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## **Roman gentrification: from the sixth century BC to the death of Trajan**

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## 9 Urban transformation and Roman gentrification

This study focussed on the Late Republican and Early Imperial Roman towns on the Italian peninsula, searching for commonalities and differences in their urban transformation. This transformation has been captured by studying towns that already existed and flourished before the Roman expansion across Italy, with the Celtic north as a special case. By using the Roman gentrification model, I tried to break boundaries between themes, such as the ancient economy, the art historical focus on house decorations, the monumentalisation of Roman towns, epigraphic evidence and the results of intensive field surveys. This meant that the explanatory model attempted to be more inclusive and considered a wider range of evidence types.

In this chapter I will answer the research questions by describing the ideal type of Roman town, followed by a summary of the proposed explanatory model and analysing factors that contributed to the different outcomes observed in the case history chapters. The research question was how and why towns on the Italian peninsula transformed from relatively independent (pre-Roman) commuter-farmer towns to the often elite-dominated *coloniae* and *municipia* of the Early Imperial period and whether gentrification theory could help to explain this transformation? Several sub questions were formulated to help answer the main question: What were the underlying mechanisms driving change for the Roman towns on the Italian peninsula? Which social groups lived in these towns and in which activities were they involved? Why did some Roman towns prosper, while others had a marginal existence? The factors that will be discussed in this concluding chapter are the properties and organisation of the pre-Roman settlement pattern, the nature of the integration process, the impact of patronage and human agency on Roman towns, and investments in Roman towns by the elite and affluent groups.

### 9.1 THE TYPICAL ROMAN TOWN ON THE ITALIAN PENINSULA FROM THE LATE REPUBLICAN TO EARLY IMPERIAL PERIOD

Before discussing the Roman gentrification model, I had to describe the physical and population dimensions of the Late Republican and Early Imperial Roman towns on the Italian peninsula and how most of them functioned. This was achieved by contrasting Early Imperial Roman towns to the typical Classical Greek town, the Normal*polis*. Most of the Roman towns on the Italian peninsula had a relatively modest population size, in this study I called them Normal*urbes*. Large towns were an exception, they often

attributed to special functions related to transporting goods and agricultural surpluses, for example, harbour towns and towns located on nodes in the road system.

The Normal*urbs* had a more varied housing stock (300–1,000 m<sup>2</sup>) than the Normal*polis* (175–200 m<sup>2</sup>). This difference had great social and economic implications, since it reflected the status and wealth of the houses' owners, and the activities they were involved in. Moreover, the Roman house provided more space per person than the Classical Greek house. In fact, social mixing and combining commercial and residential functions were observed in the *insulae* of Early Imperial Roman towns, where the *domus* became the centre of activity and thus of the accumulation of wealth. The average house plot in the Normal*urbs* (620 m<sup>2</sup>) could house 10–15 people. This meant that the families who owned the properties in the Normal*urbs* were surrounded by servants, slaves and other dependents, indicating that the owners were affluent. The typical Roman town was less populous than its Greek counterpart, with 1,900 versus 2,900 people, respectively.

Landownership was vital to the elite and affluent people living in Roman towns. Still, the way they made money was diversified through their dependents into crafts, trade, construction, banking and rentiership. The poor often worked the land, either as smallholders or as tenants on the estates of the urban-based landowning families.

The Normal*urbs* had a significantly larger hinterland (200–500 km<sup>2</sup>) than the Normal*polis* (25–100 km<sup>2</sup>). The large hinterland of the typical Roman town offered space for a large rural population and more space to produce agricultural surpluses. The total population, urban and rural, of the typical Early Imperial Roman town was 12,600 people, compared to 3,900 people for the typical Classical Greek town, which was caused by the population density of towns, the political boundaries and the size of the productive hinterland. The Greek *polis* size and territory were closely tied to the constraints of a one-hour commuter-farmer travel time (5–6 km), with a particular land use pattern. This required the upper range of land use of at least 45% for the town to feed itself. The total population of the Roman town was also determined by land needed for feeding its population, but offered more degrees of freedom. At a land use of 30%, a hinterland with a radius of 12 km (420 km<sup>2</sup>) would be required. The landscape offered more room for producing surplus, depending on land use and carrying capacity of the hinterland.

