

REVIEW–DISCUSSION  
A NEW EDINBURGH HISTORY  
VOLUME ON EARLY ROME

Guy Bradley, *Early Rome to 290 BC: The Beginning of the City and the Rise of the Republic*. The Edinburgh History of Ancient Rome. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. xx + 412, 5 maps, 67 figs, 16 tables. Hardcover, £120.00/\$160.00. ISBN 978-0-7486-2109-5. Paperback, £29.99/\$39.95. ISBN 978-0-7486-2110-1.

The more recent overall presentations of early Roman history prior to the First Punic War clearly demonstrate the degree to which the scholarship of recent decades has taken new directions. Thus, archaeological findings play a considerable role these days. In addition, Rome now tends to be viewed more in pan-Italic contexts. This opens the way to consult material evidence from other cities and regions when investigating the history of Rome itself—an aspect that is all the more convenient since possibilities for excavating remains from the early city on the Tiber bank are very limited. Regarding the theoretical dimension, new concepts are being considered, concerning, e.g., comparison, networks, and state formation. And reference to migration of people, myths, and practices has virtually become the master key for explaining historical processes. What formerly seemed fixed developments such as colonisation as well as institutions like, e.g., the Roman magistracies are now seen as highly dynamic phenomena characterised by experiments and variabilities.

The starting point is marked by Tim Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome* (London and New York, 1995). Unlike most other volumes in the Routledge series, this essential, often cutting-edge and unique synthesis has never been revised. In many respects, Gary Forsythe's *A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War* (Berkeley, 2005) is a reply to Cornell. Although Forsythe is rather sceptical of the utility of literary and archaeological evidence for the reconstruction of early Roman history, he nevertheless attempts a master narrative. Given the complete lack of illustrations and strong focus on methodological considerations, this book has probably had only a limited impact.<sup>1</sup> The scholarly field was complemented by Kathryn Lomas' volume

<sup>1</sup> Cf. reviews by K.-J. Hölkeskamp, *Gnomon* 79 (2007) 50–6 and M. Fronza, *Aestimatio* 2 (2005) 95–104.

*The Rise of Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017) which aims at a wider audience. Paying great attention to the archaeological material, the book explains the most crucial developments in their pan-Italic contexts before it continues to narrow them down towards the history of Rome. Like Lomas' account, the volume by Guy Bradley, which shall be discussed here, is published as part of a series, although this one clearly aims at an academic audience.

In textbook fashion, the author, therefore, begins with an overview of 'Sources and Approaches' (1–34).<sup>2</sup> Here he considers it outdated to distinguish 'optimistic' from 'sceptical' approaches to the source material which, although abundant, is most questionable as to its reliability. And yet he tends to view the 'documents' presented by Livy and other authors as essentially authentic (cf. 8–9 for a compilation), arguing that already at an early date, priests and oral tradition had erected a chronological framework and that Rome was a sufficiently 'modern' city by the sixth century that a certain form of record-keeping is to be assumed.<sup>3</sup> The note, however, that 'our sources tend to underestimate the change that Rome underwent during the Republic' (29) is quite instructive. Regarding hermeneutics, it is crucial to note that this book 'is more concerned with the coherency of the broader picture than with establishing the historicity of each individual piece of evidence' (33). Bradley also professes the aforementioned contextualising approach, with which he hopes to close many a gap; and despite some possible disadvantages, he is especially convinced of its overall utility for the analysis of economy and society. Optimistic heuristics and the talk about mobility, networks, and transfer mutually support each other.

To be fair, Bradley repeatedly acknowledges that the source material is insufficient and hard to interpret. Yet when facing critical problems, he regularly opts for heuristic confidence ('increasingly good evidence', 69); for Greek authors having a sound understanding of Roman affairs already early on (e.g., 88); for early dating, e.g., the Servian centuriate system and a wall completely encircling the city by the sixth century; for an early Roman greatness ('Grande Roma dei Tarquini', 191; 'a powerful and vibrant Mediterranean city', 182), etc. Occasionally, he goes quite far in this: even though only historiographical reports and no archaeological evidence whatsoever indicate a Circus Maximus in the regal period, 'nevertheless, while certainty is mostly elusive, scholars are increasingly inclined to accept such notices' (183), all the more if these can be related to archaic institutions. All of this is certainly acceptable. But in my opinion, the author refrains from a

<sup>2</sup> A slight error: Cicero's *De re publica* is dated to the 40s (23), although it actually is from the 50s.

