

BOOK REVIEW

Peasants and Slaves: The Rural Population of Roman Italy (200 BC to AD 100). By Alessandro LAUNARO. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 349. Hardcover, £65.00/\$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-00479-5.

Launaro's monograph, a major contribution to the study of Roman demography in the late Republic and early Empire, uses Italian field survey evidence to build a persuasive case against the so-called "low-count" estimate of 5 to 7 million inhabitants for Italy at the beginning of the Empire.

The book consists of seven chapters divided between four parts. Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) reviews the debate over Roman demography, which hinges on how one explains the difference between the 910,000 Roman citizens reported in the census of 70/69 BCE and the Augustan figure for 28 BCE of 4,063,000. Those who subscribe to the "low count" interpret the former figure as reporting just adult male citizens and the latter as including women and children. When one factors out the newly enfranchised citizens of Transpadana (46 BCE) and Romans living in the provinces, there is little room for late Republican population growth in Italy. Those who favor the "high count" think both figures refer just to adult male citizens, implying some growth during the late Republic and an Italian population of around 14 million by the reign of Augustus. There is also the "middle count" put forward by Saskia Hin which suggests that the Augustan census figure counts citizens *sui iuris* and leads to an estimate of 7.5 million for 28 BCE. Launaro contends that the low count necessarily implies that Italy's rural population declined in the late Republic while the middle and high counts do not entail such a trend. Thus field survey may hold the key to choosing among these options.

Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) turns to landscape archaeology and examines the methodological problems associated with deriving population numbers from site finds and comparing the results of different surveys. Launaro argues that it makes more sense to look for trends in settlement rather than specific population figures. He then describes his method for integrating survey results and the various assumptions it entails. This "operational methodology" allows him to compare

the number of observed farms, villas, and villages in the late Republic (200–50 BCE) with the early Empire (50 BC–100 CE).

Part III (Chapter 5) discusses the surveys which constitute Launaro's evidence. Each survey needed to provide comparable data with respect to site classification while the surveys as a whole had to "produce a reasonably *representative* picture" of Italy (103). The 27 surveys to make the cut range from Valli Grani Veronesi and Polcevera Valley in the north to Roccagloriosa and Oria in the south, but Etruria, Latium, and Campania provide about half of the samples. Launaro gives a brief description of each survey, discusses how he converted its "dataset," and notes the local settlement trend it suggests. A lengthy appendix (133 pages) lists all the data on which Launaro bases his analysis.

Part IV considers the implications of the aggregate survey data for Italian settlement trends and Roman demography (Chapter 6) as well as for the Italian economy more generally (Chapter 7). Launaro finds that "the total number of sites as derived from [his] pool of twenty-seven surveys point to rather general patterns of significant growth together with isolated patches of either stability or slight decline" (155). This leads to the conclusion that "the low-count interpretation has to be rejected *as a whole* because of its implications for the rural population, which do not correspond in any way to the picture which can be derived from fifty years of field research in landscape archaeology" (164). Though he prefers the high count, Launaro is quick to point out that his analysis does not allow one to choose between the middle and high counts; the variables, particularly the number of citizens in the provinces, are too uncertain.

Overall, this is a well produced and clearly argued book. In addition to offering a compelling new demographic argument, Launaro's "revised narrative of Roman Italy," tentatively outlined in the final chapter, will be of considerable interest to those who study Rome's economic and agricultural history.

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