This comparative assessment led to the conclusion that from a social and economic perspective, the Early Imperial Roman towns on the Italian peninsula differed significantly from the Classical Greek *poleis*. Contrary to Classical Greek *poleis*, the

Roman towns of the Early Imperial period did not wage war and destroy each other to gain more hinterland, and as central places they often existed evenly distributed across the landscape, reflecting their importance and the special functions they fulfilled in their region in terms of their legal, administrative, finance, entertainment and religious roles. Roman towns could compete for prestige, wealth and elite interest, which enhanced the position of the town in the settlement hierarchy.

## 9.2 THE ROMAN GENTRIFICATION MODEL

The key concepts and main theses of gentrification theories identified the most important elements that describe the evolution and processes at work in modern towns. To summarize: the presence of an affluent group of ‘gentrifiers’ that takes an interest in labour-class residential areas of inner cities; the existence of a rent gap that drives the local property market, leading to the displacement of the labour class; a shift from employment in manufacturing to services; increased professionalisation and a reduced demand for the lowest occupational level; and finally the look and feel of a district and a landscape of conspicuous consumption, which includes urban renewal, the consumption of leisure and art, and the appearance of specialised shops, professional services and commercial activities. These concepts and theories were adapted to apply to the Roman towns on the Italian peninsula of the Late Republican and Early Imperial period. The study of transformation of selected towns and regions and looking at them in the context of gentrification resulted in a coherent explanatory model for describing Roman urbanism: a Roman gentrification model.

This model connects the five key elements – the prerequisites – for Roman gentrification to the underlying processes and mechanisms in the pre-Roman and Roman periods. The starting point is the displacement of commuter-farmers by a growing group of affluent people who wanted to live in Roman towns. This group existed of either new arrivals or urban slaves who were manumitted on a relatively large scale. Patronage, the value of local citizenship and the economic strategies of the elite resulted in competition within and between prosperous *familiae* for urban space, resulting in a more dynamic property market.

The hinterland in the proximity of the towns, which had previously been being exploited by commuter-farmers, was presumably monopolised by the elite. The competition between the urban (sub)elite groups found its material expression in the demand for luxury, visual display and leisure, and in investment in public buildings. This created an urban economy with large parts of the town’s population working in urban production,

crafts, services or leisure. Competition between affluent members of a town, ties of patronage, and mobility resulted in these groups having locational preferences. These preferred towns prospered more than others. This process was fuelled by the influx and redistribution of wealth and the monetisation of the Roman economy due to the import into Italy of spoils, consisting of precious metals and slaves, as well as regular taxes from the conquered provinces.

In this study nine Roman towns were studied in different level of detail, depending on the available evidence. Roman gentrification has been confirmed for Pompeii and Praeneste, while being short-lived present at Antium. Insufficient evidence for Roman gentrification was found for Veii and Volaterra and absent for Lanuvium and Metapontum. Finally, Crustumerium and Doganella disappeared in the Roman period.

### 9.3.1 PRE-ROMAN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND CHANGES AFTER THE ROMAN CONQUEST

Most of the Augustan regions located in the centre and south of the Italian peninsula had an organically grown pre-Roman settlement pattern of independent towns, with a population of mainly commuter-farmers. The Roman urban network was created on this basis, as most *coloniae* and *municipia* were established in existing towns. Connectivity to the Roman road system was an important prerequisite for towns to prosper. This made a difference especially for the former Etruscan territorial towns of the Southern and coastal area of Etruria, which became marginalised. In contrast, the towns in the Bay of Naples were well connected to Rome.