<sup>3</sup> For a much more sceptical view, see J. Rüpke, 'Livius, Priesternamen und die *Annales maximi*', *Klio* 74 (1993) 155–79; id., 'Fasti: Quellen oder Produkte römischer Geschichtsschreibung?', *Klio* 77 (1995) 184–202.

fundamental self-regulating reflection. Of course, any reasonably consistent reconstruction of early Roman history with a clear perspective will tend towards an optimistic and maximalistic approach to the sources. On the other hand, distrust—of allegedly ancient data, documents, and oral tradition as well as of the rather fanciful interpretations of the limited and ambiguous archaeological findings proposed by Andrea Carandini and his students—would probably lead not to a short book confining itself to scarce but somewhat corroborated evidence, but rather to no book at all.<sup>4</sup> Dissent, thus, seems necessarily asymmetric.

Already in the second chapter ‘Early Italy, from the Bronze Age to the Classical Era’ (35–80), Bradley proposes an early date for the first signs of ethnic formation: ‘the distribution networks evident from mapping certain categories of artefact must relate to regional grouping, known from the Iron Age onwards and attested in later written sources’ (39). But he is sceptical of the idea that state formation in the steadily growing and consolidating settlements was preceded by clans grouping around a leader. With good reason, however, he rejects the centre-periphery model which claims that it had been the Greeks who initiated a modernisation of the Etruscan world. Rather, it would seem obvious ‘that the first Greek traders and settlers in central Italy encountered sophisticated societies with well-organised economies’ (51). The so-called Orientalising period witnessed both an emerging self-aware status elite and also a strong Near Eastern presence in central Italy (55). Referring to his own research, and along with the consensus of scholarship, Bradley further points out that the Italic elites ‘were for the most part highly mobile, fluid, and permeable to outsiders’ (57), and that Mediterranean networks were of considerable importance for Rome’s development (78). Fundamental processes of the era are explained in detail, with special attention paid to the adoption of the alphabet and urbanisation. Bradley is convinced that elites were increasingly orientated towards the public sphere and even that there was a growing control of the political community over its citizens, as he infers from the observation that the graves in Caere and Volsinii ‘are increasingly regularised and organised into rectilinear streets’ (69). But such a conclusion seems premature to me. Certainly at this time aristocratic practices like competition and athleticism, banqueting and celebration emerged, and together with the corresponding iconography and artefacts they indeed indicate ‘common values shared by the elites of this period’ (69). But this was first and foremost a process of homogenisation that allowed for competition (among the members of the aristocracy) and for

<sup>4</sup> Still worth reading in this regard is J. Bleicken, *Geschichte der Römischen Republik*<sup>5</sup> (Munich, 1999) 105–15, esp. 108–10; for approaches to excavation findings, cf. F. Kolb, ‘URBS ROMA: Die Geschichte einer Stadt im Spiegel altertumswissenschaftlicher Methodendiskussion und nationaler Forschungstraditionen’, *Historische Zeitschrift* 312 (2021) 105–30.

demonstrating the collective rule of the elites. And yet, the Etruscans were only able to integrate these into the political community at a rather late date and even then only to a limited degree—a shortcoming that considerably contributed to their defeat by the Romans, who by the fourth century at the latest took their approach—by no means a natural, obvious one—towards forming the ruling aristocracy and committing it to the public interest.

