

## Abstract

This dissertation investigates the cultural interaction that took place within the Roman Empire as Roman traditions and the cultures of provincial communities encountered one another. In earlier scholarship these encounters were cast as 'Romanization,' but increasing criticism over the last decades has shown this concept to be problematic. In its stead, scholars have proposed a range of theoretical concepts. Some of these have emphasized the wide-ranging cultural interaction taking place within the empire, others the unequal status of these different cultures.

The dissertation seeks to construct a middle position between these two poles, and produce the framework for a cultural history that may capture both aspects of Roman imperialism: the abundance of contacts between cultures and also the hierarchy in which they existed. For this purpose, the study employs the model of the great and little tradition, designed by the anthropologists Robert Redfield and McKim Marriott. This model envisages agrarian civilisation as always consisting of two traditions. The great tradition is the culture of the elite, and it is standardised and codified by literature. The little tradition is the culture of the local communities. It exists in the oral sphere, and is therefore prone to change over time or from place to place.

The dissertation argues that the establishment of the Roman Empire produced a significant cultural interaction throughout the affected communities. This interaction affected local cultures deeply, at times even transforming them. However, full participation in the culture of the ruling elite was only possible for a small segment of the provincial populations. Therefore, encounter with the Roman elite traditions did not lead to the demise of the local cultural world.