

The Early Roman Expansion into Italy

This book presents a radical new interpretation of Roman expansion in Italy during the fourth and third centuries BCE. Nicola Terrenato argues that the process was accomplished by means of a grand bargain that was negotiated between the landed elites of central and southern Italy, while military conquest played a much smaller role than is usually envisaged. Deploying archeological, epigraphic, and historical evidence, he paints a picture of the family interactions that tied together both Roman and non-Romans aristocrats and that resulted in their pooling power and resources for the creation of a new political entity. The book is written in accessible language, without technical terms or quotations in Latin, and is heavily illustrated.

NICOLA TERRENATO is the Esther B. Van Deman Collegiate Professor of Roman Studies at the University of Michigan, where he specializes in first-millennium BCE Italy, with particular reference to northern Etruria, early Rome, and the period of the Roman conquest. Since 2007, he has directed the Gabii Project. He is co-editor of *Italy and the West: Comparative Issues in Romanization* (2001), *Articulating Local Cultures: Power and Identity under the Expanding Roman Republic* (2007), *State Formation in Greece and Rome* (2011), *Roman Republican Villas: Architecture, Context, and Ideology* (2012), and *A Mid-Republican House from Gabii* (2016).

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Nicola Terrenato
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Elite Negotiation and Family Agendas

NICOLA TERRENATO
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



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*To my old colleagues in the Department of Classics at the
University of North Carolina*

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Preface

This book was already in the making when my beloved children, who are now teenagers, were far from being born. It started its long, intermittent gestation in the late 1990s at the University of Durham, where a Leverhulme Fellowship had providentially extracted me from the wreck that my academic career in Italy had somehow become. There Martin Millett had invited me to teach some classes of the core undergraduate course in Roman archeology. The idea was to preface the bulk of the course, which dealt with the conquest of the western provinces, with a short block of lectures on the Roman expansion in Italy. Confronted with the unfamiliar task of summarizing in a few hours the very rich material that was endlessly dissected in courses back home, I was forced to look for an entirely different scholarly genre from the one in which I had been operating to that point. I was reminded of the kind of discourse that I had admired in Henry Wright, during a life-changing experience as a visiting graduate student to the university where I now serendipitously teach. In trying to apply it to the Roman world, I was heavily influenced by Martin's use of archeological evidence to produce radically different historical narratives for Britain and Spain. But Italy, with its extensive textual tradition, its hundreds of thousands of inscriptions, had typically only been the subject of syntheses written by ancient historians, even if archeologists like Mario Torelli had begun breaking that monopoly and were moving in innovative directions. It was as if from the very edge of the empire, perched on Hadrian's Wall, I could contemplate the peninsula with a compendious gaze that I had not even thought possible while I was mired every day in its endless archeological detail.

It also happened that, in looking for readings in English that undergraduates could use, I could only find standard text-based historical handbooks arranged in chronological order or site-specific archeological studies. It seemed that there was an opportunity to write a book of a different kind, one that would attempt for central and southern Italy the kind of more interpretive, holistic synthesis that had been developed in other contexts. I therefore put together a synopsis that Cambridge University Press was kind enough to consider, encouraging me to submit more. So during the

ensuing two decades the book project followed me to Chapel Hill and then to Ann Arbor, constantly evolving, in keeping with my changing ideas about the Roman expansion in Italy. It has been reconceived, discussed, abandoned, and picked up again over and over, until the time came to bring it to fruition or drop it for good. In the end I reckoned that it was best to let it come out and see what reception it would get. Before doing that, however, a few words about its aims, premises, and structure are in order.

Perhaps too optimistically, this book attempts to be a number of disparate things at once. At a basic level, it retains the original goal of presenting a combined archeological and historical synthesis of the Roman expansion in central and southern Italy during the fourth and third centuries BCE. It is meant to require little prior knowledge and is aimed, among others, at students and the educated general public. For this reason, it does not take for granted any of the concepts, terms, and processes that are familiar to all classical scholars. It avoids untranslated words and quotations in Latin or Greek and even citations of ancient authors in the standard format.¹ Names of cities and historical characters are given in the most accessible form, rather than the original. While I understand that untranslated words and original names are a convenient form of shorthand for our circumscribed academic community, for other audiences they pose problems. Besides the steep learning curve that students face when confronting these textual practices, their use has had a major impact in separating the study of the classical world from that of the rest of the human past.² Even worse, these conventions have contributed to a discourse of social exclusion that has made it objectively harder for those coming from underprivileged backgrounds to read and to write about Greece and Rome. These hurdles are still in full force today, and they have hampered the progress of our discipline, depriving it of the creative contributions of a broader intellectual and social constituency. Even if the grammar of our discourse has not changed for generations and now appears immutable to us, it can and it should be questioned with fresh eyes in light of the cultural and political circumstances of the present day. In short, this book quixotically attempts to make its subject matter at once more accessible and more productively embedded in the general, global archeological and historical discourse. In the service of this goal, it summarizes much more and in different ways than most other books dealing with this context. For instance, it eschews the

¹ Only references to Livy in the Oxford University Press translation are given, with the traditional reference system in parentheses

² A point discussed in Terrenato 2002; Terrenato 2013

sequential, event-based format that is so commonly used to narrate the early part of the Roman expansion, with its countless wars, colonial foundations, and magistrates, in favor of a hypothesis-driven exposition. In doing this, it borrows most notably from historical anthropology, attempting broad interpretive constructs and thematic overviews.³ I struggled hard to find an existing plane that felt adequate to the kind of argument that I wanted to develop. In the end, I concluded that I would have to define my own, by combining elements of anthropology, archeology, and history. I offer it for consideration as the only option I could find that did justice to the vision of the process that I had developed over the decades.