The Roman towns of Latium and Campania, two regions of early Roman expansion and part of the first Augustan region, show an interesting difference. The towns of Campania had double the average built-up area than the towns of Latium (Rome excluded), at 44.7 versus 22.4 ha, while the size of the average hinterlands was similar, at 187 versus 160 km<sup>2</sup>. Both settlement patterns were organically formed. The larger size of the Campanian towns reflected the high fertility of the slopes of Vesuvius and the *ager Campanus*. Campania could support large urban populations and generate agricultural surpluses for Rome. Because of these populous Campanian towns, this region had an exceptionally high degree of urbanisation in the Roman world.

The urban settlement pattern of Etruria was dominated by fourteen towns, of which eight were situated in the south and on the north-western coast. These towns had large

walled areas and were populous in the Late Orientalising and Archaic period. The inland Etruscan towns were more moderate in size, which reflected the productive capacity of their hinterlands. If the larger secondary Etruscan towns are included, most of the population lived in an urban context. The downturn of the Etruscan towns in South Etruria during the fifth and fourth centuries BC was accompanied by a general decline in population. Veii, for example, saw a 90% reduction in population compared to the Late Orientalising and Archaic period. The urban population was estimated to 2,000–2,500 people shortly before the Roman conquest. In Southern Etruria, a network of secondary Etruscan towns promoted by the Romans to official status, in combination with Roman land confiscations, colonial foundations, and land distribution, resulted in a radical change in the settlement pattern. In the Albegna Valley, where the large population centre of Doganella was destroyed, a colonial landscape of Normalurbes appeared.

With the Roman conquest of Southern Italy, the Greek colonial *poleis* lost their independence and their economic and commercial networks geared towards the Eastern Mediterranean, which were superseded by a new Roman network of trade and communication. The Roman network included relatively small Roman colonial towns, located both inland and in the coastal areas, and a few large Roman port towns (Tarentum, Brundisium, Rhegium). The former Greek colonial *poleis* of the Gulf of Taranto went into decline or disappeared, except for Thurium (Greek Sybaris). The transformation of the former Greek colonial *poleis* in Southern Italy was driven by changes in the economy of the Roman Empire and the loss of their role as the granary for a large population in its hinterland. The rural landscape changed from intensive cultivation of grain to more extensive stockbreeding and herding. This extensive farming also appeared in many areas with high soil fertility. However, these strips of fertile land were spread out over a relatively large coastline. This suggests that other factors also played an important role, such as the cost of bulk goods, the cost of transportation, and connectivity to Rome. Southern Italy could not compete with Etruria, Campania, Sicily, and Northern Africa.

The regions of Northern Italy occupied by Celtic tribes of farmer-warriors did not have a network of independent towns on the eve of the Roman expansion. The Celtic-dominated region required more military attention than other regions. The pattern of Roman towns in the Celtic north was therefore mostly the result of the actions of Late Republican army leaders and the first emperors. The Veneti, who already had several large towns and were supportive to the Romans; saw less military intervention. The general picture of Picenum is a region that consisted of Normalurbes based on the

organic settlement pattern of villages granted legal status by the Romans. The fertile Po Valley was relatively isolated from the major trade routes and did not play a large role in feeding Rome; crops from the area were produced for local consumption and maybe trade with Dalmatia.

In Sicily, the many small agriculture-focussed inland towns of the third to first century BC, once part of a Sicily-centric pre-Roman economic system, started to decline as population centres when the island was absorbed by Rome. The settlement pattern changed in the course of the Early Imperial period, with people and economic activities concentrated in several large coastal towns. The island had better connectivity with Rome and a different history than the towns on the Italian peninsula, especially in terms of the extraction of agricultural surplus and wealth from the island. Favourable ecological conditions existed around Mount Etna, but this did not lead to a dense pattern of relatively large Roman towns. On the contrary, the pre-Roman inland agricultural focused towns largely disappeared.

### 9.3.2 THE NATURE OF THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

The second interesting factor emerging from the case histories is the nature of the integration process. Some towns showed a violent transition and a break with the pre-Roman past, while others were allies to Rome, which allowed for a more negotiated transition. The third group were towns on which a Civil War veteran colony was imposed. Finally, some towns disappeared.

