The demography of Roman state formation and culture change in Italy
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In my contribution, I focus on two major issues: the demographic dimension of the extension of the political and military features of the Roman system of rule in Italy from the fourth to the first centuries BC, and the role of human mobility in concurrent integrative processes.

The story of Roman expansion and rule in Italy is the story of a city-state that successfully established an imperial-hegemonic system of dominance whilst preserving its original ‘micro-state’ political institutions. These parallel developments created challenges that we can also observe in other ancient imperial city-states, most notably classical Athens and Carthage, and resulted in a common solution: the gradual emergence of a bifurcated institutional structure that maintained city-state institutions at the core and established nominally conjoined but de facto largely separate military institutions of control in the growing periphery. This process can readily be traced in the case of Rome. In the first phase, up to about 400 BCE, the city-state itself grew up to a point where participatory institutions could still work in practice (for a maximum of 21 urban and rural tribus), and a total population of fewer than 100,000 people (or fewer than 35,000 adult men). Rapid expansion between 400 and 270 BCE brought dramatic changes. Although only vague estimates are feasible, it appears that the number of citizens more than quadrupled (via mass enfranchisement) between 350 and 290 BCE while the number of allies quintupled from around 200,000 to about one million. From 290 and 225 BCE, the citizenry grew by another 50% while the number of allies more than doubled. In brief, within 150 years Rome moved from a city-state with a core of 100-150,000 citizens and a penumbra of some 200,000 allies to a multi-layered system comprised of a core of up to 300,000 citizens, an inner periphery of another 600,000 citizens, and an outer periphery of over 2 million Italian allies. The proportion of citizens who resided in the core (i.e., the city and the ‘suburban’ tribus) fell from 100% in 350 BC to 40% in 300 BC and 25% by 250 BC. At the same time, the basic political institutions remained essentially unchanged. These bare numbers make it perfectly clear that from a very early stage onwards (viz., the late fourth century BC), the Roman state as a whole could not have featured a participatory political system that deserves this label. Against this background, the debate over the nature of late Republican politics (i.e., more or less ‘democracy’) seems (to me at least) completely moot.

Roman citizens participated in two ways: politically (in popular assemblies) and militarily (in conscript armies). The most basic comparisons leave no doubt that the scope of actual military participation far exceeded even the theoretical maximum extent of political participation. A survey of military service rates from 350 to 50 BC shows that for adult male Roman citizens, mobilization levels commonly oscillated between 10 and 15%, and peaked at 25-30% on three occasions (in the mid-fourth century BC, the Second Punic War, and the Social War). During the same period, notional maximum political participation rates fell from perhaps 2/3 to 2% (for assemblies on the Campus Martius), and from c.10% to c.1% (for assemblies in the comitium/forum zone). The corresponding decline within the city-state core was somewhat less pronounced, from 2/3
to 1/8 and from 10% to 5%, respectively. (I note in passing that the debate about the number of Roman citizens in the Republican period, and by extension the size of the population of Italy overall, has little bearing on any of these estimates. My calculations are based on the ‘low’ estimate of citizen numbers championed by Beloch and Brunt. If the ‘high’ count that has recently been revived by Lo Cascio were adopted instead, the share of citizens outside the core would increase even further, thereby exacerbating the already dramatic extent of de facto disfranchisement.)

Italian allies only participated in the military sphere. De facto, however, conditions were the same for a growing majority of (peripheral) Roman citizens. (This suggests that the actual spread of suffrage is irrelevant for our understanding of Roman politics.) From the early third century BC onwards, most Roman citizens, and all allies, were tied to Rome primarily or almost exclusively through military service. This situation is reflected in the military nature of political offices that dealt with the citizenry of the inner periphery and the allies of the outer periphery (such as consuls, consular quaestors, and military tribunes), as opposed to the more varied and more genuinely governmental offices of the city-state core.

My second point concerns population movements within Italy. Whilst widely considered to be of great significance, they have never been studied in a systematic fashion. In a two-part article forthcoming in JRS 2004 and 2005, I provide the first comprehensive model of human mobility in Roman Italy from the late fourth century BC to the early Principate. For the purposes of this gathering, I merely want to summarize the most pertinent results. I argue that state-sponsored re-settlement programs dramatically increased overall levels of mobility on three occasions (during the Italian wars in the late fourth and early third centuries BC, in the aftermath of the Second Punic War in the early second century BC, and in the period of constitutional transition from the 80s to the 10s BC), and that in the last two centuries BC, colonization programs and urban growth in Italy required the permanent relocation of approximately two to two-and-a-half million adults. I conclude that these movements were likely to have been instrumental in Roman state formation and overall culture change: high levels of human mobility were both a direct function of empire-building and a defining feature of Roman identity. (I also argue that during the last two centuries BC, between two and four million slaves were imported to Italy.)

My parametric calculation suggest that the mean annual rate of relocations within Italy for adult male Roman citizens stood at a roughly 0.5%, for an overall lifetime chance of relocation of about 15-20%. These population movements must have been of paramount importance in the process of linguistic and cultural homogeneization (commonly referred to as ‘Romanization’) that we observe in late Republican and Augustan Italy. In terms of ultimate causation, this eventual outcome was a function of imperial expansion and exploitation. As far as proximate causes are concerned, I conclude that demographic change (i.e., migration) rather than institutional change (e.g., political alliances or enfranchisement) was the principal determinant of gradual Italian integration.