The other aim of this book is to change our understanding of the very nature of the Roman conquest of central and southern Italy, in addition to reorganizing and retelling its story. In my perception and intention, the reconstruction presented here flies squarely in the face of key assumptions that have stood virtually unchallenged for centuries. Most notably, it gives to non-Roman people powerful agency and decision-making power, way beyond the doomed resistance that they have been at best credited with. Indeed, I envision a grand bargain between elites across the peninsula that would have been the main catalyst of its political unification. Furthermore, I argue that factional networks spanning across cities and ethnic groups were more important than the opposition between political entities such as states and alliances. Finally, I conclude that Rome itself, far from changing drastically the socioeconomic structure of Italy, was itself transformed beyond recognition by the expansion process, which turned it into a federal capital that was shared as a political arena by elites converging on it from across the entire alliance to negotiate their deals about power and integration.

While this approach reacts, in theoretical terms, against nationalist constructs on one hand, and against the mechanical processes of materialism on the other, it does not fall back on traditional, Collingwood-style idealism, centered on great individuals and high culture. Rather, in a nutshell, it strives to break down monolithic views of states and power, making space for clashing factional agency that is driven by cultural constructs.⁴ The emphasis is shifted from political abstractions, like Rome or the Roman alliance, to actual actors in the process, endowed with their own goals and loyalties. Their power relationships can and do change depending on context and over time.⁵ Especially in the case of

³ For instance, the level adopted in White 1991

⁴ Brumfiel and Fox 1994; Yoffee 2005

⁵ Ehrenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995

elites, individual or factional action can trump the monopoly on power and violence that states are supposed to have.⁶ These elites are vertically integrated with their subordinates through tight hegemonic relationships that are however not purely one-sided.⁷ In keeping with a historicized understanding of structuralism, all these agent behaviors are expected to be constrained by cultural norms and mentalities. In the worldview espoused by the present book, historical change is produced by the complex interaction of the mentioned local agencies with global socioeconomic trends.

In analyzing the developments that resulted in the Roman state of 200 BCE, I use interchangeably the terms conquest, expansion, unification, empire-building, and imperialism. No implication of greater Roman agency is meant by that. They are used as neutral placeholders that point to a very complex phenomenon. There seems little to be gained from defining them much further or in making any fine-grained distinction of meaning between them. I could not find a single good, comprehensive word that adequately described the political process as it is reconstructed here. At the same time, I avoided the concept of hegemony, since it seems much more tightly connected to ideas of cultural predominance and hierarchy. The state resulting from the unification is conventionally called the Roman Empire, even if it was a republican system and if non-Romans had a very significant role in it. All dates are intended BCE unless otherwise specified.

It should also be made clear that very little of the evidence presented here is the result of my own work in the field or on the texts. Even at the interpretative level, significant pillars of my argument have been provided by the innovative work of other scholars.⁸ A considerable quantity of new data and new ideas have been recently published by Italian archeologists and historians, but have only in part been taken into account in the global debate. A key approach here is to collate together elements that have tended to stay in separate discourses. I confess, however, to having juxtaposed and combined such material in the service of my own personal vision of the process, which at times deviates substantially from their original intent. In doing this I am conscious of taking a great liberty and a risk. My hope is to broaden and stimulate the debate, even if I do not convince everyone. This is a trope in book introductions but it is literally meant here.

⁶ Oakley 2014

⁷ See Chapter 2; also van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007

⁸ E.g., Torelli's work on local senators or Bradley's on colonies; Torelli 1982b; Bradley 2006

Advancing a very controversial new idea, certain to be met with strong criticism and even outrage, requires a herculean effort of synthesis. One cannot rely on a vast body of allied literature but must necessarily create a whole worldview, which is not based on a single line of evidence but rather on the combination of a wide variety of indicators that have not been recruited for this purpose before. As a result, each of the chapters that follow condenses a much greater amount of information than is customary in our discipline, while at the same time often presenting fundamentally alternative interpretations of it. Doing justice to Syracusan empire-building in eight pages or to Roman colonies in seven is of course an impossible task, and yet one that must be bravely attempted if one wants to present the argument in full within a book of readable length. It also means that the bibliography must be kept to a few essential texts and cannot cover the entire relevant literature. Even so, the number of works cited approaches a thousand. Apologies are offered here to the scholars whose works, even if relevant, have not been included. In short, a whole book could easily have been dedicated to the topic of each of the chapters that follow and this would have been the safest course. But it is precisely in the interaction between them, in the synergy between the disparate lines of evidence, that resides the best hope of being persuasive. If this book is to have a chance of turning a new page in the debate on early Roman imperialism, it has to reconsider the whole question with fresh eyes and without subscribing to existing predominant models or even area-specific syntheses.

