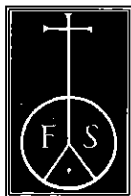


# MEDITERRANEO ANTICO

ECONOMIE SOCIETÀ CULTURE

ANNO X · FASCICOLO 1-2 · 2007

ESTRATTO · OFFPRINT



FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE

PISA · ROMA

# DURA-EUROPOS IN A DE-GLOBALISING ROMAN EMPIRE

MICHAEL SOMMER

**I**NDEED, you best have proved that well-known saying, that the earth is the mother of all and the universal country of all. Now it is possible for both Greek and barbarian, with his possessions or without them, to travel easily wherever he wishes, quite as if he were going from one country of his to another. And he is frightened neither by the Cilician Gates, nor by the sandy narrow passage through Arabia to Egypt, nor by impassable mountains, nor by boundless, huge rivers, nor by inhospitable barbarian races. But it is enough for his safety that he is a Roman, or rather one of those under you. And what was said by Homer, «The earth was common to all», you have made a reality, by surveying the whole inhabited world, by bridging the rivers in various ways, by cutting carriage roads through the mountains, by filling desert places with post stations, and by civilising everything with your way of life and good order. [...] And now, indeed, there is no need to write a description of the world, nor to enumerate the laws of each people, but you have become universal geographers for all men by opening up all the gates of the inhabited world and by giving to all who wish it the power to be observers of everything and by assigning universal laws for all men and by stopping practices which formerly were pleasant to read about, but were intolerable if one should actually consider them and by making marriage legal between all peoples and by organising the whole inhabited world like a single household.<sup>1</sup>

'Like a single household' – the modern concept of globalization can hardly be better translated into ancient terms. In his oration *Regarding Rome*, Aelius Aristides not only puts much emphasis on Rome's manifest destiny as the civilising power of the Mediterranean world; he also conceives this world as a single, indivisible body, bound together by the homogenising forces of the Roman empire, in terms of economy, jurisdiction, society and culture. According to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century orator from Asia Minor, it was Rome which had «opened up all the gates of the inhabited world», which had triumphed over nature and diversity, thus rendering irrelevant the gaps of physical and cultural distance. From the Columns of Heracles to the Euphrates, from Hadrian's Wall to the Nile, it was the same set of values, customs and laws that ruled over the daily life of the various nations which inhabited the vast empire.

Whether this cultural unity was an objective reality or not – it undeniably existed in the minds of people like Aristides, members of the educated ruling elite

<sup>1</sup> Ael. Arist., *Ad Romam* 100-102 (translation Ch.A. Behr).

of Rome and her provinces. For them, the end of diversity and the creation of a culturally homogenous Mediterranean world were Rome's mission as well as her empire's prime achievement. For a Greek intellectual of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Roman Empire was obviously more than just an accumulation of cities, more than just a military structure defending its inhabitants, more than just the lands and subjects ruled by the Roman Emperor. To a man of Aristides' social rank and intellectual skills,<sup>2</sup> Rome meant the fulfilment of a Greek dream: «The world was common to all». What the Greek *poleis*, the Persian realm and in its succession Alexander's empire and its heirs had failed to achieve, was finally put into action by the Romans: the unity of the classical world.<sup>3</sup>

Aristides' speech echoes an elitist discourse, the imperial master narrative of the first three centuries AD. Classicists of roughly the last three centuries have converted this master narrative into a solid *communis opinio* of how the Roman Empire 'worked',<sup>4</sup> for two reasons: first, the master narrative is the only extant

<sup>2</sup> P. Desideri, *La romanizzazione dell'Impero*, in G. Clemente - F. Coarelli - E. Gabba (Ed.), *Storia di Roma*, vol. 2. *L'impero mediterraneo*. II. *I principi e il mondo*, Torino 1991, 577-626, here 587-590; R. Klein, *Die Romrede des Aelius Aristides*, Darmstadt 1983; C. Kokkinia, *The governor's boot and the city's politicians. Greek communities and Rome's representatives under the empire*, in A. Kolb (Ed.), *Herrschaftsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis. Konzepte, Prinzipien und Strategien der Administration im römischen Kaiserreich*, Berlin 2006, 180-189, 186-189; S. Swain, *Hellenism and empire. Language, classicism, and power in the Greek World AD 50-250*, Oxford 1996, 254-297.