Concerning the ‘Myths and Legends of the Formation of Rome’ (Ch. 3, 81–102), Bradley emphasises the extraordinary variety of narratives concerning the foundation, which certainly did not always follow from political or religious motivations. The stories about Hercules, Evander, Odysseus, and other visitors to Italy were not exclusively ‘Greek’ but more broadly ‘Mediterranean’ (83); they indicate that central Italy and Rome attracted widespread attention early on and were involved in the shared universe of the Mediterranean mythological world. The same holds true for the figure of Aeneas. Artefacts like the Nestor cup as well as the presence of Euboean potters in Veii lead Bradley to infer a ‘wide interchange of shared technology and artisans ..., active merchants, migration and intense interchange of the eighth century BC onwards providing a fertile environment along the Tyrrhenian seaboard’ (88). This constant flow was reflected in the mixed origins of Rome, and was also inscribed into the very topography of the city. Of course, Bradley considers the foundation myth and again recognises an ‘amalgam of different elements’ (99) therein, followed by a rather brief discussion of the—relatively late—foundation date.

Probably for the sake of clarity, Bradley covers the regal period separately from the—of course chronologically overlapping—process of Rome becoming a city (see below). The former chapter (‘Kingship’, 102–37) presents a good summary of the state of discussion. Thus, it is certainly correct to present Romulus as an amalgam of Roman identity markers. By contrast, the notion that ‘the origin of the tribes seems to have local Latin, central Italian and broader Mediterranean elements’ (109) appears somewhat weak. Here, as in a number of other instances, formulas such as ‘the intense interaction on many different levels that contributed to the emergence of Rome’ (ibid.) merely serve to superficially cover a *non liquet* that is due to the source material. Overall, however, Bradley maintains a reasonable middle course, especially when it comes to the later kings from Tarquinius Priscus onwards. He skilfully presents the tale of Demaratus; the parallel Etruscan tradition of Mastarna, Ocresia, and the brothers Vibenna; the plausible model of ‘independent warrior-adventurers’ (124) as well as the parallels between Servius Tullius and Tarquinius Superbus on the one hand, and the Greek tyrants of the sixth century on the other hand, who themselves tried to establish dynasties of their own. As mentioned, Bradley dates the so-called Servian centuriate system to the regal period. The date probably is a much more contentious issue than its purpose: the census allowed for a periodic reconstitution of the body of

citizens, an uncomplicated integration of recent arrivals, and thus for an increase in military resources (130ff.). This chapter concludes with ‘The Republican Revolution’ (131–7). Here, Bradley, like many before him, infers from institutions such as the *interrex* and the *rex sacrorum*, as well as from data outside of the so-called annalistic sources, that the transition from monarchy to republic probably came about from an ‘unstable situation in the sixth century’, more gradually than the canonical tradition would have it. However, like Cornell, the author considers the *fasti* reliable overall, even for the earliest times. Consequently, he places the dual consulship already shortly before 500 BC, clearly without taking into consideration that such a complex model of leadership would not have simply fallen from the sky: neither a political rationale nor Greek or Italic models can be brought forward for such a structure (the ancient Spartan dual kingship does not seriously come into the discussion here). Quite significantly, the concept of collegiality is not addressed anywhere in this book.

But more important than the number of the annual chief magistrates, which has been debated since the nineteenth century and which was probably uncertain until 367,<sup>5</sup> is the question of their actual competencies—or, in other words, how well developed Roman statehood was around 500 or 400. This problem can only be solved with a view to the wider contexts of urban, institutional, and civic developments. The first of these is covered in the longest chapter on the settlements after the Late Bronze Age (Ch. 5: ‘Urbanism and City Foundation’, 138–92). The author leaves open the question whether it is appropriate to speak of a proto-urban phase for the eighth century, though he seems to lean towards Carandini’s theses on the Palatine wall and the *Domus Regia*. The richly illustrated chapter focuses especially on the considerable efforts that went into the ‘great building projects of 650–480 BC’: the filling of the Forum, the first great temple on the Forum Boarium, the temple of the Capitoline triad; also, of course, the erection of the city walls extending over eleven kilometres, and infrastructure projects including, e.g., the drainage of the Forum valley and the *Pons Sublicius*. The prevailing tendency towards early datings, which is particularly recognisable in the case of the so-called Servian wall (174–82), has already been mentioned. Somewhat unfortunately, the reader at this point is not yet informed about the economic, demographic, and socio-political conditions and possibilities, which are only treated in the following chapter. A look at the temple of the Capitoline triad at least implicitly

