Colonial landscapes : demography, settlement organization and impact of colonies founded by Rome (4th-2nd centuries BC)

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Chapter 6.

CONCLUSIONS

This book has critically analysed the evidence for the organization of Roman colonial territories in the period before the Gracchi. In conventional models, the colonial countryside has been characterized as consisting of rigid systems of land division and a dense network of isolated, mono-nuclear peasant farms which were situated at regular intervals from each other. The question of when exactly these characteristic colonial landscapes first developed is often sidestepped, but most scholars implicitly seem to agree that they go back at least to the fourth century. Although the literary sources say that the Roman colonization programme was much older, it is believed to be more likely that only after the Latin War in 338, when the Romans became the dominant political power in Central Italy, did they devise their successful imperial strategy which, besides ingenious enfranchisement policies also consisted of a sophisticated colonization programme. The most probable example for their newly developed colonial policies has been thought to be the Greek colonies which by this time were heavily influenced by Hippodamian orthogonal city-planning and territorial organization. Since this formula also proved to be successful in the Roman colonial context, it was continued with only minor changes deep into the Imperial period.

Times have changed and recent revisionist studies have cogently argued that the static, State-organized understanding of mid Republican colonization is the result of anachronistic ideology and schematization. These studies have focused especially on the issue of how such biases can distort a proper identification of particular discovered urban buildings. So far, much less attention has been paid to the surprising scarcity of archaeological evidence in these colonial towns dating to the fourth and third centuries. Traditional explanations of this situation have focused on problems in detecting the early strata of settlements which were built over in later times or, and this is the more popular explanation, on the notion that specific historical circumstances, such as wars, impeded the colonists in accomplishing their task of building the monumental city which was envisaged at the outset. Although these possibilities cannot be wholly discarded, it seems worth considering another option, namely that colonial *oppida* in this period were not meant to be monumental and fully built-up towns at all and that this concept developed only in the late third and second century when a large number of other Italian towns were being monumentalized as a consequence of Hellenistic influences.

A similar situation can also be detected in the countryside which has been the prime subject of this book. During the numerous field survey projects which have been undertaken in these landscapes, only very few traces of colonial farmsteads have been identified. This discovery has contrasted strongly with the densely populated and regularly organized peasant landscape which was expected.

Explanations for this mismatch have all focused on the problems concerning the archaeological detection of these rural and possibly flimsily constructed buildings. The possibility that the recorded emptiness in some way reflects an actual settlement pattern has not been considered properly. Yet, the evidence on which the conventional model of colonial settlement organization is based is very fragile and might be biased by similar anachronistic expectations to those which distorted the proper interpretation of colonial city organization. This book, therefore, has critically re-examined the traditional understanding of colonial rural organization, focusing especially on issues of population density, land division, settlement organization and geo-political arrangements.

Interestingly, my analysis of these issues shows that the traditional model of colonial settlement organization is not based purely on the literary texts dealing with the mid-Republican period - which actually reveal little about these topics -, but is above all the result of a synchronic use of data from different time periods. If the fragmentary data is studied diachronically, marked changes in colonial policies become visible. Such an approach shows that Roman colonial practices changed over time and did not spring like Athena, full-grown from the head of Zeus. Moreover, it places the introduction of the monumental and geometrically organized Roman colonial landscape at a later moment in time. The crucial period appears to have been the late third to early second century and not, as was previously assumed, the period immediately following the Latin War.

Disentanglement of the peasant landscape model

Important clues which have prompted the view that colonial territories were settled regularly with isolated farmsteads are the numerous references to the division of land into equal parts assigned to colonial settlers. In combination with the traces of the land division systems which have been identified on aerial photographs of former Mid- Republican colonial territories, this has led to the assumption that the rigidly divided colonial landscapes described by the *agrimensores* developed early in Roman history. At first sight, these indications are compelling and indeed seem to support the view that the typical Roman colonial practices began early in the Mid-Republic. However, on closer inspection, it turns out that the building blocks of this argumentative edifice are very weak. The first objection is that the literary sources only begin to report the handing out of substantial and equally sized holdings for the period after the Second Punic War. Before that time, only a few references to the allocation of very small allotments, which were much too small to sustain a family, are recorded for citizen colonies and for viritane land division programmes. This lacuna has generally been passed over in silence and the consensus has been that ancient historians like Livy simply forgot to mention the sizes of the allotments distributed or that for some reason this information was lost and could not be consulted in the late Republican period. These explanations fail to convince.

