

Nicola Terrenato, *The Early Roman Expansion into Italy. Elite Negotiation and Family Agendas*. Cambridge University Press. 2019. Pp. xx, 327. 978-1-108-42267-3.

The history of early Rome is as fascinating as it is frustrating due to the challenging body of evidence. Having braved this scholarly minefield in numerous thought-provoking studies, Nicola Terrenato's new book, aimed at a broad readership, now amalgamates these into a refreshingly alternative view on Roman expansion.

Pointing out the Romano-centric bias of the literary sources, Terrenato instead draws on the archaeological evidence to examine the wider context of Roman expansion. He thus argues that wider Mediterranean changes induced Italian elites to cooperate across political lines, which led many to voluntarily join Rome for their own personal and family reasons in a "grand-bargain" that formed the bedrock of the conquest of Italy. Although the focus of the book is on archaeology, the dispensation with references to any literary sources except for Livy is unfortunate. One would wish for more detail and discussion of the bold conjectures on elite policies that are ultimately based on the literary evidence.

The book is organized into six chapters with a considerable bibliography (273–321). The first chapter provides a succinct overview of the main positions and debates on Roman imperialism (1–30). Modern and especially early German scholarship's fascination with the ancient authors' narrative of Roman military expansion is held responsible for the emergence of a self-sustaining "hagiography of conquest" (p. 6) that marginalizes the archaeological and epigraphical evidence as well as the non-Roman perspective.

The second chapter (31–72) describes the emergence of urban centers, intensification of trade and communications, and the rise of powerful lineage groups throughout the Mediterranean in the first half of the first millennium BC. These developments benefitted landed elites in particular, who were able to utilize the new urban spaces and resources for their own interests with little interference from the "significant sector of the population that remained outside the traditional social system" (71).

Chapter 3 (73–108) outlines how these changes stimulated the rise of larger territorial states in the fifth century through synoptic analyses of Syracuse, Carthage, Massilia, and Tarquinia. Facing both opportunities and challenges to the established order, Terrenato assumes that "elites in widely different contexts must have somehow reckoned that the situation had matured for the foundation of new territorial empires" (103).

Chapter 4 (109–154) focuses on Central Italy during the "Heterogeneous Conquest" of the fourth century. It complements the Romano-centric literary narrative with the perspectives of Veii, Caere, Capua, the Samnites, and Arretium. In the case of Veii, T. argues that the "unique spatial and historical relationship between this state and Rome" (118) led to a fusion of both communities and that Veii's urban

death should not be taken as the norm. Instead, friendly takeovers were more common, where elite families actively cooperated with their Roman peers even against internal resistance. Glimpses of such competing local factions exist for Capua, where the *deditio* was followed by a power struggle which the pro-Roman faction eventually won, thereby securing significant privileges. The argument is less persuasive in regard to the Samnite Wars: acknowledging that “a violence-heavy scenario of this kind is in some ways in line with the prevailing models about Roman imperialism” (p. 141), Terrenato prefers to see the Samnites as an instructive case “revealing the structural limitations that Romans faced in their expansion” (142–3) identified as the absence of urban networks as well as the “smaller significance of agriculture, and especially commerce and manufacturing” (138–139).¹

Terrenato thus draws a picture of the conquest where local conditions and elite interaction take precedence over military conquest. The appeal of joining Rome is attributed to its guarantee of “social stability, local autonomy, opportunities for stronger long-distance influence, and a relatively fair system for participating in imperial decision making” (153), but it is also stressed that the many individual agendas caused a fragile cohesion of the Roman “territorial empire” (130–133).

Chapter 5 (155–193) examines several family biographies and their pursuit of family agendas through “horizontal interstate linkages” which are presented as a crucial component and at times even determinant of state-level politics (158). Consequently, central communal institutions like the army, the senate, and elections in the assemblies are supposed to have been controlled by factional groups through personal loyalties and patronage networks. This thesis is exemplified by the relation of the *gens Plautia* with Privernum and supplemented by the family biographies of the Fulvii, Magii, Cilnii, and Caecinae. Friction regarding these families had less to do with any ‘Struggle of the Orders’ but rather reflected the struggle over access to the “political game” in Rome.

