

Review

A. C. JOHNSTON, *THE SONS OF REMUS: IDENTITY IN ROMAN GAUL AND SPAIN*.
Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 420. ISBN
9780674660106. £39.95.

Andrew Johnston has written engagingly, and with a generally sharp theoretical awareness, about a wealth of literary, epigraphic and archaeological material. Dismissing post-colonial scholarship as only 'seeking resistance' (7), he argues that our histories need to see 'native' and 'Roman' in less binary terms, and for the former to be more 'active' participants. He is not interested in the "grandsons of Romulus", as the late republican poet Catullus famously called the Romans of his age, but rather the sons of Remus' (3); this sets up the title of the book, and its direct lineage to Emma Dench's *Romulus' Asylum* (2005).

J.'s beautiful rhetoric promotes the importance of sensitivity to regional complexities in the western provinces, but the content sometimes falls short of the target. The book covers the Iberian peninsula and Gaul, but the title states that it is a study of identity in Roman Gaul and Spain, oddly overlooking Portugal which provides, for example, the site of Évora at the opening of ch. 2.

The summary of the scholarly landscape in the introduction simply highlights Haverfield and Jullian and very selective readings of Woolf's work (whose caricature may bemuse many in the field). The conclusion is also disappointing: the brief survey of approaches to the Roman provinces skips from Schmitz's *A History of Rome* (1847) and Haverfield's *The Romanization of Roman Britain* (1915) to Price's 2012 chapter in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World*. J. tends to present a straw man rather than engaging fully with the growing body of work on provincial local/multiple identities, agency, memoryscapes, discrepant experiences and entanglements. J.'s research very much follows the *Zeitgeist* and the book could have drawn strength from this scholarly energy.

There is much worthy of praise, and debate, in the main chapters. Ch. 1 concerns constructions of 'selves' — here, and throughout, largely elites (5) — through naming, space, time and eponymous deities. The discussions are illustrated with carefully chosen examples, for example, from Pliny the Elder and Martial, and the use of the 'backwards C' in epigraphy to represent pre-Roman communities. So for example \supset *Olca* could be read as *Olcabriga* or *castellum Olca* (or bilingually, I would suggest). A slightly forced distinction creates a second chapter on 'others', which treats 'patterns of interaction', intercommunity conflict and 'the polyphonous invocations of *patria* and *cives*' (124). The focus is again on elite output: the *tesserae hospitales*, lapidary inscriptions and multiple *leges*. J. has a knack for spotting an illustrative example, for example *SPQT* (*senatuspopulusque Termestinus*) in place of *SPQR* in an inscription of the Arevaci region, curse tablets from Emporion and the Venus figurines of Aremorica. Under Roman rule local groups were sustained, destroyed and created and, like their pre-Roman predecessors, were far from homogeneous, displaying complex interactions, sometimes violent, both with local, and more distant, others.

Ch. 3 on 'local pasts', history from a local perspective, presents further fascinating material, from both larger community and family levels. It attacks the vision that locals are distinguished from Graeco-Roman culture by being uninterested in/forgetful of their past. A particularly evocative example of a Lusitanian *cantor*, depicted as a means of disseminating local histories, recurs. J. discusses a series of local foundation myths, whose 'primary actors (the "founders") are constructed either as indigenes, or as primordial [...] without recourse to the etymologizing typical of Greek mythography' (136), focusing on Tartessus, Lugdunum and Hercules in the West (Malkin is strangely not cited). He then presents examples of how landscapes and monuments lent coherence to local identities. The fourth chapter treats us to analysis of the local versions of Roman pasts, of manipulations and negotiations which 'would not always have been readily intelligible or even recognizable to a non-local, Roman audience' (229). The exploration ranges widely across histories involving Trojans, Rutulians, Romulus and Remus, republican events and figures.

The final main chapter opens with a discussion of the visual representation of the Sequanian brothers at Burdigala, a passage which, along with several others, would have benefited from the inclusion of images. The chapter takes as its mission demonstration of 'performance of identity'

and discusses local offices (e.g. through the firing lists of La Graufesenque), Druidism, expressions of identity in Ausonius and Martial and a will from an individual of the Lingones.

The scope of the book is ambitious: no individual can be expected to write equally expertly on the literary, epigraphical and archaeological evidence from Gaul and the Iberian peninsula. J.'s expertise and the most successful parts of the book lie in the contextually sensitive manipulation of literary sources: there is comparatively little discussion of archaeology and we rarely hear what the inscriptions look like, how they are physically presented, how they fit within the epigraphic landscape. J.'s treatment of the materials confirms that the evidence tends to be very good on the 'Roman side', whereas often leaps of faith and imagination are required to reach the local. It is of course tempting to see links, for example, between early monumental architecture and snippets in much later authors, but examples such as the sixth-century B.C. Massaliote *Floralia*, which J. can identify as 'anachronistic', indicate caution is required. Reading back across centuries with notoriously slippery later Roman sources as guides makes for an enjoyable adventure, but we may still end up far from the local. To my mind there is not enough engagement with Gaulish inscriptions, and the *Monumenta linguarum hispanicarum (MLH)*, the bible of local language inscriptions from the Iberian peninsula, only appears once in the whole text.

J. criticises others for a focus on the dichotomy between objective change and continuity, but does not in practice offer a better approach: his temporal scope is stretched and messy, skipping between material centuries apart without careful contextualisation (e.g. of transmission processes of literary sources) and not acknowledging broader, sometimes radical, societal, economic and political changes. The Roman Empire ends up being everywhere and nowhere, a problematic feature of many critiques of 'Romanisation'. Understanding Roman provincial realities requires not only sensitivity to the local, but also to the complex and constantly evolving broader provincial and imperial context.

University of Nottingham Alex Mullen
alex.mullen@nottingham.ac.uk