From the late fifth century and thereafter (Labici is the first case), Livy follows a consistent pattern in describing the decisions to found colonies: he begins with the *senatus consultum* (or in a few cases the plebiscite) which ordered the foundation of the colony, followed by the number of settlers,

the amount of land they were granted and, less frequently, the names of commissioners who supervised the event. This chronographic style gives the impression that the source of this information was some sort of official list which went back to at least 418. If this assumption is indeed correct, the consistent absence of references to allotment sizes for the Latin colonies founded before the Second Punic War must be considered meaningful. But, even if it is assumed, that the chronographic style is merely a stylistic device adopted by Livy (or his annalistic source) to give his reports more authority, it is difficult to explain why he consistently left out information about allotment sizes for the period before the Second Punic War. Therefore, the most plausible conclusion is that the absence of information is significant. In any case, the view that there is literary evidence which suggests that equally divided peasant landscapes existed before the Punic Wars is certainly wrong.

Moreover, the evidence of the existence of land division grids in these early colonies must also be questioned. Critical examination of these grids has shown that they cannot convincingly be connected with the foundation of a colony in the pre-Punic War period. Especially problematic are the arguments which have been used to date these grids. Conventional theory asserts that a special type of *limitatio* consisting of parallel lines only is characteristic of Pre-Hannibalic Roman land division systems. The majority of the grids attributed to mid-Republican colonies has been dated on the basis of this typological criterion only. However, as Campbell has convincingly shown, the *agrimensores* make it very clear that this type of land division was also practised in the Imperial period. Since most mid-Republican colonies received new settlers in the Late Republic and Imperial periods, it cannot be excluded that the traces recognized belong to land division programmes dating to these later periods.

In quite a few cases, doubts can even be raised about whether these recognized systems have something to do with Roman colonial practices at all. Surprisingly, the distances between the lines of several of these grids are not measured in *actus* and instead the Oscan *uorsus* or Greek *plethron* have been preferred. The fact that there seems to be a geographical pattern in the units of measurement used (see Fig. 15) also suggests that these grids were created by local or regional initiatives and not by a central Roman government which sent out a small army of engineers to create impressive land division systems and other large-scale infrastructural works prior to the arrival of the colonists. Almost without exception, these land division lines are positioned either perpendicular to or in line with the natural relief of the territory. As these lines are often channels, it seems obvious that they were created to control the hydrological conditions in the area. Therefore, there is a good possibility that their prime function was not the demarcation of (allocated) land, but that their construction was motivated by land improvement strategies. If indeed this assumption is correct, this implies that there is no longer a strict need to connect these systems with land division programmes.

Probably one of the most important arguments for believing that these systems were related to early colonial land division programmes is that it is considered unlikely that Rome developed the complex orthogonal system of colonial land division (*centuriatio*) known to have existed in the late Republican period out of nothing. In an evolutionistic framework, it makes sense that more primitive

and experimental stages of land division systems existed before the archetypal centuriated colonial landscape developed. However, although it is difficult not to envisage some earlier experimental phases, this does not need to imply that such experiments took place in a Roman colonial context. It is certain that the Greeks experimented with land division systems from the Archaic period and thereafter and that they had developed an orthogonal land division system before the Early Hellenistic period. The Romans must have known about these systems and could have copied them when they began to divide their territory into equal parts marked by physical boundaries.