The subsequent chapter 6 (194–248) on “The consequences of the Expansion” reevaluates well-known phenomena of the Roman conquest according to the previous line of argumentation. The negative impact of Roman warfare and plundering on local communities is compared to a temporary intensification in the circulation of mobile surplus between elites (201). Terrenato assumes that at least some local elites would have quickly grasped at the new economic opportunities offered by Rome thereby offsetting the disruptive effects of the initial conflict.² Viewed from this perspective, the Roman conquest did not bring revolutionary change but rather a reconfiguration in which colonization, roadbuilding and even grants of citizenship provided elites with tools to expand their influence.

¹ The case of the Otacilii from Maleventum/Beneventum and their close relation with the Fabii cautions against dismissing the Samnites as a case apart; see Münzer 1920, 70–78.

² The impact of military operations on communities and politics is probably underrated by T., see Armstrong 2016 and also Lentzsch 2019 on Roman defeats.

The conclusion (249–272) concisely summarizes the book’s central argument that the conquest of Italy had been “the result of a grand bargain negotiated between some specific actors across ethnic and state lines” (250). As to the question why Rome became the hub of an expansionist network of Italian aristocrats, Terrenato concludes that its location at the center of a large urban cluster was strategically and economically advantageous and also established a “propensity for elite permeability” from early on.

Overall, the book greatly contributes to our understanding of the evolution and fabric of the Roman alliance network and also demonstrates the value of the local Italian perspectives beyond what has already been done in regard to elite intermarriage and interaction.³ That said, the book also raises serious questions about its absolutization of elite cooperation to a point where the Imperium Romanum is replaced by an oligarchic federation of Italian elites. Although Terrenato frequently points out that the power balance between elites on a local and regional level was complicated and under constant negotiation, these nuances are at times lost during the bold but speculative conjectures regarding backroom deals between different lineages, families, or factions.

The idea of largely dominant elites sits uncomfortably with the widely held notion that central political institutions, the *cursus honorum*, and a broader political participation were all achieved in tandem with Roman expansion in the second half of the fourth century.⁴ Elite machinations might have been abundant, but it is questionable if the citizen body was politically as passive and bound by patronage networks as Terrenato supposes.⁵ Roman citizens in particular displayed a remarkable capacity for resisting elite encroachment both on the individual and collective level in form of the *pater familias* and the *tribuni plebis*.⁶

Another issue is the permeability between Roman and Italian elites, whom Terrenato sees as social peers. A fusion of communities certainly did take place in cases like Veii and Capua, but it is debatable if this was the norm or even widespread in relation to the overall numbers.⁷ Some Italians, of course, managed to join the Roman elite, and interaction was intense, but the asymmetries inherent in these processes have to be taken into account. A large proportion of offices and priesthoods, including the consulship, was reserved to long established Roman families, the patricians. Newcomers therefore had to compete for the plebeian positions and would

³ Eckstein 2006, Fronda 2010, Beck 2015.

⁴ Beck 2005, Linke 2010, Hölkeskamp 2011. Large-scale infrastructure projects that largely benefitted Roman citizens also suggest some central level of planning and authority, see Bernard 2018, esp. 118–158.

⁵ Hölkeskamp 2010, 35–41, Yakobson 2010.

⁶ This issue is briefly addressed in Chapter 1 (pp. 61–63) where Terrenato acknowledges considerable friction between the emerging state and the traditional power structures of the lineages.

⁷ Tan 2019 proposes that enfranchisement mainly served to secure the extraction of money and manpower.

have depended on their Roman ‘friends’ for gaining citizenship and political support. Ultimately, the question of who could join was largely decided by the established elites in Rome, and this asymmetry will only have increased with the rapid expansion of the *ager Romanus* following the Latin War and the resultant concentration of prestige and resources in Rome.⁸

This criticism should not deflect the reader from the great merits of the present study. Terrenato’s arguments on Romano-Italian elite interactions reveal the fabric and foundation of Roman Italy beyond the purely military and provide a forceful reminder to figure Italian agency and local conditions into our equations.

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⁸ Beck 2005, 147–154 demonstrates that newcomers among the plebeian consuls fell from 38% between 290 and 265 BC to around 25% after 265 BC. This is still a remarkably open elite, but nevertheless one dominated by Roman families.

Yakobson, A. (2010), 'Traditional political culture and the people's role in the Roman Republic', *Historia* 59, 282-302.