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The dynamics of life : demography and the history of Roman Italy (201 BC - AD 14)

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The dynamics of life.

**Demography and the
history of Roman Italy
(201 BC – AD 14)**

Saskia C. Hin

The dynamics of life.

Demography and the history of Roman Italy (201 BC – 14 AD)

Proefschrift

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Once, I tried to explain a not so aged person what this project was about. When I told him why, sadly, I could not him offer a book that showed him in vivid colours who these people were I was talking about studying ‘Roman demography’, he offered me help. Surely, there was a solution to my problem. If I did not have any pictures because it was so long ago that there were none, well, then I could take his grandfather’s picture. For, surely, he was also very old.

Completion of this project took, apart from reading, a lot of talking and interacting with others. Finalizing thoughts and ideas took some incubation time and piecing together. Many of them finally popped up, quite according to theoretical predictions, at moments when they should not have. In swimming pools, on bikes, in between chocolates, whilst trying to photograph unwilling birds and squirrels, during attempts to run, not jog, on Leiden and Californian streets, and – to be honest – whilst pretending to listen to others. Some have been irrevocably lost on the spot, others did make it into the book.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, I have come to owe more than a simple word of thanks to many. I have greatly benefited from the help and encouragement given by various academics, and from the discussions they were willing and eager to engage in. Among them, there are two people who in their different and complimentary ways have been pivotal in bringing this project from start to completion.

I would first of all like to thank my supervisor and co-supervisor. Throughout the dissertation writing process, prof. Luuk de Ligt at Leiden University, has been a challenging sparring partner. Giving me the freedom to develop my own line of research, he encouraged and helped me to find my own way in a vast subject matter. It was great to have Walter Scheidel, professor at Stanford University, as a perfect excuse to keep going back to California. The gateway to ancient demography, he has also been invariably sharp, generous, supportive, and fun. This dissertation has gained a lot from their supervision.

The members of the Leiden VICI-project on late-republican history, in which this research project was embedded, have been invaluable sources of knowledge, and without my interactions with them this dissertation would have looked different. For this, and for their support I am most grateful to each of them. It was great to be able to share the PhD process with my fellow students, Jeremia Pelgrom and Saskia Roselaar, always ‘at hand’ in our office to help solve whichever little issue, discuss our work, and more. Postdoc Simon Northwood was a most reliable source to fall back upon for any matter concerning English.

Prof. Paul Erdkamp (VUB Brussels) has played a particularly important role throughout the past four years. Reading first outlines, then drafts, and thinking along with the arguments, he provided crucial feedback, comments, ideas, and references as well as moral support. Always reliable, meticulous, and ready to rebound *Sparwitze*, it was a pleasure to work with him.

At several moments, dr. Rens Tacoma proved pivotal in efficiently and strategically helping me address and tackle specific issues. His sharp comments, suggestions, and organizational support have been most valuable. My former tutor, dr. Johan Strubbe, instantly provided crucial practical help when needed.

Most of the pages of this book came into being during my stays at Stanford University. I entered and re-entered a very welcoming, friendly community of Classics Department members. They showed me a different, most stimulating approach to the Ancient World. Both me and my work have profited tremendously from the classes I could take, the talks I could attend, the discussions I could have – from being there. In as much as, as Nathan Rosenstein has not stopped reminding me, it is easy to fall in love with California, it's also easy to love Stanford. I am grateful to the Jo Kolk Study Fund, whose generous grant supported my stay in 2007-2008.

Two former Stanford grads I would like to thank in particular: Christelle Fischer-Bovet, and Andrew Monson. Both ancient historians, their presence did much to help me think and write. At a personal level also they became dear to me. The same holds true for dr. Carolin Arlt, Egyptologist at Berkeley and always willing to talk about demography, and Jean Bovet, driver, cook, human computer-helpdesk, and always making you laugh.

At various stages I got the opportunity to meet with scholars who provided precious comments and ideas. I would like to express my specific gratitude to prof. John Rich (University of Nottingham), prof. Richard Saller (Stanford University), prof. Wim Jongman (Groningen University), prof. Peter Turchin (University of Connecticut) and dr. Vladislav Yavorsky (Moscow State University).

In the editorial stage, Rosemary Robson made a great effort to help me (and the reader) by turning Dungleish into English. I was pleasantly surprised by many a refreshing and inspiring observation added by her hand to the margins of the manuscript.

Over the course of the last four years, my friends witnessed the (irregular) growth process of this project. In many respects, without them my living standard would not be quite the same. Some I would like to thank here explicitly. For keeping my head out of books, and reminding me of the virtues of disorganization I am particularly grateful to Marieke Schoonheim. Kavita Ziemann added zest, much zest, and the most unconventional views on dissertation writing and life in general I have heard any PhD student defend. The sharp and sound judgements of Marte Knigge – both Law School PhD and from Groningen, which says it all - saved me from many errors. Mark Heerink, Lisette van Eerten, and Marjolijn Esselink “grew up” with me as classicists. Sharing our households, my daily life has been intertwined with that of Lisa Koolhoven for most of the past eight years. She has shown remarkable tolerance for this PhD-project, which at times hit her in the form of piled up dishes, grumps, no-show appointments, and not-so-aesthetic interior design changes. On another level, she added many valuable insights and comments from her perspective as a social historian and friend. I am glad you were there.

Demographers, especially when working on family issues, are in danger of overstating the importance of the family. I am willing to run the risk, for I owe mine much. Not all parents are willing to support, both morally and financially, the study of a remote, unknown world. Statistically, I should have become a law or medicine student. But mine appreciated the unconventionality of this track, and I am most grateful for that. To my brother, Remco Hin, I must express great debts and appreciation for his willingness to evolve into, most likely, the only Dutch geologist with a side-job as a reviewer and editor of massive bodies of text on Roman demography.

The origin of my interest in ancient history is prosaic rather than poetic. I was bought into it by promises of chocolate bars and biscuits, of significantly more school field trips, and, most importantly, of cutbacks on gym class and German. If it would not have been a classics teacher providing these rosy prospects, my future would have been different. Once drawn in, I got stuck.

The topic quite interesting in itself, this is surely also the place to credit drs. Patrick Nieuwenhuysse. Pretty soon he turned out to be the best teacher I ever met: our culture in 'nature' (a landscape of clay, grain, potatoes, and beets) and, at least as I recall it, most startling and hilarious.

Finally, I must acknowledge that some of the opportunities to make this book a better book were lost not because I simply forgot about them. Rather, recalcitrance and stubbornness tempted me willingly to ignore some pieces of advice that might have made sense, and probably did so. I suspect the Spinhof family shall forgive me for attributing this to genetic predisposition – especially when adding that, for once, I am glad to place myself in a tradition.

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