<sup>3</sup> The attitude of Greek intellectuals towards the Roman Empire has been of some debate recently. P. Veyne, *L'Empire gréco-romain*, Paris 2005, 163-257, has recently located Greek identity in the context of the Roman Empire in an area of tension between 'contre' et 'avec', between 'collaboration' e 'vocation supérieure'. On the other hand, the various circles of identity in the eastern half of the Roman Empire have been described as concentric: Kokkinia, *Governor's boot*; E. Stephan, *Honoratioren, Griechen, Polisbürger. Kollektive Identitäten innerhalb der Oberschicht des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, Göttingen 2002, 114-260 (distinguishing between four circles of identity: city - regions/ethnic groups - the wider Greek cultural community - the Roman Empire); S. Settis, *Un'arte al plurale. L'impero romano, i Greci e i posteri*, in E. Gabba - A. Schiavone (Ed.), *Storia di Roma*, vol. 4. *Caratteri e morfologie*, Torino 1989, 827-878 (on figurative art: «una compattata e coerente *koiné* figurativa», 853); G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman, staying Greek. Culture, identity and the civilizing process in the Roman East*, PCPhS 40, 1994, 116-143. The concept of Rome encompassing the civilised world by conquest is already very present in the Augustan period. Virgil's (*Aen.* 1 279) *imperium sine fine*, in space and time, is a divine gift. *Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento* (*Aen.* vi 851) is the purest reflection of manifest destiny one can conceive. In very similar terms, Livy describes the expansion of empire in the republican period. All such narratives are, however, heavily focused on Rome, the Urbs. A notable shift of paradigms takes place with Tacitus who locates Romanness even in the most remote angle of the vast empire and challenges the old style of writing Roman history as a history of the city. After all, Tacitus had realised that the *arcana imperii* were located, for a long time, in the provinces, not in the city. On Tacitus's new conception of Roman history Desideri, *La romanizzazione dell'Impero*, 592-595; K. Clarke, *In arto et inglorius labor. Tacitus's anti-history*, in A. K. Bowman - M. Goodman - H. Cotton - S. Price (Ed.), *Representations of empire. Rome and the Mediterranean world*, London 2002, 83-103, here 90-93.

<sup>4</sup> Exemplary the chapter on *Die Romanisierung der Reichsbevölkerung* in J. Bleicken, *Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte des Römischen Kaiserreiches*, Paderborn 1981, vol. 2, 34-47: «Die Romanisierung des Reiches und die als deren Konsequenz anzusehende Übertragung des römischen Bürgerrechts an immer mehr und schließlich fast alle Reichsbewohner führte zu einer starken *Homogenisierung* der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse» (45).

'model' of the Roman Empire which can claim to be contemporary, any possible alternative narrative, with the significant exceptions of the Jewish and the Christian traditions, is lost or did in fact never exist. Second, and more important, the 'model' presented by the imperial master narrative harmonised perfectly with the paradigm of the modern nation state and the idea of 'la nation une et indivisible', which had its debut with the French Revolution and deeply influenced classical scholarship in the period to follow.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Rome's role as the power that brought the torch of civilisation to the barbarians echoed the attitudes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's colonising powers towards the colonised parts of the world. A self-proclaimed Prometheus with the torch in his hand, the Roman Empire as shaped by Aristides served as the ideal forerunner of the modern colonial empires. For 19<sup>th</sup>-century historians like Robert Seeley and Charles Dilke, both, the Roman as well as the British Empire, had the mission to civilise the world.<sup>6</sup>