A violent transition was observed at Etruscan Veii and Doganella. These towns were close to Rome and were in demographic decline before the Roman conquest. Doganella, located in the Albegna Valley, was conquered by the Romans under conditions that cannot be reconstructed. The town disappeared in the transition to the Roman period and the Albegna Valley became a colonial landscape of *Normalurbes* (Cosa, Heba and Saturnia) with land distributions to colonists. With the disappearance of Doganella and the introduction of these Roman colonial towns, in combination with the repopulation of the countryside, the urban to rural balance shifted towards a predominantly rural population.

The region of the Celtic tribes of Northern Italy is fundamentally different from that of peninsular Italy. The Celtic population was primarily rural-based and the landscape was probably filled with villages, with a farmer-warrior population. As these Celtic tribes

were hostile to Rome, the integration must have been violent. In this region the Romans could, from the beginning, introduce elite-dominated, self-governing towns that could control relatively large hinterlands.

On the other hand, the transition into the Roman period at Etruscan Volaterra and the Cecina Valley did not occur via conquest, but via senatorial and later imperial patronage. Patronage assured that the status quo was maintained for the local elite with respect to the social order and property rights. The Etruscan elite were absorbed into the Roman social order and legal structures. The transition of Lanuvium into a Roman *municipium* might have been negotiated by the local elite, as the rural hinterland of Lanuvium showed signs of continuity. However, the town did not flourish in the Roman period. In both cases, the traditional elite kept their old role and position, but the fortunes of the towns depended on the ties of patronage to Roman elites, which was stronger for Volaterra. A negotiated transition was likely for many of Rome's allies before the Social War.

During the first century BC and early first century AD, veteran colonies were founded in existing towns. These veterans were numerous and some had made their fortune during the conquest of the Eastern provinces and the civil wars that plagued the last century of the Late Republican period. During the civil wars, soldiers had approval from their generals to pillage and shared in the spoils. As a result, the towns where these veteran colonists settled became larger and more prosperous. Some of the veteran colonists were prosperous enough to enter the *ordo decurionum*. Being affluent, many of the veteran colonists of the Late Republican period were probably rentiers and not hands-on farmers like previous groups of settlers.

Finally, some pre-Roman towns were abandoned. The examples discussed are Crustumerium, several of the large Greek colonial *poleis* of the south, and the agriculture-focussed small towns of inland Sicily.

### 9.3.3 THE IMPACT OF PATRONAGE AND HUMAN AGENCY ON ROMAN TOWNS

One of the important factors of Roman gentrification was patronage and human agency resulting in the prosperity of Roman towns. The elite and their dependents preferred to reside in towns thus the social composition, with a prosperous elite, affluent groups and dependents tied to their *patronus*, was important for the success or failure of Roman towns.



Besides the Civil War veterans, the descendants of urban slaves, freedmen and freeborn, played a key role in the urban transformation and development. For the Bay of Naples, the formal relationship between the town elite, freedmen, and freeborn is well attested. Freedmen remained a key part of the *familia* and conducted business on behalf of their *patronus*. They engaged in crafts, ran workshops and supported the social and economic foundations of Roman towns. Indeed, a clear rise in managerial and professional occupations occurred. As a reward, those involved profited from the fortunes of their *patronus*. The system of patronage was key in the transformation of the town: the (sub)elite strived to maximise social and economic control to secure and increase their position and status. They achieved this through dependents—slaves, freedman and freeborn—in key positions in a chain that created wealth and status.

The redistribution of wealth among the town population happened via all types of exchange, such as market trade, the production of daily necessities that required little specialisation (bakeries, *tabernae*, wine bars), the production of luxury goods (e.g., jewellery, metalworking, table wares, glass, furniture and perfumes), various services (e.g., barbers, prostitutes, hostels and inns), building constructions associated with urban renewal and benefactions, and specialised labour associated with the aesthetics of public and private space. This meant that a diverse labour force existed within the Roman town. Distinct production quarters were absent in most towns; workshops formed an integrated part of the same *insulae* owned by the *patronus*, where his elaborate *domus* house was often situated too.

