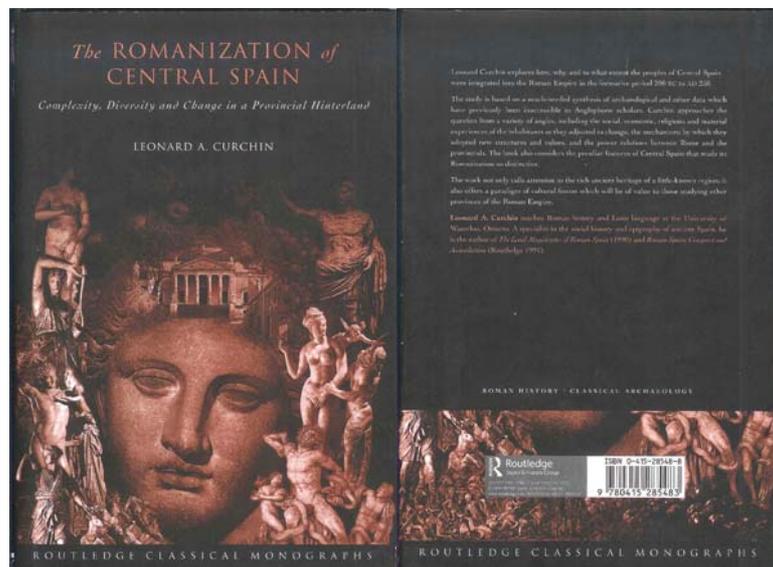


Curchin, L.A. 2003. The Romanization of Central Spain. Complexity, diversity and change in a provincial hinterland. – London/New York, Routledge.

Book review by Harry van Enkevort



Central Spain, the heartland of the Province *Hispania Citerior*, is the laboratory for Curchin to study the cultural transformation of six indigenous peoples, from the second century BC to the mid-third century AD. According to him, we can understand the working of the Roman empire by studying the changes in the behaviour of the indigenous peoples who lived in the study area. This extensive plateau of approximately 100,000 square kilometres is also known as Meseta, a term used by the famous German explorer and geographer Alexander von Humboldt. After a short introduction to the physical geography of the region, Curchin tries to develop, in the most theoretical part of the book, the model of Romanization that describes the best way in which the indigenous people were integrated into the Roman empire and adopted or adapted ‘Roman’ artifacts, structures and lifestyles. In his opinion the integration model gives the best insight into Romanization. In this model, the Roman and indigenous cultures “undergo a process of mutual permeation and amalgamation to form a new, ‘provincial’ culture”. Nevertheless “the model predicts that some elements of both constituent cultures will remain unabsorbed and unintegrated” (p. 14) Curchin adopted the eclectic method in using both processual and post-processual insights, in combination with archaeological, literary and epigraphic evidence, to illustrate how the transition from pre-Roman to Romanized culture took place.

The author outlines different aspects of the indigenous culture from both the Romano-centric and the indigeno-centric point of view, and comes to the conclusion that the peoples who were living on the Meseta were not the barbarians (Celtiberians) we know so well from historical sources. In the centuries before the arrival of the Romans, the social organisation reached the sophisticated level of what Elman R. Service in 1962 called a chiefdom, a pre-state society. The pre-Roman chiefdoms were well known for warfare. At the end of the third century BC they were confronted with two expanding Mediterranean powers: Carthage and Rome. Between 195 and 72 BC, Central Spain was both a war zone and a cultural interaction zone for the indigenous peoples and the Romans. The loyalty and collaboration of local elites, the successors of the pre-Roman aristocracy, led to successful integration of the indigenous peoples into the Roman power structure. Service in the army was especially important for the Romanization of the indigenous soldiers through their pay and prestige. In the end, the demilitarisation of the Meseta is a clear sign that the informal strategy of participative integration was successful.