Since Seeley's and Dilke's days, our views of Roman imperialism and 'Romanisation' have certainly changed thoroughly. Numberless regional and local studies provide fascinating new approaches to cultural interaction in the Roman Empire – and beyond. As a result, the Roman Empire appears far less monolithic than it used to.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Aristides' account suggests that globalisation is a phenomenon far older than the process we are observing in our days. Modern globalisation theory acknowledges that discourses of globalisation form part of globalisation itself. A statement like that of Aristides leaves no doubt that the Roman Empire disposed of an elite for which the Roman 'world' was the intellectual reference point par excellence. Even if Aristides' image of an Empire that had made «the earth common to all» was fictitious, there was a sufficiently large group of people, authors like Aristides and their audiences, to which precisely this image represented the *raison d'être* of the Roman Empire. The powerful master narrative of globalisation fits perfectly with the material legacy of the Empire: roads, bridges, the land register, the infrastructure of the Roman army. Globalisation might therefore be a term much more precise than 'Romanisation' to describe Rome's effect on the ancient Mediterranean and its periphery. The intention of this paper is to outline the effects of globalisation on Rome's periphery, namely its eastern one, and, in turn, the repercussions those effects had on the imperial master narrative itself. As we will see, these repercussions formed an intrinsic part of what we are used to call the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century crisis.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I. Geiss, *Nation und Nationalismen. Versuche über ein Weltproblem*. 1962-2006, Bremen 2007, 92-93.

<sup>6</sup> See the introduction in *MedAnt IX* (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Now R. Hingley, *Globalizing Roman culture. Unity, diversity and empire*, London 2005, 14-71.

<sup>8</sup> The bibliography on the 'crisis' is extensive, and the character of the period as well as the applicability of the concept of crisis are much disputed. For an introduction G. Alföldy, *Die Krise des Römischen Reiches. Geschichte, Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbetrachtung. Ausgewählte Beiträge*, Stuttgart 1989; A.K. Bowman - P. Garnsey - A. Cameron (Ed.), *The crisis of Empire. A.D. 193-337*, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Bd. 12, Cambridge 20052; M. Christol, *L'empire romain du III<sup>e</sup> siècle. Histoire politique (de 192, mort de Commode, à 325, concile de Nicée)*, Paris 19972; K.-P. Johné (Ed.), *Deleto paene imperio Romano. Transformationsprozesse des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert und ihre Rezeption in der Neuzeit*,

Globalisation creates mobility, as it is induced by increased mobility. Large-scale mobility by means of technical attainments and political achievements is the leitmotiv of Aristides' account quoted in the beginning. Increasing mobility is, as can be observed in the modern world, the fertile ground on which diaspora flourishes. Diaspora communities not only come into being when people are moving, they also develop the ability to maintain ties, both mutually and with their place of origin. The papers presented here have studied the Roman military diaspora on the middle Euphrates and lower Khabur which could work only because there were roads, means of communication and a central structure of command ensuring homogeneity and uniformity. They have addressed the commercial diaspora in different periods, which lacked a central structure of command but took advantage of the legal framework offered by vast empires. Finally, they have investigated Jewish Diaspora in the historical settings of different empires. As a basic pattern of diaspora has emerged the maintenance of bonds between the several diasporic communities, the preservation of loyalty towards a real or virtual homeland and the set of customs, ideas and values embodied by it, and finally the intensification of notions of belonging shared by the members of diasporic groups when facing the 'other', represented by the surrounding majority.

Men and women in diasporic environments live next door to the 'other'. To them, the dialectics of identity and alterity is daily bread. Precisely this environment, as described by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, can be the most powerful «ground of identity»,<sup>9</sup> more powerful and fertile than any other source. Personal identity, according to Erving Goffman, has «to do with the assumption that the individual can be differentiated from all others and that around this means of differentiation a single continuous record of social facts can be attached, entangled, like candy floss, becoming then the sticky substance to which still other biographical facts can be attached».<sup>10</sup> The same is true for collective identity. The notion that a group is, in some respect, peculiar, inevitably provokes attempts to construct a distinct identity, which helps to maintain the collective's shape – the 'candy floss', in Goffman's beautiful words. For a group exposed to 'otherness' on a day-to-day basis, the candy floss is indispensable for their social coherence – accordingly such groups invest a great deal of effort on the collective construction of identity.

