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978-1-107-00479-5 - Peasants and Slaves: The Rural Population of Roman Italy (200 BC to AD 100)

Alessandro Launaro

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Peasants and Slaves

The crisis of the Roman Republic and its transformation into an Empire have fascinated generations of scholars. It has long been assumed that a dramatic demographic decline of the rural free peasantry (which was supplanted by slaves) triggered the series of social and economic developments which eventually led to Rome's political crisis during the first century BC. This book contributes to a lively debate by exploring both the textual and the archaeological evidence and by tracing and reassessing the actual fate of the Italian rural free population between the Late Republic and the Early Empire. Data derived from a comparative analysis of twenty-seven archaeological surveys – and about five thousand sites – allow Dr Launaro to outline a radically new picture according to which episodes of local decline are placed within a much more generalised pattern of demographic growth.

ALESSANDRO LAUNARO is a British Academy postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge and a research fellow at Darwin College, Cambridge. He has taken part in surveys and excavations in Liguria, Tuscany and Marche, and is currently researching the relationship between population dynamics, rural settlement patterns and agrarian economic regimes across Roman Italy.

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'[. . .] peut-on espérer que les progrès de l'archéologie combleront bientôt quelques-unes des lacunes qui empêchent souvent d'écrire une histoire ancienne autre qu'imaginaire? Ma réponse est oui, si deux conditions sont respectées. La première est que les archéologues sachent argumenter leurs résultats pour d'autres qu'eux-mêmes. La seconde est qu'on mesure la valeur des hypothèses qu'il faut en tout état de cause avancer, et qu'on n'hésite pas à les modifier quand de nouvelles découvertes, cheminement normal, les invalident.' (Tchernia 1986: 305)

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PREFACE

This book traces its origins back to an essay on comparative analysis in landscape archaeology which I submitted while being an undergraduate ERASMUS student at the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester (2002/3). Marinella Pasquinucci – who first introduced me to landscape studies – had encouraged me to embark on such an overseas ‘endeavour’ (well – it looked so at the time!) in order to widen and deepen my understanding of the subject. Taking advantage of such an outstanding teaching staff and learning environment, I ended up attending more courses than I was originally allowed to, only to complement them with further ‘tutoring’ by my ERASMUS supervisor, David Mattingly, who patiently agreed to devote time and effort to help me develop my own ideas.

Once back in Italy, following my graduation in Classical Archaeology, I embarked on a Doctorate in Ancient History at the Università di Pisa (2004–8) which was to pursue precisely that comparative approach I had written about when in Leicester. By integrating published evidence from field surveys into a wider perspective on the historical demography of Roman Italy, I aimed at showing how landscape archaeology could have made a significant contribution to ‘core’ issues within ancient history. Indeed, I wished to prove how such a deep permeation of different approaches was not only desirable and profitable, but – rather – necessary.

Such a pursuit – which eventually produced this book – proved to be a rather tough endeavour, certainly more than I originally expected it to be. I wish therefore to acknowledge here my full and deep gratitude to *all* those people and institutions who supported me – in one way or another. I am first of all greatly indebted to Elio Lo Cascio, David Mattingly and Martin Millet, whose great patience, intellectual liveliness and wise advice I have since learned to rely on. Graeme Barker and Marinella Pasquinucci both encouraged me to widen my horizons by networking with other scholars, namely Cesare Letta, Paolo Malanima, John Patterson and Rob Witcher, their learned and passionate involvement always proving inspirational. I also benefited from precious feedback and comments from Luuk de Ligt, Elizabeth Fentress, Andrea Giardina, Maurizio Gualtieri, William Harris, Saskia Hin, Willem Jongman, Geoffrey Kron, Marco Maiuro, Neville Morley, Robin Osborne, Pasquale Rosafio, Walter Scheidel, André Tchernia and Andrew Wilson. Several of them (Fentress, Hin, Jongman, Maiuro, Mattingly and Witcher) together with Maria Grazia Celuzza, Saskia Roselaar and Paolo Sangriso (who also first taught me how to excavate, many years ago) kindly made available their own work ahead of publication. Responsibility for the views expressed in this book is however of the author only.

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PREFACE

During the Doctorate I benefited from a nine-month studentship from the Laboratorio di Topografia Antica (Università di Pisa), while the ‘Pisa–Leicester Agreement’ supported part of my travel expenses between those two Universities. The Universiteit Leiden provided me with accommodation while attending the ‘VICI Conference’ in June 2007 (thanks are due to Luuk de Ligt). All Souls College in Oxford offered me accommodation while attending the ‘Oxford Roman Economy Project’ seminar in September 2007 (thanks are due to Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson). Thanks are also due to Geoff Horrocks who – as Chair of the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge – accepted me as a Visiting Graduate Student during the academic year 2007/8. Katherine Isaacs offered me the great opportunity of taking part in the *CLIOHRES.net* – European Network of Excellence on History. Moving frequently between Italy and the UK, I had also the great pleasure of being a guest of Rob Witcher (in Durham) and – perhaps too many times! – of the Mattingly family (in Leicester).

Much of the revision work took place while holding a Leverhulme Visiting Fellowship back at the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester in 2009. I therefore wish to thank the Leverhulme Trust for such an important opportunity and Colin Haselgrove (Head of the School) for presenting me with such a great privilege. The main argument also significantly benefited from feedback I received at the Roman Archaeology Conference in April 2009 (whose attendance was partly supported by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies) and at the ROCT Workshop in June 2009 (thanks are due to Jeroen Poblome and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for their hospitality). These occasions produced two papers (Launaro forthcoming^a, forthcoming^b). The text was eventually finalised while I was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge and a Research Fellow of Darwin College, Cambridge. I wish to express my gratitude to all these institutions as they provided a most suitable environment in which to refine the content of this book.

My gratitude goes also to the General Editors of the Cambridge Classical Studies for accepting this work to be published in their series and to the staff of Cambridge University Press (especially Thomas O’Reilly and Malcolm Todd) whose professionalism – and patience! – helped make this a better book.

Last but not least, a big *grazie* to my friends Davide, Marzia, Nicola and ‘il Biajo’, who provided unflinching support and – most importantly – good humour when it was most needed. Our family cat, Lucky (a.k.a. *Monsieur Le Chat*), came from time to time to show his own support as well. But most of all I wish to acknowledge loving gratitude to my family, especially my parents and Ninetta: this book – what of good might be in it – is no less theirs than it is mine.