

Klär, Timo: *Die Vasconen und das Römische Reich. Der Romanisierungsprozess im Norden der Iberischen Halbinsel*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2017. ISBN: 978-3-515-11739-5; 290 S.

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The publication is the result of doctoral research by Timo Klär at Saarland University. With this book, he explores how the Roman idea of the barbarian Vascones relates to the Romanisation of the Vascon region (p. 12). It treats the history of the Vascones in six chronological chapters.

The first chapter introduces the major debate: Romanisation. It starts out with a short introduction of the Roman conquest and incorporation of the Iberian Peninsula into the Roman sphere, leading up to the well explained Romanisation debate. The author shows familiarity the different aspects and periods of the debate, as well as the specific discussions regarding the Iberian Peninsula. However, the treatment of the methodology used within the book remains descriptive and quickly leads to the „vaskonische Hypothese“ (p. 29), the idea that modern Basque is descended from a pre-Indo-European language. Timo Klär's own ideas of the workings of Romanisation does not become clear in the methodological introductory chapter.

The book continues with a chronological account of Vascon history from the Roman Republican period up to medieval times. The introductory sections on the history of the Roman Empire feel too descriptive and out of place, but the chapters in themselves offer insights into the effect on the Vascon territory of Roman policy toward nearby regions. Even within the chapters, however, the discussion sometimes tends to diverge too far from the topic (e.g. the section on *Gades* and Caesar pp. 83–85). These historical excursions do raise the question of whether the focus is too broad; nonetheless, they show Timo Klär's erudition regarding the available literature and ancient sources.

The distribution of the chapters immediately shows the book's focus on the Republican and early Empire: these two chapters take

up the majority of the book. Obviously, this is because the sources for these two periods are more plentiful, and as the book deals with the Romanisation of the Vascones, this process would have taken place in the earlier days rather than in the Late Antique period. Although the last chapters provide a needed view on the history of the Vascones in the Late Antique and medieval periods, they seem more of an afterthought than an addition to the debate on the Romanisation of the Vascones.

The book draws strongly on Classical literature and the research focussing on it. As a result, we see the bias of the Roman authors, who focus on the „cities“ of the region. The most in-depth analyses examine to the cities of Graccurris, Pompaelo, Calagurris Nassica, and to a lesser extent Osca. These cities are very different in origin and as such could show different ways of Vascon integration into the Roman sphere. In the case of Calagurris, there was a strong presence of people originating from the Italic Peninsula (p. 109); these were Roman citizens, leading to the question whether this city is a good indicator of the Romanisation of the Vascones. However, Graccurris (p. 131) and Pompaelo (pp. 73 and 142) were founded by Roman generals and settled with local people. It is interesting to see that Klär takes the foundation of cities to be an honour to the local people (pp. 94 and 142), whereas he earlier argued, following traditional views, that the foundation of these cities including veterans was intended to form a Roman base in newly conquered areas (p. 58). Nonetheless, he is right that these cities would enhance contact between the Romans and the local population.

Each of the historical chapters treating the Republic, High Empire and Late Antiquity close with a consideration of the contact between the Vascones and the Romans. In these sections we can find the author's opinion on the subject. For the Republican period, the absence of the Vascones in the conflicts between the neighbouring tribes and Rome is taken to be evidence of Vascon support for the Romans. Following from this assumed support, the author infers that the Vascones were in contact with Rome, but this *argumentum ex silentio* can also be interpreted as it has

been before: the Vascon area was of no importance for the Romans. Nonetheless, Klär argues convincingly that the Roman presence in the region indicates that it was a more important than formerly believed.

One of the most compelling sections addresses the aspect of religion. Here, the author goes further than only showing the contact between Romans and Vascones, inferring Romanisation when both groups live in the same city. The example of the sanctuary of Ujué is a very telling case of the so-called *interpretatio vasconica* (p. 161). Here, two seemingly similar altar stones were found with Latin inscriptions and bulls' heads on the sides. The difference between the two altar stones is in the dedications: one to Jupiter and one to Lacubegis. These similar altar stones indicate that at the sanctuary both gods were venerated, most probably as one and the same, indicating religious exchange between Vascones and Romans. Here, Klär also includes the evidence for the connection with the neighbouring tribes, including those on the other side of the Pyrenees. This view is much needed as the Pyrenees are often wrongly taken to be an unsurmountable barrier.

In the fourth chapter, Klär states that the Latin language seems only to have been spread in the cities, while the contact between the Romans and the Vascones in rural areas seems to have been less intense. He goes on to conclude that contact between the cities and the rural hinterland was less intense than is often thought, a line of reasoning that deserves more research.

Reading this book, we indeed must follow Klär and conclude that the Roman presence and the interaction of the Vascones with the Romans has been underestimated in antique and modern literature. The standard idea of the Vascones as an untouched tribe living high up in the mountains without any contact with the Romans is incorrect, but Klär's description of the interaction between the Vascones and the Romans is not enough to understand the process which led to the incorporation of this region into the Roman Empire. The book is, as its title indicates, a treatise on the Vascones within the Roman Empire. It provides a very thorough description of the Roman presence in Vascon territory based

on an incredible number of classical sources and modern literature. Future research would benefit from starting with this book's examinations of the Roman conquest and Roman cities in the region, as it treats these topics very well. From here, researchers could extend their investigation into the countryside, a region for which the book only peeks tantalizingly underneath the veil.

HistLit 2019-2-102 / Pieter Houten über Klär, Timo: *Die Vasconen und das Römische Reich. Der Romanisierungsprozess im Norden der Iberischen Halbinsel*. Stuttgart 2017, in: H-Soz-Kult 13.05.2019.