Chapter 2

Becoming Wolf, Staying Sheep

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From its earliest historical period, illuminated from various angles by hexameter epic poetry, hortatory and commemorative elegiac poetry, and some melic poetry, by funerary and dedicatory epigram, by vase-painting, sculpture and later attestations of wall-painting, Greek polis-society set a very high value on displays by its male citizens, above all by its νέοι, of valour and military excellence—both concepts covered, significantly, by the same term that also designated non-military excellence, ἀρετή. That high value continued to be accorded at least down to the time of Polybius, and Greek cities continued to be involved in land and particularly naval campaigns—the clearest case is that of Rhodes—down to the Roman civil wars of the first century BC. The pax Augusta eliminated the opportunity, if not the motive, for cities and peoples within the empire to go to war with each other. But neither the reign of Augustus nor that of any of his successors succeeded in halting recurrent wars on the empire’s frontiers, and most Greeks who thought about the matter are surely likely to have shared some form of the view that Aelius Aristides put forward in his εἰς Ῥώμην, that one of the empire’s great benefits to the civilized Mediterranean world was the ring of legionary steel with which it protected its boundaries.1

In this situation one might have expected a substantial number of Greek νέοι to have grasped the opportunity for a military career, whether in the auxilia or the legions—the latter option must have become increasingly open as civitas Romana spread in the Greek cities of the East and as the restriction of legionary recruitment to those who were already citizens was relaxed. But so far as we can tell from our evidence, primarily epigraphic, that is not the case. There are a few Greeks from city elites who undertake one of the three equestrian militiae, but at that point more men move into a procuratorial career or have no further documented post than enter a long military career. There are also a few, but very few, whose paths into or through a senatorial cursus involved more than one military post. Thus so far as concerns members of Greek elites, the number of equites and senators who seem to evade any military involvement is much greater than of those who have one or more military

1 Aristid. or. 26 Keil, esp. 81–4.
posts. So too there are few Greek legionaries at centurion level, and the num-
bers at the level of an ordinary legionary are very small indeed by comparison
with recruitment from veteran colonies in the Eastern empire or from more
recently acquired provinces like Thrace, to say nothing of recruitment from
the western provinces. The Greeks' vision of the Roman empire seems to have
been very different from that of Romans or other westerners.

I shall examine some of the evidence for this situation, beginning with
enrolment in legions.

**Legionaries**

The overall picture we can reconstruct seems to have changed remarkably
little during the seventy years between Parker (1928), Forni (1953 and 1974),
Mann (1983) and Le Bohec (2000). A list of the relevant cases is printed below
as Appendix 1. It is clear from that list that very few Greeks come from the great
urban centres of western Asia Minor. This has its corollary in the *cognomina*
of legionaries. In 5700 cases which were analysed in 1916 by Dean there were
56 Latin names each found twenty times or more. The second most frequent
category was Greek, but it revealed only 192 names spread over 328 men. Apart
from Celtic names (80) the rest was made up of negligible numbers (Thracian,
Phoenician, other Semitic names). In short, the onomastics of the legionaries
reveal that the army belonged to the Latin-speaking Roman world.

Perhaps this picture is not surprising: the rewards for fighting bravely for
one's *polis* (and the penalties for military incompetence or for cowardice in
battle) were much more up-front in an archaic, classical or even Hellenistic
*polis*. The pattern of occasional fighting by a citizen of a classical *polis* who
returned (if he did return) to the same station in his society that he had left
was very different from what was entailed by joining a professional Roman
army for a period of twenty or twenty-five years and service far from one's
πατρίς. Perhaps the surprise should be that any men from Greek cities opted
for a military career at all. Some *did*, but men from Italy, the western prov-
inces and Africa, facing similar choices, did so in vastly greater numbers. What
explains this disparity?

Two preliminary points may be made. First, if one seeks an answer within
the framework of the formulation in Woolf 1994, one might say that becoming
a member of the Roman military machine could be seen as adopting a part of

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2 Dean 1916.
3 Le Bohec 2000.