There is no evidence to suggest that this necessarily happened for the first time in a colonial context. Land division systems can be created for a wide variety of other purposes, like the selling of land, the registration of property or land reforms. In fact, the first documented case of a Roman land division system in the *agrimensores* is connected with the selling of land and probably dates to the middle of the third century. Although not too much weight should be attached to the late and undeniably controversial texts of the *agrimensores*, it makes sense to connect the development of a more rigid means of demarcating property claims with the new practice of selling conquered land on a large scale. It would not have been surprising that the new owners demanded a firmer title to this land than had been the case in the previous periods when elites acquired land by exercising the right of *occupatio*. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the first attestations to the existence of *formae* (cadastral maps which were used to record property rights) also appear late, namely during the Second Punic War, when more land was being sold.

At some point in time, this sophisticated system of recording property was also adopted in colonial contexts. It is very difficult to pin down this development chronologically. On the basis of the literary sources, it could be argued that the practice of drawing cadastral maps began only after the Second Punic War; the period in which Livy begins reporting about the sizes of allotments distributed. While this postulation does carry some weight, various scholars have recognized traces of orthogonal land division systems on aerial photographs and cadastral maps of former colonial territories which they date in the Pre-Hannibalic period. Nevertheless, the arguments which have been used to date these supposedly early grids are far from conclusive and a Hannibalic or Post-Hannibalic date of construction cannot be ruled out.

Intriguingly, it is likely that survey archaeology has also contributed to the view that scattered forms of settlement dominated in colonial landscapes. The maps which pin-point the locations of recognized sites show dense landscapes of small dots, giving the impression of flourishing peasant landscapes. However, critical examination shows that these maps are often misleading. The large-scale and the coarse chronological resolution of these maps conceal the fact that in large areas no traces of Pre-Hannibalic settlements have been identified. Moreover, the equal size dots give the false impression of a landscape settled in an egalitarian manner; a view which fits neatly with the peasant landscape model. In reality, these dots on the maps often stand for artefact scatters of very different

sizes and substance. It is more than likely that the decision to visualize the archaeological data in this uniform way was steered strongly by aprioristic expectations of Roman rural settlement organization.

If these fixed ideas are set aside, the possibility of seeing very different settlement arrangements opens up. On closer inspection, it turns out that the survey data actually suggest that during the first century of their existence, most colonial territories were settled in irregular fashion, either in clusters or aligned alongside specific elements in the landscape such as roads, waterways and specific geo-morphological zones. Although it is impossible to exclude the possibility that these patterns have been biased by visibility problems or inadequate sampling strategies, this theoretical problem should not be used as a justification for clinging on to the old paradigm of early colonial settlement arrangement, especially since there is evidence for the existence of nucleated forms of settlement in the archaeological and epigraphic record of colonial territories.

Considering the potentially hostile environment into which the colonial settlers ventured, it seems sensible that people would have preferred to live together in nucleated settlements instead of residing in isolated farmsteads which would have been more difficult to defend. From a logistical point of view, it is also easy to find reasons for the clustering of settlements. Especially if the role of a centralized government in creating complex infrastructures is downplayed, it would have been expected that farmers initially settled in those areas with easy access to primary resources like water or roads and only after a while, when the situation stabilized, would they have expanded to the more marginal areas.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that before the Punic Wars dispersed settlement patterns have only been identified in colonies which were founded in the former territories of centralized communities in central Latium and south Sabinum. These areas were already characterized by more scattered settlement models before they were colonized by the Romans. For the most part, these were a legacy from the Archaic period, which was also a time of rapid urbanization processes and the appearance of large-scale land improvement systems, like the famous *cuniculi* (drainage or water supply tunnels cut through solid rock). The Roman colonists entering these landscapes could have made use of the existing infrastructure and have perpetuated or adapted a pre-existing pattern of dispersed settlement. Yet, in some of these landscapes Roman colonization seems to have resulted in a contraction of settlement. Amongst other reasons, this apparent anomaly can be explained by a psychological consideration, for instance socio-political tensions.

More scattered forms of settlement have also been recorded for the colonies which were founded after the middle of the third century. It is tempting to connect this phenomenon with the theory outlined above that in this period Rome developed more rigid land division policies. However, not only is the amount of data available for this period inadequate to support such a hypothesis, it is also certain that most of these colonial territories were settled neither as regularly or as densely as might have been expected on the basis of the information obtained about allotments sizes and land division grids. No doubt, some of these riddles are attributable to site recovery problems, but also in

these landscapes evidence of hamlets and ribbon settlements exists, suggesting that a completely scattered settlement pattern did not develop in most of the later colonial territories either.

