

## REVIEW

### *E PLURIBUS UNUM?* ITALIANS AND ROME FROM LATE REPUBLIC TO AUGUSTUS

Michel Aberson, Maria Cristina Biella, Massimiliano Di Fazio, and Manuela Wullschleger, edd., *Nos Sumus Romani Qui Fuimus Ante ...: Memories of Ancient Italy. Études Genevoises sur l'Antiquité* 6. Bern: Peter Lang, 2020. Pp. 244. Paperback, €57.10/£47.00/US\$68.95. ISBN 978-3-0343-2889-0.

What were the contributions of the various Italian peoples to Roman culture and state in the Late Republic and Principate? And how were these contributions remembered and reconfigured over time? These are the questions underpinning this volume, which presents the proceedings of the third and final conference in the series ‘E pluribus unum? Italy from the pre-Roman Fragmentation to Augustan Unity’, held in Oxford in October 2016. This is a bold undertaking because questions about local influences on Roman culture, about Italy’s relationship to Rome, and about the ways that Italy was reshaped under Augustus, are familiar territory; they have been treated numerous times, including in some of the most influential works in the field.<sup>1</sup> The focus on memory adds a distinctive accent to the discussion of these questions here. But the editors’ main claim to novelty is in the fact that they bring together historians, archaeologists, linguists, and literary scholars and look across the inscriptional, archaeological, and literary records. Accordingly, the volume adds breadth, nuance, and richness to existing vistas rather than breaking fundamentally fresh ground.

Much like the volume’s view of ancient Italy itself, the sixteen chapters (in Italian, French, and English) are defined by a diversity of perspective, approach, and theme. Quite deliberately, the volume offers questions as well as answers; stresses what we don’t know as much as what we do; and leaves us with an appreciation of the complexities rather than with neatly tied ends. Some may yearn for more decisive conclusions to the volume as a whole (there are plenty within individual chapters), but this picture of variety and

<sup>1</sup> As Smith points out (p. 11) A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, 2008) and G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilizations in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998) were cited in almost every chapter of the second volume of the series.

uncertainty is itself a fitting end to the exploration of an Italy whose identity Giardina famously described as ‘incompiuta’.<sup>2</sup>

The volume opens with a brief editorial preface—or in the editors’ words a ‘conclusione in forma di premessa’—which sets the present volume in the context of the broader series. The editors are disarmingly candid about the difficulties of their project; they repeatedly stress the complexities of the issues, theories, and evidence they are tackling. This preface is immediately followed by a robust opening chapter by Christopher Smith which can usefully be read not only as a second introduction to the volume but also in its own right as an incisive engagement with previous scholarship on the topic.

The volume then opens into fourteen further chapters that consider the influence and reception of Italy on Rome from a wide variety of perspectives. In line with the series’ stated aim to offer unusually comprehensive coverage, there is treatment of a broad range of topics: administration (Edward Bispham); politics (Federico Santangelo, Gary D. Farney, Clément Chillet, Andrew Gallia); the army (Will Broadhead); law (Roberto Fiori); language (Rudolf Wachter, Valentina Arena); religion (Eric Orlin); monuments and images (Eugenio Polito); literature and historiography (Bernard Mineo on Livy, Sergio Casali on Virgil, Mathilde Simon on Pliny and Strabo). The promised diversity of evidence is mostly achieved across rather than within chapters, but there are exceptions. For example, Broadhead’s and Chillet’s chapters effectively combine literary and epigraphic evidence; and Orlin’s chapter stands out for its integration of literary, epigraphic, and archaeological material.

Between them, the chapters demonstrate the intricate dynamics of the relationship between Italy and Rome, showing that it could be one of cooperation, inspiration, uncertainty, and/or resistance. The reciprocal influences between the two are stressed throughout; this reciprocity is unsurprising in itself, but it is striking to see it demonstrated in so many different areas. On the one hand, the eclectic mix of arguments and approaches powerfully exemplifies the overall picture of messiness and complexity that the editors argue for. But teasing out this picture requires some patience and commitment from a reader, since connections and contradictions between chapters are not spelt out. In several places, it would have been useful to have more dialogue between contributions. For example, I wonder how Bispham’s argument that the *regiones* around which Pliny organises his discussion of Italy have a republican origin might affect Simon’s reading of Pliny and Strabo’s texts as reflecting a particularly Augustan view of Italian geography. There might have been some productive exchange between Wachter on Sabine and Arena on Celtic in Varro’s *De Lingua Latina*. And the note of methodological caution that Fiori and Polito sound on the difficulties

<sup>2</sup> A. Giardina, *L’Italia Romana: storie di un’identità incompiuta* (Rome, 1997).

of distinguishing between ‘Roman’ and ‘Italian’ elements might have been heeded more widely. The absence of explicitly drawn-out connections between chapters reflects the light-touch feel of the volume’s editing. The non-standardisation of chapter length and organisation gives contributors freedom to explore either leisurely or briskly (and there are successful examples of both paces); but there are places where some more forceful editing would have been welcome.