Stuttgart 2006; D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at bay, AD 180-395*, London 2004, 215-298; M. Sommer, *Die Soldatenkaiser*, Darmstadt 2004; K. Strobel, *Das Imperium Romanum im '3. Jahrhundert'. Modell einer historischen Krise? Zur Frage mentaler Strukturen breiterer Bevölkerungsschichten in der Zeit von Marc Aurel bis zum Ausgang des 3. Jh. n. Chr.*, Stuttgart 1993.

<sup>9</sup> D. Boyarin - J. Boyarin, *Diaspora. Generation and the ground of Jewish identity*, in J. E. Braziel - A. Mannur (Ed.), *Theorizing diaspora*, Oxford 2003, 85-118. Prototypes of individuals experiencing acts of transgression and transcendence on a regular base are *Grenzgänger*, recently described by B. Waldenfels, *Schwellerenerfahrung und Grenzziehung*, in M. Fludernik - H.-J. Gehrke (Ed.), *Grenzgänger zwischen Kulturen*, Würzburg 1999, 137-154, here 137, as «solche, die diesseits und jenseits heimisch oder vielleicht auf keiner Seite ganz heimisch sind».

<sup>10</sup> E. Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity*, Englewood Cliffs 1963, 56.

Consequently Empire, globalisation, diaspora, alterity and identity are interwoven in one single texture. In the context of the Roman Empire, their interdependence can nowhere be better observed than in the most peripheral zones, of which the middle Euphrates region, the object of our conference, is one of the best documented. There are few areas within the Roman world that provide better conditions for the preservation of architecture and artefacts,<sup>11</sup> but a place like Dura-Europos owes its outstanding importance for an investigation of diaspora and the rise of collective identities in antiquity not just to its excellent preservation. As could be seen, the middle Euphrates valley lay at the crossroads of inter-regional mobility, from the dawn of history, and it continued to play a key-role in the interaction of the various sub-regions of Western Asia well beyond Classical Antiquity. Though the part Dura-Europos played in the long-distance trade of the Partho-Roman world is still very controversial (and the evidence suggests that the city played indeed no major active role),<sup>12</sup> its closeness to the arteries of the intercontinental long-distance trade, the apparent mobility of its population, its strategic significance, and the importance it had for the dislocation first of the so-called Palmyrene militia and subsequently of regular Roman units make Dura-Europos an integral part of the osmotic frontier zone between the empires of the West and the East.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Dura-Europos should be taken, in many respects, as representative for provincial towns at the fringes of the Roman Empire. The Empire was surrounded by more or less open frontiers, where trade was a major factor, though not necessarily basic to livelihood, and the Roman military just ubiquitous. As a consequence, we may assume that other peripheral cities of the Empire shared, *mutatis mutandis* and to a certain degree, Dura's fate.<sup>14</sup> The following case-studies will focus on two sectors of diaspora, one of them concerning the impact of Roman soldiers and veterans in the Dura area, the other the strategies employed by the flourishing local Jewish community to maintain group coherence.

The Roman army was, at least until the Severan period, a highly self-contained institution.<sup>15</sup> The interdiction of marriage prevented soldiers from developing intense ties with the local populations surrounding their garrisons. The same le-

<sup>11</sup> Dura-Europos has duly been dubbed the 'Pompeii of the East' by M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and its art*, Oxford 1938, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Even though M. Rostovtzeff, *Caravan cities*, Oxford 1932, 153-219, had listed Dura among the prominent commercial cities of the Partho-Roman Near East. For a convincing reconstruction of Dura's involvement in local trade L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A study of religious interaction in Roman Syria*, Leiden 1999, 34-40.