The missing sites problem

An assessment of site retrieval rates of field surveys depends heavily on what populations are expected to have lived in the territories investigated. This is a controversial issue since such information depends on late textual sources. The only source which repeatedly gives information about the sizes of colonial populations is Livy. His information suggests that colonial territories were densely populated, often with overall population densities of over ten colonial families per square kilometre. Since only a small percentage of these families would have fitted inside the colonial town centres, Livy's figures imply that the vast majority of colonists must have had a rural base.

Essentially, the credibility of Livy's figures depends entirely on the reliability of the annalistic sources in general; a hotly debated issue on which no consensus can be expected. Nevertheless, it might be worth considering whether Livy's recordings are plausible and if they are contested by other information. In fact, various scholars have argued that the scale of the colonial enterprises suggested by Livy is too high for mid-Republican Roman society, because it is unlikely that Rome could have sustained such a drain on its manpower. As a solution to this problem they suggest that either Livy's figures are anachronistic inventions or that large numbers of non-Romans must have signed up for colonization. Looking askance at the former possibility, sceptics point out the existence of other sources which suggest very different colonial population sizes. Although two of the recorded figures are atypical, they do not suggests considerably smaller colonial populations and hardly attest to the existence of an alternative and possibly more trustworthy historiographic tradition. In contrast to these claims, my analysis has shown that by and large Livy's population figures are compatible with the demographic information provided by the other sources, for example Polybius' manpower figures.

An alternative explanation suggests that Livy's numbers are correct, but that he misunderstood who precisely participated in these colonial adventures. His emphasis on the Roman proletarian background of colonists is considered anachronistic and might be explained by the fact that he wanted to place the Roman colonization programme in his larger narrative which deals with the struggle between the orders. It is believed that, in reality, substantial numbers of allies and indigenous people were included in these figures. Although it is indeed likely that some natives or allies participated in Roman colonial programmes, the analysis I give in Chapter 2 shows that the theory that this *must* have been what happened on a large scale is incorrect. The migration rates implied by Livy's figures are always substantially below likely Roman population growth rates (mostly achieved by enfranchisement), which suggest that Rome could easily compensate for this loss of manpower; the more so, since Latin colonists continued to send troops to Rome in times of war. Moreover, the fact that there is a strong positive correlation between the number of migratory movements and population growth rates strengthens the credibility of Livy's statistics.

If Livy's figures are accepted as roughly correct, this implies that the archaeological field surveys are seriously wide of the mark. On average, recovered site densities are well under 1 per square kilometre for the early colonial period. In order for these site densities to approach the text-based expectancy, it has to be assumed that they all represent large nucleated settlements inhabited by more than ten families. It is likely that, as a result of conceptual biases, evidence of the existence of larger settlements has not been noted or has been explained away as the consequence of disruption caused by ploughing or later occupational phases. At the same time, on the basis of the published information on site sizes, it seems very unlikely that this happened on a scale large enough to bridge the gap with the text-based demographic expectancy and hence it has to be concluded that large numbers of settlements have not been recorded during the various field reconnaissance projects.

Conventional explanations for this problem have all focused on problems to do with the recognizability of early colonial sites which are considered to have been composed of very simple structures which generated very vague and easy-to-miss surface scatters. Although undoubtedly visibility problems contributed significantly to the missing site problem, this is only half of the story. Implicitly, these studies have accepted a scattered model of colonial settlement organization which turns out to be anachronistic on closer inspection.

The acceptance of a more nucleated model of colonial settlement organization offers new insights into the factors which caused the missing of sites. Besides taphonomic processes and consumption patterns, a third factor can now be added: location preference, which probably contributed to the low recovery rates of early colonial sites. Nucleated settlements are often located in the non-arable zones of a territory, frequently on hilltops which often to this day remain untouched by the plough. These places have also attracted settlement in later moments in history. Since regular field surveys depend on arable areas for good results, there is a possibility that a substantial number of these settlements have not been noticed.