The structure of the book is neither chronological nor thematic. Rather each chapter makes a discrete argument that contributes to a comprehensive investigation of early Roman imperialism. Thus Chapter 1 deconstructs the historiography of Roman imperialism to show that there are unquestioned assumptions inherited from centuries ago that still tightly constrain our discourse today. Chapter 2 argues for the existence of long-term socio-political structures that were already in place in the early first millennium BCE and that had a major role in explaining later events. A geographically broader overview is offered in Chapter 3, making the case that early Roman expansion can only be understood within the context of similar processes happening elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The conflicts between Rome and other Italian polities are discussed in Chapter 4, where a typology (rather than a chronology) of wars and diplomatic activities is attempted. Chapter 5 breaks down the same processes to the level of individual elite families and factions, illustrating how Roman and non-Roman aristocrats came together in ways that shaped political and military events. The direct

aftermath of the unification is the subject of Chapter 6. In it, high-impact models for the effect of the Roman conquest are challenged area by area, arguing for a much less disruptive picture of these consequences. After all these elements are in place, it becomes possible to present in Chapter 7 a synthetic vision of how central and southern Italians collaborated to put together a territorial empire in the fourth and third centuries BCE.

Acknowledgments

A first draft of the entire book was written in 2000–2001 when, thanks to the kindness of Anthony Snodgrass and Henry Hurst, I presented a series of six lectures at the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge University. That transformative experience was supported by the British Arts and Humanities Research Board, by a Churchill College Fellowship, and by a UNC–Chapel Hill nurturance leave. The feedback received at the time was very important in the progress of the research. I kept working on the manuscript during sabbatical semesters granted by UNC–Chapel Hill and by the University of Michigan, while holding two Michigan Humanities Awards, as well as a Senior Fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study. All these wonderful institutions are gratefully thanked for their support. Countless friends and colleagues have been very patient, generous in advice, and lenient in criticism, even when they disagreed with my interpretations. Mario Torelli and David Potter read the whole manuscript and provided invaluable help. The same goes for the anonymous readers of the manuscript. At least the names of Ed Bispham, Peter van Dommelen, Donald Haggis, Martin Millett, Marcello Mogetta, Chris Smith, Anthony Snodgrass, and Paolo Squatriti must be mentioned. Vincenzo Salmeri, Ed Bispham, Andrea Augenti, and Andy Goldman invited me to give talks about the book at Pisa, Oxford, Bologna, and Gonzaga, where the audiences offered precious feedback. Parrish Wright and Dan Diffendale helped me with figures and revisions; Dan is also the author of many of the drawings and photos; his art and critical eye have been invaluable. Fabio Colivicchi, J. Troy Samuels, Marcello Mogetta, Sheira Cohen, Mario Torelli, Jeremy Armstrong, Tony Kaufman, and Alex Hoer kindly shared unpublished information with me or gave me permission to reprint their materials. The late Jessica Kuper at Cambridge University Press kindly encouraged me to write this book, not suspecting that I would deliver it long after she was gone. Michael Sharp took over and helped me finish the project. Mark Scott copy-edited the text. Heartfelt thanks to all.

Many people around me had to put up with my working on what for two decades was ominously known simply as “the book.” This involved odd hours, physical and mental absences, cranky and despondent moods,

overexcited and repetitive descriptions of the main arguments. First and foremost, thanks for the patience to my children Giuliana Motta and Carlo Terrenato, then to Laura Motta, to my parents Marina Frontali and Luciano Terrenato, to my sister Francesca Terrenato and her partner Massimo Brizzi, to my friends Andrea Augenti, Marta Ciofi, Keri Bruggink, Roberto Gianani, Stefano Veneziano, and Claudio Parrinello. They all encouraged, coaxed, and supported me, made me laugh, read chapters, brought me snacks, and talked me off the ledge many times. I'm finally done guys!

Finally, and most importantly, this book is dedicated with humble gratitude to my old colleagues in the Department of Classics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Twenty years ago, they all welcomed me with warmth and kindness, giving me a stable home and a sense of professional self-worth. I want to remember especially George Houston, Jerzy Linderski, Cecil Wooten, Ken Sams, Mike Weiss, Kenneth Reckford, and Philip Stadter. At a time when no one else would, these fine folks took a big chance on an outsider disowned by his dissertation advisor, with a weird CV, unconventional research ideas, and a very wobbly understanding of US academia. Without their foresight, fairness, and unwavering support, I doubt that much would have become of me. I had promised them this very book for my tenure review, and they kept me even if I was nowhere near finishing it. I finally make good on that promise. Better late than never, I hope, and thanks again for everything.