<sup>13</sup> M. Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, «Oriens et Occidens» Bd. 9, Stuttgart 2005, 302-305.

<sup>14</sup> Apart from Dura's eventual destructio, of course.

<sup>15</sup> On the changes from the period of Antoninus Pius onwards, especially the problem of the citizenship of the soldiers' children and aspects of *connubium*, K. Kraft, *Zum Bürgerrecht der Soldatenkinder*, «Historia» 10, 1961, 120-126; R.G. Watson, *Eserciti e confini da Traiano a Settimio Severo in Clemente - Coarelli - Gabba* (Ed.), *Storia di Roma*, vol. 2. *L'impero mediterraneo. 2: I principi e il mondo* (n. 2), 387-408, here 395-397; G.R. Watson, *The Roman soldier*, London 1981, 136-137.

gal restrictions did not apply to veterans, who in many cases, on their discharge from the army, settled down next to the legionary camp, both maintaining old ties with their former comrades and developing new ones with the indigenous population.<sup>16</sup> Considering the number of units and soldiers garrisoned along the military frontier of the middle Euphrates and lower Khabur, it can be concluded that a substantial number of soldiers retired year by year and decided to settle down in the area, on the plot of land they received in return for their service. This process of settlement is highlighted by a couple of documents belonging to the papyrological corpora of Dura and the middle Euphrates.<sup>17</sup>

Of particular interest in the present context is the case of the veteran Iulius Demetrius, who purchased, according to P. Dura 26, a property from a local called Otarnaios, in the village of Sachare. Demetrius was already the owner of a neighbouring property.<sup>18</sup> For the plot of land, Demetrius paid 175 *denarii*, about one fifth of the annual salary of a legionary of those days.<sup>19</sup> The size of the property, not given in the document, may have come to one, at maximum two acres. By purchasing the land, Demetrius was far from becoming a large-scale landowner, and he was certainly not a rich man in the proper sense of the word. But he was able to enlarge his property and to invest money in his farm shortly after having been discharged.<sup>20</sup> In addition, he cultivated wine and selected fruits; apparently, he produced for a local market, not – as most local peasants in the Near Eastern world would do – for subsistence.<sup>21</sup> From his living not in Sachare, but in another place called Raquqeta, it can be inferred that he did not have to cultivate the land personally, but that he had some slaves to do the work for him. Compared to the indigenous population, Demetrius was clearly privileged; he was the representative of a new local elite, a grass-root leisure-class coming from outside and adding a new element to the social structure of the Khabur region.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> G. Alföldy, *Römische Heeresgeschichte. Beiträge 1962-1985*, Amsterdam 1987, 26-42; E. Gabba, *Per la storia dell'esercito romano in età imperiale*, Bologna 1974; E. Gabba, *Le strategie militari, le frontiere imperiali* in E. Gabba - A. Schiavone (Ed.), *Storia di Roma*, vol. 4. *Caratteri e morfologie* (n. 3), 487-513, here 502-509.

<sup>17</sup> For a quantitative assessment M. Sommer, *A map of meaning. Approaching cultural identities at the middle Euphrates (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD)*, *EVO* 27, 2004, 153-183, here 176. However speculative any attempt to estimate numbers must be, the impact of the veterans on the social structure of the Khabur region was doubtlessly substantial.

<sup>18</sup> ... γείτονες τῆς αὐτῆς χώρας ἀπὸ μὲν ἀνατολῶν κανάλιῳ ὕδατος καὶ Ἀβούρα ποταμῶς, δυσμῶν ἄμπελος τοῦ ἡγορακότος [...] (P. Dura 26, 15-17).

<sup>19</sup> ... τεμῆς ἀργυρίου δηναρίων ἑκατὸν ἐβδομήκοντ[α] πέντε [...] (P. Dura 26, 12-13).

<sup>20</sup> Some of his fellow soldiers who signed as witnesses were still active.