Geo-political arrangements

Both the archaeological and literary records attest clearly to the presence of indigenous communities living in colonial areas. These indications require a serious consideration of the juridical position and geographical setting of these people. Two scenarios are usually defended with regard to their juridical position: either the indigenous people were granted the right to live in the colonial territory as foreigners (*incolae*), without political rights but subject to colonial law and taxation, or, as Bradley has recently proposed, they were incorporated into the colony as full citizens. Both scenarios, although they have fundamentally different views on the nature of colonist-native relationships, share the conviction that the indigenous people living on the sequestered land fell under the jurisdiction of the colony.

Indeed there is some literary and epigraphic evidence for the existence of such arrangements but there are also strong indications that a very different course of action was often adopted. Quite a

few references in the sources suggest that the people living in the conquered territory retained some form of political autonomy and were not either fully integrated into or subjected to the colonial community. Such an arrangement of two communities living on one territory is also called a double-community scenario. According to a definition used by Kahrstedt, double communities are those which share a single territory, but are socially and politically independent of each other. In such a scenario, membership of a community depends on socio-cultural or ethnic criteria, rather than on territorial considerations (hence, a non-territorial definition of community). In this view, a colony was not primarily a territorial state, but above all was a socio-political community of migrants which had the right to exploit a piece of land conquered by a Roman general. The same applies to the indigenous people who continued to live within the boundaries of that territory. They were not part of the colony, but formed a (semi-) independent socio-political community which could remain living on land claimed by Rome.

Since the 1950s, this model has been subjected to fierce opposition and until very recently it was rejected by most scholars. The most important reason for dismissing this scenario is that it is incompatible with the view that a colony is a territorial sovereign state. Various scholars argue that a *colonia* must be a sovereign territorial unit because Roman law uses different terms to describe socio-political communities without territorial jurisdiction. New legal studies have recently countered these arguments as they have demonstrated that there is ample evidence, above all in the Gromatic sources, of the existence of separate indigenous and colonial communities living in a single territory. The inference which can be drawn from this evidence is that Roman law did not necessarily oppose a legal construction in which two politically separate communities, one consisting of colonists and another of natives, shared a single territory.

Although according to these insights the basis for membership of a colonial community might not have been defined principally by territorial criteria, this does not exclude the possibility that colonial migrants lived in close proximity to each other and claimed a unified part of the territory as their own. In the Post-Hannibalic period especially, when the sources begin to report about the handing out of equally sized allotments and there is more convincing evidence of the existence of rigid land division systems, there is a strong possibility that a colony acquired a clear territorial dimension. On the other hand, there is little evidence to support the view that such an arrangement was standard practice in the Pre-Punic War period. On the contrary, the archaeological record is more easily reconciled with a model which presupposes more patchy socio-political and ethnic landscapes in which no closed topographical boundaries which indicate either clear-cut colonial or native living spaces can be drawn. Newly founded sites are often found in-between settlements which originated in the Pre-Roman period. Even though settlement continuity is a very dangerous indicator for establishing ethnic or socio-political backgrounds, it is tempting to connect these patterns with the suggested non-territorial definition of colonial and native communities.

In an absolute sense a double-community scenario does not conflict with the other models of colonist-native relationships suggested. It is still possible to assume that some people of the conquered indigenous community enrolled in the colony. If they did so, the grounds for their decision may have been socio-politically prompted, for example, by pro-Roman attitudes or socio-economic criteria and not by the fact that they lived on conquered land.

Whatever the beginnings might have been, it is likely that as time passed the ties and interaction between colonists and natives living closely together intensified, which might have blurred the original socio-political and juridical divisions between them. In some cases this could have resulted in a decision to unite these communities formally by an act of *contributio*, as is recorded to have happened in the case of Taras-Neptunia in the late second or early first century. The reorganization of Italy into new municipal districts after the Social War especially offered a good opportunity to unite scattered colonial and peregrine communities which had lived close by each other politically for many generations. Perhaps it was only at this moment that the patchwork of territorially defined municipal communities which is so familiar to us now was created.