

Luuk De Ligt, *Peasants, Citizens and Soldiers: Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225 BC - AD 100*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xvi, 391. ISBN 9781107013186. £ 65.00; \$110.00

Luuk De Ligt's book, which looks at the population history of Roman Italy in the crucial period spanning from the 3rd century BC to the end of the 1st century AD, is an important volume that will undoubtedly generate further debate and will also become a must-read work for ancient historians, whether directly interested in ancient demography or, more generally, in the social or economic history of Republican Italy. Any historian interested in pre-modern Italy will find much of interest in DL.'s lucid discussion, in his solid methodology, and in the fresh way in which he looks and evaluates the evidence.

Determining population's size and its structure is key element in the study of any society, in order to answer questions that range from the political, social and cultural spheres to the assessment of the economy. Unfortunately, ancient historians face a serious problem, since the data available on population are too fragmentary and extremely scattered in time and place.¹ In the case of the Roman world, the demographic debate has a long scholarly tradition, and has resulted in two opposing views, known as the 'low count' and the 'high count'.² Such debate is fundamentally centered on how to interpret two pieces of ancient evidence: the figures given by Polybius (2.24) for the Roman and allied military strength in 225 BC (and consequently on how to extrapolate from these sums a figure for the overall population) and the figure for the census carried out in the Italian peninsula in 28 BC, as reported in Augustus' *Res Gestae* (8.2: 4,063,000 *capita civium* were registered).

The defenders of the low count believe that, unlike earlier censuses, which counted only the free adult male population in order to register those able to serve in the army, the Augustan census figures included all men, women, and children of citizen status. This interpretation implies that in the period 225 to 28 BC the free population of Italy had contracted, declining from an estimated c.4.5 million to just over 4 million, while the number of slaves had grown steadily.³

¹ Regardless of attempts to estimate the GDP for the ancient world (e.g., P. Temin, "Estimating the GDP of the Early Roman Empire", in E. Lo Cascio (ed.), *Innovazione tecnica e progresso economico nel mondo romano* (Bari 2006) 31–54), there is too much uncertainty about population data to make such estimates meaningful; see discussion in A. K. Bowman and A. I. Wilson, "Quantifying the Roman Economy: Integration, Growth and Decline?" in Bowman and Wilson (eds.), *Quantifying the Roman Economy* (Oxford 2009) 3–84.

² The low count position rests on the work of J. Beloch, *Die Bevölkerung der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Leipzig 1886) and P. Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225 BC – AD 14* (Oxford 1971), which envisaged in the last two centuries of the Republic a steady decline of the Italian free population, particularly rural, with an increase of the slave population, both phenomena caused and sustained by Rome's great military expansion. For Brunt, peninsular Italy in 225 BC had c.4.5 million free inhabitants. The high count was first proposed by T. Frank in "Roman census statistics from 225 to 28 BC" *CPh* 19 (1924) 329–41.

³ Brunt estimated that in 225 BC the number of slaves was c.500,000 whereas in 28 BC there were c.3 million slaves; K. Hopkins (*Conquerors and Slaves*. Cambridge 1978) was more cautious with slave numbers and estimated c.2 million slaves for Italy in 28 BC.

The high-count position has been further developed and defended in recent years most notably by Elio Lo Cascio. According to this scholar, on the eve of the Second Punic War Italy had a population of 6 to 8 million. The 28 BC census is interpreted as registering only adult male citizens, and therefore the high-counters estimate a total citizen population of Italy in 28 BC of *c.* 13.5 million, with a slave population between 1.5 and 3.5 million, thus positing a considerable demographic growth in the last 200 years of the Republic.

The importance of this debate and which scenario is preferred is not limited to demographic studies, but is wide-ranging, since it touches central historical problems. The implications of the low versus the high-count scenario affect how one understands central aspects of Rome's Republican history: the Gracchan reforms, military recruitment, the gradual proletarianization of the army, the extent of displacement of small and medium free farmers to the advantage of large estates operated by slave labor, the migration to Rome of these dispossessed farmers with the subsequent social and political problems that marked the late Republican period, and so forth.

