shortcomings associated with the concept of Romanization. In regard to a subject as contentious and politically charged as Roman imperialism, it is foolish to deny the influence of modern politics on scholarly assessments.

All the same, *Globalizing Roman Culture* has its share of shortcomings, some of which stem from tensions between Hingley's championing of postmodern theory and its practical applications in the book. For instance, in the course of his critique of earlier positions on Romanization, he disparages the idea of progress as "modernist" (a term of opprobrium for Hingley). He claims that "Mommsen's and Haverfield's theories of Romanization were part of a broader image of progress that was common to many people during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; ideas that were derived from the evolutionary and diffusionist theories that formed a fundamental part of modernist thought" (p. 38). Yet, in Hingley's telling, the scholarly discussion of Roman cultural change is itself a model of progressive improvement: bit by bit, theories become more sophisticated and less vitiated by pro-imperialistic sentiments.

The relationship between Romanization and modern politics, though often admirably discussed, also creates some difficulties for Hingley. At times, he views his assessment of a globalized Roman culture as more accurate and nuanced than earlier visions of Romanization. At other points, however, Hingley stresses his argument's sympathy with contemporary political views popular in the academy. A certain tension exists between these two positions: the reader is left to wonder whether Hingley's description of cultural change is more accurate or more politically useful.

Hingley demonstrates, for example, that "during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people in the West created a classical past that served their own nationalist and imperialist aims" (p. 21). Yet one could counter that, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, people in the West created a classical past that served their own purported anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist aims. How is this an advance? Although Hingley's admirable capacity for self-criticism compels him to warn that "critical attitudes to our own recent imperial history may be driving the current agenda" (p. 65), he tends to be less willing to probe the underlying assumptions of postmodern theory than he is to point out the political motivations in others. For instance, he suggests that assertions of the Western world's foundation in Greco-Roman culture are simplistic and politically tainted. In particular, Hingley mentions the ways in which the "image of the classical origin of an inherited Western civilization was drawn upon as...a powerful support for imperialism" (pp. 21-22).

Elsewhere in his text, however, Hingley approvingly cites Edward Said, who maintained his own version of the classical roots of the contemporary West: according to Said, modern westerners share their Greco-Roman ancestors' manner of demonizing the East and have inherited various other pathologies. Nowhere does Hingley discuss the political motivations surrounding that assessment.

Overall, though Hingley purports to offer a more balanced assessment of Roman imperialism, his picture is mostly negative. This becomes particularly clear in the final chapter of the book, in which Hingley ruminates on the applicability to the Roman world of Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's views of imperialism. Although many of Hingley's arguments are solid, at times one may wonder whether he intends to present views on Roman imperialism that are more complicated or those that are more fashionably hostile. More importantly, Hingley demonstrates a penchant for citing others' articles in place of presenting his own justifications for certain stances. This allows Hingley to offer numerous contentious arguments without presenting the reader

with much in the way of evidence. And the voluminous references to scholarly works can at times lead to confusion as to what Hingley himself supports.

All in all, though, *Globalizing Roman Culture* is a valuable addition to the scholarly literature on Romanization. Hingley's attention to the complexities of cultural change makes his case a persuasive one. Although it is unlikely that the replacement of "Romanization" with "globalization" will prove to be a panacea, Hingley's familiarity with a great variety of theoretical perspectives will ensure that his will remain a major voice in the debate.