



ROME AND THE BLACK SEA REGION

DOMINATION, ROMANISATION, RESISTANCE

*Edited by
Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen*

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BLACK SEA STUDIES

5

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Introduction

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen

Domination

In 89 BC, Roman legionaries intervened in the Black Sea region to curb the ambitions of Mithridates VI of Pontos. Over the next two centuries, the Roman presence on the Black Sea coast was slowly, but steadily increased. The annexation of Pontus and Bithynia as a Roman province (63 BC), the transformation of the Bosporan Kingdom into a client power (42 BC) and the establishment of Roman garrisons in the Crimea (AD 64) mark stages in this protracted process. The campaigns of Trajan in Dacia and Armenia (AD 105-114) represent the last great effort of Rome to bring the Pontic area under her sway, and the *Periplus* of Arrian (AD 130) a stock-taking of Roman domination at its greatest extent, when Rome controlled, directly or indirectly, more than two-thirds of the Black Sea shoreline. Unlike the Mediterranean, the Black Sea never became a Roman lake. Even at the height of Roman power, political control was enforced through a variety of mechanisms, from outright annexation to alliances with native rulers, the details of which have not always found their way into the historical record.

The range of different political and diplomatic instruments used by Rome in the Pontic region reflect her underlying reluctance to undertake a permanent annexation by military means. With large numbers of regular soldiers already committed to the defence of the Rhine, the Danube and Syria, Rome had no need for yet another frontier in the Pontos, nor a *limes* in the Caucasus. They also, however, reflect the variety of political, geographical and demographical realities that faced Rome on her first encounters with the Black Sea region – where the nomads of the north Pontic steppe zone and the mountain pastoralists of Anatolia coexisted with the Greek-speaking citizens of the coastal cities, ancient Milesian colonies whose inhabitants took pride in their urbanity and civic heritage.

The advent of Rome brought immediate and tangible changes in local power relations, taxation, local administration, to take a few examples. Over time, it entailed innumerable minor and major changes that were not limited to the sphere of economy and politics, nor to the districts under Roman rule. The new order of things came to permeate social life, religion, lifestyle, architecture, language and patterns of consumption.