Housing was also an area of (sub)elite competition in towns. At the domestic level, within *insulae*, the sizes and shapes of houses differed and property boundaries were subject to continuous change, reflecting the differences in social status and wealth of the owner. Some of the *patronus*' dependents resided in workshops and comparatively small single-room houses connected to the house of the *patronus*. The most affluent members of the town lived in their own elaborate houses; others rented an *atrium* house or apartment. The most extensive and diverse evidence of this comes once again from Pompeii, where both a dynamic property market and a significant rental market have been attested. The existence of a dynamic property and rental market is likely based on the large pool of different types and sizes of houses at Pompeii. It has been estimated that one out of five houses were rented out, and the presence of a dynamic property market is demonstrated via the continuously changing property boundaries within *insulae*.

The property market was a source of income for the elite and affluent people who owned property in Pompeii. Oscan Pompeii transformed into a town of the elite, with service staff, crafts and services specialists who played an important role for elite investment in the regional and wider business. The occupational structure of the town changed as a result, to a mix that included trade, services, and specialised knowledge. As a result of this transformation process, which included the rise of an affluent group of citizens in need of elaborate houses, the influx of wealth and slaves, and people working in hospitality, crafts and trades, which resulted in (tenant) commuter-farmers being displaced from the town into the hinterland.

A key piece of evidence of the importance of freedmen and their descendants comes from Herculaneum, where they constituted most of the town's population. This situation must have been similar in the other towns in the Bay of Naples. This region profited from senatorial and equestrian presence, patronage, and conspicuous consumption. As one of the favourite locations of the Roman elite, Campania was among the first regions to benefit from the second century BC influx of wealth and slaves from the conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean. This changed the economy due to the increase in elite spending power and strengthened the transformation of Roman towns through urban investment and renewal. It has been estimated that about 20–25% of Pompeian households were affluent in the Early Imperial period. The Bay of Naples was in many ways exceptional, but this social and economic transformation of its towns must have occurred, at a more modest scale, in other regions.

The evidence from the towns of Latium shows the diversity among Roman towns in the region. These differences were associated with the presence or absence of affluent people, the networks of patronage and the economy of the town. Praeneste flourished, with its population involved in long-distance trade; the town was one of the favourite places of the Roman elite and their entourage to escape from Rome, as it was less than one day's travel away. Lanuvium did not get the same elite interest and did not benefit from the influx of wealth and slaves. Antium offers a special case, where at first the impact of elite presence under emperor Nero caused the town to flourish, later followed by decline when the elite left. Thus, the elite's choices determined the historical trajectory of the town. The construction of the harbour did not lead to sustainable development and the region around Antium never became a second Bay of Naples.

The negative effects of the absence of an elite, patronage, and human agency are demonstrated at Metapontum. The decline of Metapontum was well underway before Hannibal chose it as a base. Most importantly, the houses and centre of the town were

in decline when the town was conquered by the Romans. The town was not attractive to the Roman elite. Perhaps the town never received *municipium* status; its hinterland may have been absorbed by nearby Heraclea or Tarentum. A *forum* and surrounding monumental buildings have not been discovered within the area of the supposed Roman town, suggesting that the town could have been a *vicus*. The rural settlement density was low, perhaps because the area had become the remote hinterland of another town. The only towns in Southern Italy that flourished in the Imperial period were the natural harbour towns of Tarentum, Brundisium, and Rhegium. These towns had important economic functions and attracted the attention of wealthy traders and their dependents. They also had extended hinterlands beyond Southern Italy.

In Sicily, the role of the elite changed, and with it the economic role of the towns. The success of the coastal Roman towns can be described within the framework of the proposed Roman gentrification model, especially regarding the locational preferences of the Roman elite, their affluent dependents, the bulking up of agricultural surpluses, and the development of a food- and crafts-centred town economy. These prosperous Sicilian towns were larger, more populous, and had a more elaborate public and domestic architecture, festivals, games, theatrical activities and elite and (sub)elite conspicuous consumption than the small towns that remained in inland Sicily.