<sup>5</sup> Here and elsewhere it becomes evident that the line of German scholarship from Th. Mommsen and W. Ihne through K.-J. Beloch and up to J. Bleicken today is virtually unnoticed. The same goes for works like F. Di Martino’s *Storia della Costituzione Romana*. Even an important volume like W. Eder, ed., *Staat und Staatlichkeit in der frühen römischen Republik*, (Stuttgart, 1990) is not listed in the otherwise considerable Bibliography (370–99).

demonstrates that this attempt by the Tarquins to rival comparable mega-projects in Greek cities remained an isolated experiment; the ‘temple is linked to the person of the king, and would seem to express kingly pretensions of unimaginable grandeur’ (173).<sup>6</sup> In any case, the temple was hardly ‘also a product of the Roman community’, as Bradley assumes. For although the Republic inherited it, building measures thereafter had an entirely different emphasis.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter ‘Economy and Society in Archaic Rome and Central Italy’ (192–236) again invokes the image of a dynamic and diversified community for the late regal period. The development, which was only interrupted in the fifth century, already created ‘a very sophisticated market’ (198) with maritime trade, and the link to the sea appears ‘as a critical feature in early Roman history’ (203). Accordingly, Bradley dates the first Rome–Carthage treaty, as handed down to us by Polybius, to the year 509 and takes the Romans’ leading role for granted even though the sources speak of Tyrrhenian pirates. In a short passage on demographics, the author repeats his estimate already given elsewhere: a population range of 21,000 to 28,000 for the city of Rome and a total Roman population of 64,000 to 85,000 around the year 510. Social structures and groups are already presented briefly here, as ‘the emergence of the plebs must be linked to openness and mobility in the seventh and sixth century, which allowed a massive enlargement of the population’ (216). With good reason, the author here pays special attention to women (220–30), thereby again emphasising the heuristic problems in creating a contoured image. At the same time, he establishes a rather reckless line of argument: from the notion that female burials in central Italy and Etruria often create the impression of an ‘enthusiastic display of wealth, status and power’, he infers that conditions in Rome—where we lack such findings—must have been very similar (‘archaic “cultural koine”’, 224). Likewise, he accepts the literary reports on prominent female figures of the regal period and the formative years of the Republic as being at least plausible and therefore concludes ‘that powerful women played an important role in the later Roman monarchy’ (227). But we need to take into account that all of these female figures are part of either ethical discourses or of much later debates on tyranny—or occasionally of both. In my view, it remains an open question whether we can plausibly apply to Rome the ‘picture of high-status women in Etruria, Rome, and

<sup>6</sup> Bradley mentions the ongoing debates, ‘stressing different factors such as the link between urbanism and autocracy, the “thermodynamic” theory of monumentalism, and the unreal “despotic” scale of sixth-century architecture at Rome’ (191).

<sup>7</sup> See now D. Padilla Peralta, *Divine Institutions: Religion and Community in the Middle Roman Republic* (Princeton and Oxford, 2020); cf. U. Walter, ‘Einzahlen aufs Gemeinwohlkonto: Dan-El Padilla Peraltas Studie über Religion und Staatlichkeit in der Mittleren Römischen Republik’, *Gymnasium* 128 (2021) 273–8.