One question on which contributors seem understandably divided concerns the choice and utility of theory. Anyone who has ventured anywhere near the themes and questions of the volume will be alert to the theoretical minefield that surrounds them. This volume acknowledges this minefield rather than defusing it. And in its handling of theory, the volume feels targeted largely at specialists who have existing familiarity with the shape of the field; there is critical engagement with—rather than summarising of—previous scholarship. Smith dramatises the debate about whether grand theoretical models can provide useful answers, a debate which plays out more quietly later in the volume. Different contributors take different sides: some (e.g., Chillet) have theory at the crux of their approach; more commonly, however, contributors put theory aside and root their analysis in specific evidence (e.g., Mineo, Farney). Santangelo is a notable example of where theory and evidence are combined productively. One strength of the volume is its sustained and serious engagement with a range of non-Anglophone scholarship, a refreshing change given the frequent dominance of Anglophone scholarship on these issues. It is especially helpful, and uplifting, that the bogeyman of ‘Romanisation’ itself is largely confined to the background rather than being relentlessly wheeled out for critique.

Another underlying question concerns the shape of change over time. The series promises to investigate the ‘*longue durée*’ of Italian influence, and its three volumes together cover a period from the sixth century BC to the third century AD. The present volume concentrates especially on the late republican and Augustan periods, though its final three chapters usefully extend the story down into the reigns of later emperors. The chapters argue for variety and complexity of engagements with Italy right across these periods, but within this broad sweep of time, some (predictable) turning points emerge. The first is the Social War, whose ramifications are explored most explicitly by Bispham, Santangelo, and Broadhead. The takeaway is that these ramifications are deeper and longer-lasting than is sometimes appreciated—even if, as Broadhead argues, slower-burning and less instantly dramatic. The second moment under the spotlight is Augustus’ *tota Italia*. Unsurprisingly, the balance between continuity and change here remains unresolved. What emerges—especially from the contributions of Casali, Mineo, and Orlin—are the manipulations, obscurities and sleights of hand of the Augustan sources, which blur memory, invention, and history, both consciously and unconsciously. The

three final chapters in the volume by Farney, Chillet, and Gallia show the frailty of any resolution of the Italian past under Augustus; Italian culture continued to be rejected, embraced, and debated for centuries, according to contemporary needs. These three chapters also helpfully bring in the perspective of the Empire more widely, showing that Italian peoples and cultures had resonance beyond the borders of the Italian peninsula.

There are inevitably some points that could be further developed. Several chapters leave the agency behind the processes and interactions described rather vague; we have memories but nobody doing the remembering—or at least nobody beyond named members of the elite, an old problem that the volume otherwise tries laudably hard to avoid. Smith rightly hints at the difficulties of unearthing individual agency, but it would nonetheless have been good to see contributors make some more attempts to tackle this problem, even if these attempts must result in some *aporia*. The coverage of Italy is also somewhat patchy. There is understandably a lot on the Sabines and even more on the Etruscans, but less on other peoples and cultures. And I wonder how far the argument of some contributors that Greek-inflected southern Italy was a different place and therefore safe to put to one side is convenient rather than fully convincing.

At their best the contributions offer incisive readings that change the way we think about sets of evidence and tie these readings to broad conclusions. Arena offers a powerful argument that Varro's writing about the influence of Celtic on Latin was a politically significant act, a contribution to the contemporary republican debate about the rights of Cisalpine Gauls to citizenship. Her argument fits nicely with other recent approaches to Varro that see him as an author with a coherent vision rather than simply a hoarder of facts.<sup>3</sup> Bispham's slow-burn chapter builds to a quietly devastating conclusion rooted in close reading of evidence old and new; not all may agree with his argument about the republican, and ethnic, basis of the Augustan *regiones* but it deserves to be engaged with. Broadhead is especially effective in the way that he combines detailed discussion of evidence with big-picture conclusions clearly linked to the volume's overall aims. Wachter convincingly explains language change in terms of broader societal and cultural changes, with some especially sharp observations about the ways that intra-Italian migration transformed the Latin of the city of Rome.

Both this volume and the wider series are impressively ambitious. Especially in the breadth and scope of contributions they go a long way to delivering on their ambitions, which is no mean feat. *E pluribus unum?* Perhaps not, but this may be unrealistic in any case; there is more interest—and more

<sup>3</sup> Another recent example of such approaches to Varro, which presumably came too late for this volume, is D. Spencer, *Language and Authority in De Lingua Latina: Varro's Guide to Being Roman* (Madison, Wisc., 2019).

historical accuracy—in a messy, complex picture. The many different chapters do not come together into a seamless whole, but in these many chapters there is much to make us think harder and deeper about the myriad ways that ancient Italy is, was, and should be remembered.

*University of Oxford*

OLIVIA ELDER  
olivia.elder@classics.ox.ac.uk