#### 9.3.4 INVESTMENTS IN ROMAN TOWNS BY THE ELITE AND AFFLUENT GROUPS

Increased wealth and spending power were observed in Roman towns during the Late Republican and Early Imperial period, but differences between towns existed. Public benefaction by the elite and members of affluent groups, which found its material expression in urban renewal, public building programmes and monumentalisation of the town, was closely related to the prosperity of the town and competition between towns. Benefactions could be made by individual citizens of the town or undertaken and paid for by the towns' magistrates. In the Early Imperial period the *ordo Augustalium*, *collegia*, and senators, equestrians, or the emperor and his family or freedmen could also pay for benefactions. Competition among the elite and affluent groups in towns resulted in more elaborate public benefactions and lavishly decorated *atrium* and peristyle houses.

In the cases of Pompeii and Praeneste, their towns' elite and affluent members wanted to ensure that their towns would stand out, could compete with other Roman towns and was a desirable place to live, away from the large towns like Puteoli, Naples, Capua, and even Rome, but with excellent connectivity.

The high level of urban investment in public buildings in Latium, with its many self-governing towns, implied the presence of a wealthy local elite. A concentration of public buildings existed in the area nearest to Rome and in the towns located near the Bay of Naples in Campania, two regions favoured by the Roman elite.

The Roman towns of Campania had many public buildings, especially related to leisure and entertainment, but religious buildings, administrative and market structures were also well represented. This reflected the high degree of public benefactions compared to other regions on the Italian peninsula and the general prosperity of the elite and affluent groups. The wider population of the towns, such as craftsmen, shopkeepers and the less well-off, would have benefited from this redistribution of prosperity. The places of leisure, entertainment, and public display, such as theatres, amphitheatre and bath complexes, existed at high density in Campania and Northern Italy, which could also be associated with the large number of Civil War veteran colonies.

The high degree of public building activities in the province of Transpadana and the province of Venetia-and-Histria may have been caused by their relatively late incorporation into the Roman world. From the beginning, the Romans introduced elite-dominated, self-governing towns, with all the public amenities. Many of the towns of Northern Italy were colonies of Civil War veterans with ties of patronage to Roman generals, which potentially expedited building programmes. These building programmes required a significant labour force in construction-related professions. A dynamic property market could have secured a continuous need for specialist craftsmen, such as mosaicists, painters, sculptors, smiths, and carpenters. The fragmentary epigraphic evidence shows that *collegia* are most frequently attested in the towns of Northern Italy, bordering Umbria and the *ager Gallicus*. The most frequent *collegia* were the *collegia fabrum* (builders), *collegia centonariorum* (craftsmen and/or tradesmen of cloth and clothing) and *collegia fabrum tignariorum* (builders and carpenters).

A high degree of elite investments in public space was not limited to medium and large towns. The oversizing of public spaces relative to the size of the Roman towns, in combination with high rural settlement densities, was observed in Picenum. Perhaps these buildings were funded by absentee *patroni* that drove the monumentalisation of towns via benefactions. This oversizing of the public buildings emphasised their function as service centres for the surrounding territory.

#### 9.4 CLOSING COMMENTS

The framework of Roman gentrification has helped analyse differences between regions and towns and has augmented current understanding of Roman urbanism and its transformation. Unfortunately, Roman towns that approach the Normal*urbs* in social and spatial dimensions have not been well studied. The evidence for the Roman towns that were well-studied is fragmentary, which is a general problem in the fields of ancient history and archaeology. Nevertheless, the cases of prosperous towns all point to a mostly elite-dominated town structure and a relatively low degree of urbanisation, with Campania as the exception because of its exceptional fertility. This study has shown that not all Roman towns developed in the same way. It provides an explanatory model that offers a heuristic device for further studies on Roman urbanism by focussing research on the five prerequisites for Roman gentrification.