Latium who were involved in many of the social activities of their male peers, including wine-drinking and networking at banquets' (229), as long as this is solely based on archaeological findings from elsewhere. However, this explicitly does not apply to the widespread practice of intermarriage, which—similarly to the archaic Greek world—served as a tool for aristocrats and rulers to establish translocal networks. Yet Bradley refuses to recognise a continuous development towards the later Roman ban on exogamy, so heavily enforced by law, for here again, he takes for granted 'that Romans both overestimated and misrepresented the level of conservatism in their city' (214ff.). This assumption actually seems quite reasonable, since we do know by now that in supposedly static pre-modern societies a flawless reproduction of social conditions could never be achieved and that every such attempt required great effort. But should Bradley not therefore approach the sources with much more caution? The pages on ethnicity (231–6) are at least as important and instructive, although here Bradley's argument is hard to follow. Thus, he counts the widespread circulation of goods during the Late Bronze Age among the 'pre-existing conditions for a sense of ethnic difference' (232). But one has to ask how such 'sense' is to be determined without referring to the outdated idea of artefacts as indicators of ethnic identity. In fact, Bradley assumes that in the Orientalising and Archaic periods, the 'mobility and intense exchange characteristic of this era undoubtedly accelerates the manifestation of ethnic identity' (ibid.), thus inferring ethnic identity from 'foreign' objects, models, and craftsmen—an invalid approach, as I would argue. For how should this identity have found expression, since we know nothing about political forms or the significance of ethnic self-awareness for those forms? If one accepts the idea of permanent circulation, which characterises this book, one will always find it logically difficult to determine deliberate demarcations. Things are different, of course, when it comes to sanctuaries and local or regional adoptions of myths. But these clearly point towards politically effective formations as they undoubtedly characterised the famously 'open and adaptive city' (233) of Rome.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Bradley omits any closer inspection of language as a fundamental distinctive feature, although this was probably a decisive factor for the formation of Latin identity within multilingual central Italy. On the other hand, Etruscan influence in Rome was limited, as indicated by the very little material evidence for Etruscan language—which is all the more striking since the situation is very different in Campania. With good reason, Bradley finally argues for a modified concept of ethnicity in order to allow us a proper grasp of the complex situation (236).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bradley, p. 236: 'Overall, therefore, Rome was probably from its earliest origins a multi-ethnic frontier city, and as a result, a clear sense of unified ethnicity in archaic Rome is difficult to recover.'

In his chapter on ‘Rome in the Early Republic’ (237–62), Bradley first outlines the formation of patricians and plebeians. He refers to his thesis presented in a paper in 2017 according to which the plebeian secessions actually presented a form of socio-political mobility: ‘The plebs could be understood as a group akin to the mobile armed bands of the archaic period, devoted to a particular tutelary deity, and potential founders of a new community on land that they conquered’ (249). Thus the idea, already set forth by Mommsen, that the plebs had formed a self-conscious plebeian community (‘Sondergemeinde’) is integrated into the framework of central Italian mobility and fluidity. With good reason, the author regards the plebs as ‘a mixed group, with a substantial military element, reflecting Rome’s complex society and economy’ (251). His thesis assumes that no landowners were among those plebeians willing to migrate. His arguments rely heavily on an often neglected note by Servius, who distinguishes colonies founded by public agreement from those founded through secession (Serv. ad *Aen.* 1.12). The section on the Decemvirate and the Twelve Tables is rather brief and perpetuates a false reading.<sup>9</sup> Altogether, this chapter pays too little attention to the preconditions of the Struggle of the Orders; hence, the plebeian *gravamina* hardly acquire any distinct form. The plebeian movement in the fourth century again is touched upon only briefly (259–62).

The following chapter summarises ‘Roman Foreign Relations in the Sixth, Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC’ (263–304). On the one hand Bradley stresses the advantage held by the ‘embryonic imperial power’ of Rome, while on the other hand he rightly points out that fluid power-relations and changing alliances in central Italy presented significant problems even for the most powerful city states. This is particularly evident for the Etruscans, who are dealt with over several pages (265–71) and who never established a nucleus of Etruscan power within the League of Twelve Cities, in spite of temporarily successful expansions towards Campania. With regards to Latium, Bradley accepts the literary tradition of a strong Roman position in the Latin League during the late regal period. Although the Latins for a time united against Roman hegemonial ambitions, the threat posed by the hill tribes of the Volsci and Aequi forced all parties into a close alliance. In an instructive sub-chapter, the author draws together research on warfare during the archaic period: despite the well-known phenomenon of private-group- and clan- based warfare ‘we should not necessarily exaggerate the weaknesses of central Italian states in the sixth and fifth century BC’ (287). Far into the middle Republic,

<sup>9</sup> *in partes secanto* (tab. 3.5) certainly does not indicate that a debtor was ‘cut into parts (if unable to pay a debt)’ (256). Rather, it refers to chunks of raw copper (*aes rude*), which were redeemed from the selling of the debtor and then cut into pieces to meet the demands of the creditors; cf. D. Flach, ed., trans., and comm., *Das Zwölftafelgesetz* (Darmstadt, 2004) 72–3, 194–5 (not in Bradley’s bibliography).