In subsequent chapters Curchin analyses several aspects of the Mesetan peoples. Although the Roman and indigenous cultures converged in many ways, the author shows us, in chapters 4-10, several aspects of the societies, beginning with elements and traditional values from pre-Roman times and ending with the changes they underwent during Roman times. In the end the indigenous culture of Central Spain was a provincial Roman culture in which the old traditional culture merged with the Greco-Roman culture, which was already influenced by the culture of earlier conquered peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in earlier times. Inscriptions and finds reveal discrepancies in the level of Romanization between peoples living on the Meseta. The author describes successively the changes, or in other words the Romanization, in settlement pattern, society, economy, religion, language and behaviour of the Mesetan peoples.

The settlement pattern underwent an impressive change due to the diffusion of urbanism throughout Central Spain. In the end, many hill-forts were replaced by cities, which were founded on more favourable locations such as river banks. From Augustan times onwards, cities acquired municipal rights. On the supraregional level of administration, the *conventus* capitals filled judicial, economic and religious functions. The countryside also changed. A network of roads linked the traditional rural settlements and the new villa estates with the cities. This enabled the farmers to bring their produce to the market. This level of exploitation, surplus production and profit of the villa estates, mostly owned by indigenes (the local magistrates), was unknown in Iron Age Central Spain.

The integration into the Roman empire led to a new, more complex social order, a mix of both indigenous and Roman elements. The adoption of Latin names shows that a Roman identity was a sought-after goal. The extension of Roman and Latin citizenship was made attractive by privileges, although the traditional social structure was never completely broken down. The old elites kept, and even enlarged, in Roman guise, their social and economic power, which was based on their privileged possession of agricultural and mining resources. As in other parts of the Roman world, the Meseta economy was originally based on non-monetary exchange. The production and use of coins shows nonetheless the penetration of Roman practices relating to coinage from the mid-second century BC on. The incorporation of the Meseta into the Roman world led to a more complex economic organisation and to the monetisation of the region. The first phases of this process were stimulated by the demands of the Roman army.

The religious pantheon of the indigenous peoples was characterised by duality. Both Celtic and Graeco-Roman deities could be worshipped. It is clear that certain pre-Roman religious practices survived right alongside Roman ones, the imperial cult for instance. This latter practice provides eloquent testimony to the influence of the imperial ideology. Central Spain was less Latinised than the Mediterranean coast, but it is obvious that the names of the elites were always Latinised. Others who had no access to Roman citizenship kept their indigenous names. The Latinisation of the peoples “had important consequences for social organisation” (p. 214), for instance, the abandonment of the traditional gentile system. Mortuary practices show that individuals had not totally abandoned their old beliefs and rituals, although the pre-Roman practice of cremation was gradually replaced by inhumation in the first century AD.

There can be only minor criticisms of Curchin’s book. The list of modern and antique names in the book is overwhelming and no topographical map with all these names located is presented. The quality of the content of the text is outstanding, although more attention should have been paid to the figures; they are too simplistic and do not sufficiently illuminate the text.

The book gives us a magnificent overview about the changes that took place in Central-Spain after the Roman occupation in the second century BC. It gives the reader good insight into several aspects of the Mesetan culture and the Romanization of Mesetan peoples. This comprehensive overview of Roman times of the Meseta and the comprehensive bibliography and index gives many opportunities to compare the Romanization of Central-Spain with comparable developments in other Roman provinces. This book is a valuable volume on the bookshelf for everyone who studies Romanization, although the term ‘Romanization’ has become much disputed in the last decade. Leonard A. Curchin gives the best meaning to the concept he can, in moving partially away from the Romans towards the indigenous peoples themselves and offers the reader a new perspective on the changes which took place on the Meseta during the Roman occupation.

Curchin, L.A. 2003. *The Romanization of Central Spain. Complexity, diversity and change in a provincial hinterland.* – London/New York, Routledge. 300 pp. ISBN 0-415-28548-8. Price \$114.95 (hardback).

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