<sup>21</sup> The rural population's situation in the Hellenistic east has been thoroughly studied by P. Briant, *Remarques sur laoi et esclaves ruraux en Asie Mineure hellénistique*, in Aa.Vv. (Éds.), *Actes du Colloque 1971 sur l'esclavage*, Paris 1973, 93-133; Idem, *Villages et communautés villageoises d'Asie achéménide et hellénistique*, *JESHO* 19, 1975, 165-258; Idem, *Colonisation hellénistique et populations indigènes*, «*Klio*» 60, 1978, 57-92.

<sup>22</sup> The bibliography on the social and political implications of veteran settlement in the Roman provinces is vast. Nevertheless, there are still many unsolved problems, especially with regard to the

The veterans' privileged position can also be deduced from their prominence as witnesses in legal documents. The way the documents allude to their status as veterans, leaves no doubt that they enjoyed some social prestige, which the rural population generally lacked. But it was not just a social, but also a cultural gap, which divided the veterans from the local population and made them a diaspora community in the proper sense. Though onomastics as historical evidence, especially as an indicator for cultural affiliations of groups, should be treated with caution, in this case it provides a clear clue: the papyrological evidence suggests that, whereas all the soldiers and veterans in the area used, practically without exception, their *tria nomina* in written documents, an overwhelming majority of the local population renounced to utilise this passport to romanness the *constitutio Antoniniana* had bestowed upon most free inhabitants of the Empire in AD 212.<sup>23</sup>

The apparent rejection of the *tria nomina* among the local population requires an explanation.<sup>24</sup> No less peculiar is the return to Semitic names attested by a contract of divorce, dating in AD 204 (P. Dura 31). Akkozis and Nabousamaos bore local names, the man even a theophoric one; but their fathers had perfectly Greek names: Seleukos, respectively Konōn. The grandfathers – or are we dealing with the same person? – both had the Semitic name Abissaios. Akkozis and Nabousamaos belonged to the first generation born after the establishment of Roman supremacy – the return to Semitic names in two families precisely in this period is at least noteworthy. Rejection of *tria nomina* and return to local names do not necessarily imply 'resistance' to Roman rule, but they reveal cultural cleavages which may have been induced by latent resentments against the massive presence of the Roman military.

'Resistance' has recently been used as a paradigm in order to explain the obvious polemic against sacrificial cults evident in the wall-paintings of the Dura synagogue. A recent study in the building's artworks has interpreted the creation of

role played by veterans in the social, political, and religious life of local communities. Most pertinent are J.C. Mann, *Legionary Recruitment and Veteran Settlement During the Principate*, London 1983; Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, 223-225; E. Todisco, *I veterani in Italia in età imperiale*, Bari 1999; S. Demougin, *Les vétérans dans la Gaule Belgique et la Germanie inférieure*, in M.-Th. Raepsaet-Charlier, *Cités, Municipales, Colonies. Le processus de municipalisation en Gaule et en Germanie sous le Haut Empire romain*, Paris 1999, 355-380, esp. 367-373; L. Keppie, *From Legionary Fortress to Military Colony. Veterans of the Roman Frontiers*, in Idem, *Legions and Veterans. Roman Army Papers 1971-2000*, Stuttgart 2000, 309-316.

<sup>23</sup> Sommer, *Map of meaning*, 169-175. Whereas only about 25 percent of all individuals mentioned in the documents were soldiers or veterans, more than two thirds (68 percent) of those using the *tria nomina* were either veterans or active soldiers. On the impact of the constitution Antoniniana now K. Buraselis, *Theia dorea. Das göttlich-kaiserliche Geschenk. Studien zur Politik der Severer und zur constitutio Antoniniana*, «Akten der Gesellschaft für griechische und hellenistische Rechtsgeschichte», Bd. 18, Wien 2007, 94-157, and still C. Sasse, *Die Constitutio Antoniniana. Eine Untersuchung über den Umfang der Bürgerrechtsverleihung auf Grund des Papyrus Giss. 40 I*, Wiesbaden 1958.