DL in this book, which stems from a five-year large research project, takes up all these aspects of the debate and examines strengths and weaknesses of the two interpretative models in order to determine which demographic scenario is more likely to be, from an historical point of view, more accurate. The book comprises six chapters and four appendices. Ch. 1 clearly presents the available literary and archaeological evidence, the theories and models used in Roman population history and discusses new approaches put forward by scholars in recent years, such as estimates for carrying capacity of the land and climate change. The other chapters are organized thematically. Ch. 2 focuses on Polybius' figures and the size of the Italian population right before the Hannibalic War; the census procedures and figures are treated in Ch. 3; the impact of the Hannibalic war, the background to the Gracchan reforms, proletarianization of the legions and emigration from Italy are covered in Ch. 4; Ch. 5 discusses the Augustan census and Italy's urban network; the archaeological evidence from field surveys and how to best use these data to reconstruct the demographic developments in the Italian countryside is treated in the last chapter, Ch. 6.

Although DL is in favor of the low count, he presents the weak points of both theories very clearly. He focuses on the "plausibility of the assumptions that must be made in order to accommodate various categories of literary and archaeological 'evidence' within the frameworks of competing demographic reconstructions" (p. 284) and this is a great strength of the volume. While the treatment of any type of evidence is always rigorous and the discussion very clear, DL is at his best when closely analyzing literary sources. His reading reveals sharp new insights, particularly in the case of Polybius' crucial passages (pp. 52–72).

The main points that DL stresses as weaknesses of the high count-model concern the fact that a posited population of 15–16 million is at odds with the much lower population levels reconstructed for the 16th and 17th centuries and that the population growth rate that the high count implies would be out of the ordinary for a society

experiencing the economic and demographic impact of a series of prolonged and destructive wars. DL proposes a revised low-count model which envisages a slow population growth until the end of the first century AD. This is a very important proposition, since his revised model seems to best account for the archaeological data on rural site numbers, which generally tend to increase between 30 BC and AD 100.⁴

An important contribution to the field comes from the systematic analysis of data from walled areas of Italian towns in order to reconstruct urban networks, population densities, and urbanization rates.⁵ In particular, the discussion of the urban network of Cisalpine Gaul in 28 BC is crucial, since the high counters believe that Cisalpine Gaul had at least 40% of the Italian population and towns matching in size those of the late medieval period, whereas the low counter assign to this region between 25 and 30 per cent of a smaller Italian population (pp. 205–28). DL argues convincingly that in order to fit in Cisalpine Gaul the 6 million people posited by the high count one needs either to postulate that its towns had a very high population density, two or three times higher than densities for their counterparts in Renaissance Italy or that the region was only very lightly urbanized (p. 227); in the light of this, the low count appears a better fit for the evidence on towns in this region.

The book has been well-produced; the present reviewer noted only very few typos/mistakes: on p. 27, note 95 Daniele Foraboschi is referred to as she, when in fact he is a man; p. 71 has Luciania instead than Lucania; on p. 92, note 61 the correct bibliographical reference is to Daly 2002 and not Dalby.

To conclude, this book is a remarkable work of scholarship; DL offers a sophisticated and insightful analysis of the evidence. There is much that is thought provoking in this study and certainly it will kindle further debate. Regardless of whether one agrees with DL's revised low-count model, this book will force high and low counters to face and try to solve the weaknesses in their theoretical models. It also offers an excellent overview of the literature and evidence on the topic and as such will be a fundamental reading for scholars and advanced students alike.

ANNALISA MARZANO
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⁴ DL is, however, rightly very clear about the great methodological difficulties posed by using trends in rural site numbers for straightforward demographic extrapolations (pp. 249–54).

⁵ Beloch had already in 1886 estimated the population of Roman Italy by calculating population from the walled areas of Roman towns. Despite the various problems inherent in extrapolating population from city areas (e.g. extra-mural habitations, non-built up space inside towns, varying population densities according to type of dwellings) this is still the best available method for the ancient world. See various contributions in A. K. Bowman and A. I. Wilson (eds.), *Settlement, Urbanization, and Population* (Oxford 2011), particularly Wilson's chapter, and, for the reconstruction of the population of Classical Greece from urban density, M. Hansen, *The Shotgun Method: The Demography of the Ancient Greek City-State Culture* (Columbia and London 2006).