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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.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	
1	Ancient demography: a very short historiography	2
2	Population history and late republican Italy: the traditional view	4
3	Aims and organization	5
4	Sources and methods	6
	Ancient...	6
	And modern	8

PART I

Economic and ecologic parameters

2	Framing the economic setting: structure and development	
1	Why economy?	11
2	Outline	13
3	Malthus and population ecologists on the limits to growth	14
4	The search for Italy's carrying capacity, and for economic growth	16
5	Endogenous growth: diversification and intensification in agriculture	17
6	Can efflorescence occur in a pre-industrial context?	22
7	Generating real economic growth: factors and indicators	24
8	The impact of Empire on the Italian heartland: resource inflow	25
	8.1 Slaves and other types of booty	26
	8.2 War indemnities	27
	8.3 Taxes and rents	28
9	Building a network of connections: trade and specialization	31
10	Institutions: legal and political settings	35
11	Conclusion: defining ancient growth	37
3	Climate and climatic change	
1	Introduction	41
2	Climate dynamics and evidence	42
3	Economic effects	49
4	Demographic effects	53

PART II

The demographic parameters: mortality, fertility, and migration

	General introduction to part II	59
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4	Mortality	
1	Life expectancy at birth	60
2	Sex and death: were men the privileged sex?	61
3	Geography and locus-specific disease pools	63
4	The mortal effects of crowding	65
5	The distribution of mortality by age	65
6	Shortcuts from cradle to grave: female infanticide	66
7	War mortality	72
	7.1 Soldier mortality: killed in battle	73
	7.2 The death toll of a life in barracks	75
	7.3 Losses to village and family: the demographic impact of military recruitment	77
8	Demographic responses to mortality crisis: Hannibal's deaths and postwar recovery. A case study	81
	8.1 Conferral of postponed marriages and childbirths	83
	8.2 Upsurge of remarriage rates	86
	8.3 Earlier marriage	86
	8.4 The recovery bonus of Darwinian selection	89
	8.5 Was the end of recovery growth the end of growth?	90
9	Conclusion	90
5	Fertility	
1	Ancient fertility decline?	91
2	Generation next. Marriage and household formation	93
	2.1 Marriage ages	93
	2.2 Explaining age gaps between marriage partners	96
	2.3 The neo-local household – a universality?	98
	2.4 Labour opportunities: alternatives to subsistence farming	102
3	Childbearing: strategies to limit its burden.	103
	3.1 Sharing burdens: the contribution of grandparents and the community	104
	3.2 Spacing burdens: birth intervals	105
4	The desirability of children	108
	4.1 Playing daddy's wallet out? Evidence for infanticide, abandonment and abortion	108
	4.2 Little gold mines? Children and their contributions to the household economy	110
	4.3 Offspring as life insurance: 'old-age' support	114
	4.4 The relative importance of old age: perceptions	114
	4.5 Sons for husbands	117
5	Female empowerment and fertility	120
6	Peer pressure and reproduction	122
7	Differential stakes, divergent outcomes: elite, mass, and offspring	124
8	Fertility decline? A summary and conclusion	127
9	The census: stagnating population figures and the economics of non-registration	128

6	Migration	
1	Introduction	132
2	Typology of migration	133
	2.1 Causes of migration	133
	2.2 Types of migration	137
3	The urban graveyard revisited: urban migration and death	138
4	Marriage and children: a migrant's fata morgana? On migration and sex ratios	144
	4.1 Urbanization: the young ones on the move	146
	4.2 Who gets the job? Labour opportunities and the demographic composition of migration flows	147
	4.3 Inscriptional evidence on sex ratios among urban migrants	149
	4.4 A city of men, or a recording bias?	150
5	Sex and the city. Did migrants reproduce?	153
6	'The urban graveyard' and the issue of resident population reproduction	156
7	The macro-dimension: internal migration and Italy's population development	156
8	The final factor: migration across the Alps	159

PART III

Population size and living standards

7	Counting Romans	
1	Introduction	163
2	Traditional interpretations and outline	163
3	Manpower in Polybios: a new scenario?	165
4	Wanted: men for war. The allied forces in 225 BC	166
5	A citizen a soldier, a soldier a citizen? The figures from 234 BC and 225 BC	167
6	An alternative reconciling hypothesis: <i>iuniores</i> in Polybius and <i>sui iuris</i> in the census?	170
7	The Roman demographer's puzzle: who are the <i>capita civium censa</i> ?	172
8	Other definitions of the census population in the ancient sources	174
9	Serve, pay, and vote: the aims of registration	176
	9.1 Recruitment	176
	9.2 Fiscal aims	177
	9.3 Registering the electorate	179
10	The practice of census taking	181
11	Inclusion of widows and orphans under Augustus: implications for population size	183
12	A population category on the rise: the <i>sui iuris</i>	188
	12.1 Overcount	188

12.2	Emancipation of (grand)children	189
12.3	Women <i>sui iuris</i> in a <i>sine manu</i> marriage	189
12.4	Freedmen: a demographically anomalous subpopulation	190
12.5	Citizens outside Italy: registration and emigration	190
13	Measure and man: Augustus and the census shift	192
14	Concluding remarks	194
8	Demography, economy, and inequality: quality of life	
1	Introduction	195
2	Economic and population developments during the last two centuries of the Roman Republic: a summary	195
2.1	Economy	195
2.2	Demography	196
3	Real wages: living standards of ordinary citizens from an economic perspective	198
4	Malthusian windows of opportunity: demographic decline and rising real wages	203
5	The benefits of life in the core of an Empire	204
6	The demographic approach: life expectancy	204
6.1	Breastfeeding practices and differential infant mortality	207
6.2	Stature and nutritional status as indicators of differential living standards	210
7	Demographic and economic dynamics and their implications for the history of late Republican Italy: a conclusion	211
	Appendix 1	215
	Census figures 508 BC – AD 48	
	Bibliography	217
	Nederlandse Samenvatting	
1	Wat en waarom? Thema en vraagstelling	243
2	Hoe? Opzet en bronnen	244
3	De individuele hoofdstukken	245
4	Dus? Conclusies	250
	Curriculum Vitae	251
	Stellingen	252