<sup>24</sup> The implications of the *constitutio Antoniniana* were observed attentively in the Greek East, as Buraselis, *Theia dorea*, 138-142, points out (with reference to Gregory the Wonderworker and Menander of Laodicea who both discussed the edict's effects). This makes it unlikely that the *constitutio* was just ignored by the indigenous people.



spaces of 'self-definition', physically visible in the Synagogue's hall of assembly, as acts of resistance.<sup>25</sup> In this view, any religious community is a potential centre of resistance, embodying 'segmental opposition' that can turn into overt opposition against the central power at any time. Such an interpretation, though pointing in the right direction, stretches the evidence too far. The opposition articulated in the wall-paintings is exclusively 'segmental', mutual, directed against the competing cults and sanctuaries.<sup>26</sup>

The imagery of the Dura sanctuaries can best be understood when considering their local setting. The polemic of the Synagogue wall-paintings heads towards local, not imperial targets, and it reflects local religious discourses. Cults like that of Iuppiter Dolichenus, of Mithras or of the countless local gods, not to forget Christianity, were the competitors which made it necessary for the Jewish community to define their own identity, to draw borders between themselves and the others and to keep their faith 'pure'. Who could better embody their particular situation as a diaspora group than Mordecai and Ester, who had to live in accordance to the Law in a non-Jewish, potentially hostile environment? What could better represent the distinctiveness of their religion than the abortive sacrifice of the priests of Baal so colourfully depicted here? And what could better keep alive the loyalty to, and the remembrance of, the lost homeland of Eretz Israel than the stories around the genesis of Jewish identity: Abraham at the well of Be'er, Jacob's dream in Beth-el, the Exodus, David's anointment? This is precisely the kind of stories a diaspora community requires as a collectively shared memory in order to survive as an identity group: the 'sticky substance' to which they could attach the experiences of their daily life.

Hence the emphasis on the common genealogical and religious basis of Judaism, incarnated in the covenant of the tribes with Yahweh and the Ark (which is depicted according to Vitruvian norms as a Roman temple, a Corinthian peripteros), the monarchic tradition of the Davidic state, the Temple (which is likewise represented as a Roman temple, clearly in its eastern characteristic, with a temenos wall overtopped by pinnacles, and with acroters in the shape of winged Victories). As the synagogue was oriented towards the west, towards Jerusalem,

<sup>25</sup> J. Elsner, *Cultural resistance and the visual image. The case of Dura Europos*, CPh 96, 2001, 269-304.

<sup>26</sup> On the synagogue wall paintings E. Garte, *The theme of resurrection in the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings*, «The Jewish Quarterly Review» 64, 1973, 1, 1-15; M.-H. Gates, *Dura-Europos. A fortress of Syro-Mesopotamian art*, «The Biblical Archaeologist» 47, 1984, 3, 166-181; J. Gutmann, *The illustrated midrash in the Dura synagogue paintings. A new dimension of the study of Judaism*, «Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research» 50, 1983, 91-104; J. Gutmann, *The Dura Europos synagogue paintings and their influence on later Christian and Jewish art*, «Artibus et Historiae» 9, 1988, 17, 25-29; C.H. Kraeling, *The synagogue. (The excavations at Dura-Europos. Final report, Bd. 8. 1)*, New Haven (Conn.) 1956; M. Olin, 'Early Christian synagogues' and 'Jewish art historians'. *The discovery of the synagogue of Dura-Europos*, «Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft» 27, 2000, 7-28; M. Sommer, *Dura-Europos ed il medio Eufrate. Osservazioni su diaspora e costruzioni di identità culturali nella Mesopotamia parto-romana*, *MediterrAnt* 7, 2004, 837-857; M. Sommer, *Kulturelle Identität im Zeichen der Krise. Die Juden von Dura-Europos und das Römische Reich*, «Chilufim» 1, 2006, 12-31; K. Weitzmann - H. L. Kessler, *The frescoes of the Dura synagogue and Christian art*, Washington (D.C.) 1990.

its imagery pointed towards the traditions and memories shared with other Jews scattered over the Roman world and beyond.