colonisation efforts are viewed in a wider context of individual and group mobility. In line with his thesis that an emigration of the plebs actually was a realistic option during the Struggle of the Orders, the author takes seriously the literary reports according to which an emigration of parts of the population was seriously considered after the conquest of Veii and the Gallic invasion. Following these two successive violent outbreaks, however, the Romans are assumed to have instead cautiously decided to resume their colonisation programme, reaching out towards Campania and bringing the Latins to their senses. All of this greatly increased Rome's military potential while at the same time the long-lasting conflict with the Samnites required their full efforts and resources.

A seamless transition leads to Chapter 9 ('Rome and Italy 338–290 BC: Conquest and Accommodation', 305–33), in which Bradley only partly agrees with A. M. Eckstein's pseudo-realist model of inter-state relations. With N. Terrenato, he stresses that the 'Romans were often linked to the peoples they came to control, through marriage and other forms of social interaction' (306).<sup>10</sup> For 'much of the expansion we call the Roman conquest came about by the projection of power rather than straightforward battlefield defeat and resultant subjection' (ibid.; cf. 332). The author then outlines the stages and instruments of Roman control over all of Italy, concerning two well-known factors—colonisation and road building—with appropriate attention to circumstances that were contingent, local, and determined by popular intent. The 'patterns of war and imperialism' were not so much common Italian practices but indeed very genuinely Roman, including the well-attested willingness of commanders to act within a 'culture of perpetual war' and hence to accept high risks and losses.

This conclusion draws attention back to Rome around 300 BC (334–59), a time when 'dramatic changes in the Roman state in terms of politics, economy, culture, demography and religion' took place (334). Successively, Bradley discusses: changes in the senate, which was a place for articulating thoroughly divergent interests and opinions; the consolidation of the magistracy; the ever recurring social conflicts; and finally the acceleration of economic, urbanistic, and religious developments (with 354–59 being especially helpful). Further, he outlines the now well-researched competitive political culture of the nobility and also pays attention to the growing importance of slavery. The latter now satisfied the need for labour by drawing on external sources, where previously one had resorted to socially inferior citizens through debt-bondage.

In a brief 'Conclusion' (360–4), Bradley sums up the overall development and once more emphasises the 'context of the wider Italian and Mediterranean environment' (360). Indeed, 'Rome was shaped by the highly competitive

<sup>10</sup> N. Terrenato, *The Early Roman Expansion into Italy: Elite Negotiation and Family Agendas* (Cambridge, 2019); cf. my review, *Historische Zeitschrift* 310 (2020) 456–62.

environment of central Italy' (363). However, in the long run, Rome was able to gain an advantage not least due to its considerable size and its often stressed openness to immigration and technological innovations. Bradley adheres to his (in my opinion ill-founded) thesis of a potential for plebeian mass mobility, although he is forced *de facto* to abandon it.<sup>11</sup> His subsequent conclusion, however, certainly holds true: 'Nevertheless, controlling the fission of the citizen body was only managed through important concessions, such as the establishment of the tribunate, which changed the nature of the Roman political system.'

The book is lavishly illustrated and offers helpful tables as well as a brief 'Chronology' (365–6) at the end. The selected references allow access to scholarly controversies, while the 'Guide to Further Reading' (367–9) mainly covers basic literature. Overall, there can be no doubt that this book captures the broad outlines very clearly and offers a good representation of the increasingly optimistic tendencies in scholarship, which are based on a growing material basis and on bold models. It might prove difficult for beginners, but this objection can be raised against any conceivable synthesis on this challenging period. Nevertheless, an understanding of these formative years is fundamental for an overall comprehension of Roman history.

*University of Bielefeld*

UWE WALTER  
uwe.walter@uni-bielefeld.de

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 363: 'Rome also regularly faced the potential loss of parts of the population in the early Republic through plebeian secessions and (probably) the proposed migration to Veii, but these movements were averted by the pragmatic flexibility of the Roman elite and (perhaps) an emerging sense of collective Roman community.'