The two examples illustrate what geographical mobility and diaspora, both consequences of Roman expansion and the 'globalisation' impelled by it, could result in: the reinforcement of pre-existing patterns of identity, both in the diasporic groups and in their environments. In plain words, active and retired soldiers in imperial service became more 'Roman', indigenous peasants and city-dwellers more 'indigenous', Jews more 'Jewish', Mithraists more 'Mithraist', polytheists more 'polytheistic'. The dialectic outcome of progressive diasporisation by progressive globalisation was, consequently, the construction of hermetic group identities which counteracted the process of 'cosmopolitanisation' the peripheries Roman Empire had undergone in the first two centuries of the imperial period. Instead of a 'Roman' identity common to everybody, it was given birth to an increasing number of group-specific discourses, alternative narratives challenging the traditional master narrative emanating from the centre: 'Romanisation', whatever it really meant, remained abortive under such circumstances.

The case of Dura-Europos suggests that the reversal of globalisation first happened at the outer fringes of the empire. The question is whether or not the group-specific discourses of the periphery had any significance for the centre. Did the imperial elite perceive anything at all of what was going on in towns like Dura-Europos? Was there any notion that the set of traditions, values and customs, the lifestyle and knowledge that fed the imperial master discourse could be in danger and be replaced by new paradigms within few decades after the fall of Dura-Europos in 256/7? If any contemporary felt that a new era was about to begin, it was Herodian, the often vilified 'story teller'. We lack any precise information about his origin and social status, but he was certainly very proud of his Greek *paideia*.<sup>27</sup> The benchmark of his historical judgement is Marcus Aurelius, the incarnation of Greek erudition, with whom his *histories* begin. Marcus' antipode is Elagabalus whom Herodian doesn't depict as the usual fool in purple – the image created by Cassius Dio. Instead, Herodian's parallel account constructs Elagabalus as a man culturally alien to everything that is Greek – and consequently, in accordance to his conception of *paideia*, everything that is Roman. His Elagabalus is a religious zealot who tries to topple the sacred foundations of the Roman state. The story of Elagabalus culminates in a conflict between him and his aunt, Iulia Mamaea. When Mamaea tried to have her son, Elagabalus' cousin Alexianus, Severus Alexander, educated in a classical manner, in Latin, Greek, wrestling and philosophy, Elagabalus removed the young man's teachers from court, had some of them executed and imposed «charioteers, comedians and Thespians»<sup>28</sup> on Alexianus.

<sup>27</sup> Most comprehensive now M. Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis. Studien zum Geschichtswerk Herodians*, München 1999. On Herodian and the changing image of the Roman Empire M. Sommer, *Elagabal - Wege zur Konstruktion eines 'schlechten' Kaisers*, SCL 23, 2004, 95-110, here 107-110; Sommer, *Kulturelle Identität*, 25-28.

<sup>28</sup> Herodian. V 7, 7.

With Elagabalus and his aunt, two rivalling cultural projects were colliding in a struggle for dominance, not somewhere, but in the Empire's power centre, the imperial palace in Rome. Herodian's Elagabalus incarnates the rise of alternative narratives and the erosion of the master narrative, in his attire, his appearance and his habit. Still on his way to Rome, in Nicomedia, after his victory over Macrinus, he belied Aelius Aristides, who had claimed that the Roman world was «the universal country of all». Elagabalus was anxious that the senate and people of Rome should get used to seeing his dress, and to test out their reactions to the sight before he arrived. So an enormous picture was painted of him as he appeared in public performing as a priest. Also in the picture was a portrait of the Emesene god, to whom he was represented making a favourable sacrifice. The picture was sent to Rome with orders that it should hang right in the middle of the senate house, above the head of the statue of Victory.<sup>29</sup>

This picture was indeed the mirror of a de-globalising Roman Empire, the antithesis to Aristides' vision of globalisation.

The University of Liverpool

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* V 5, 6.