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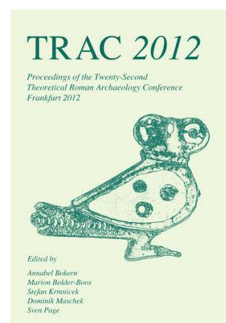

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The Internal Frontier: An African Model for Culture Change in South Central Italy (Fourth-third Centuries B.C.)

Roman Roth

Introduction

Between the mid-fourth and mid-third centuries B.C., south-central Italy – an area comprising parts of the modern regions of Campania, Abruzzo-Molise, Basilicata and Apulia – was the focal point of Rome's expansion across the Apennine peninsula. The surviving literary evidence provides ample, albeit not always reliable evidence for key events such as the Samnite Wars, as well as Rome's conflict with the Greek colony of Tarentum and the ensuing Pyrrhic War. The successful outcome of all of these from the Roman point of view, then, resulted in military and political hegemony across the region. In addition to, and even more so than the evidence of ancient written sources, the archaeological record for this period is extremely rich: it ranges from the hill-fort sites of the interior, mountainous parts of Lucania and Samnium, which can often be linked to the contemporary wars with Rome, to the earliest, firmly attested examples of the Roman practice of settling colonies and municipia in their former enemies' territories.

These two prominent types of site serve to illustrate the cultural contrasts that are frequently drawn between the Romans and their Italic opponents, and which are regarded as a key factor in bringing about a series of conflicts in south-central Italy. Thus, the Romans' expansion south and to the mountainous interior of the peninsula is portrayed as part of a wider struggle between urban and tribal (or, in some cases, proto-urban) modes of existence. In this way, the founding of colonies and, to a lesser extent, municipia forms part of a deliberate drive of the Roman urban model into a hostile territory, with the ultimate result that the urban model and, by extension, centrally organised settlement of the countryside was to have prevailed by the end of the third century B.C. It is fair to say that this historical interpretation of the archaeological evidence – which has been described in overly schematic terms here – draws on or, at least, finds a parallel in the views expressed by ancient authors about Rome's wars in her subsequent settlement of south-central Italy, amongst whom Livy must be singled out as the most important. Yet, it should equally be recognised that the interpretation of those events in terms of a military and cultural struggle between urban and non-urban populations ought to happen against the wider background of long-term interaction between the Greek colonies of the coastal plains and the Italic populations of the rugged interior, and of the treatment of these relations by the Greek historiographical tradition. For this, too, not only focuses on the violent aspects of that wide-ranging interaction but also tends to cast it in the light of a struggle between the civilised cities and their uncivilised assailants who had begun to push towards the coast from the later fifth century B.C. Most obviously, the connection between Greek and Roman takes on this type of conflict is provided by the events that took place at Neapolis during 327 to 326 B.C., and which provided

Rome with a welcome pretext for expanding into the Samnite interior on behalf of their Neapolitan allies – the opponents of whom had called the Samnite garrison in to protect their city (Livy viii. 23)! This familiar episode, in fact, provides a complex and, in the present context, very significant scenario of the fuzzy modes of interaction which this article re-examines.

This paper seeks to sketch an alternative approach towards the dynamics of culture change in south-central Italy during the fourth and third centuries B.C., as an alternative for which the term 'Hellenistic period' is used throughout. As its heuristic basis, the proposed approach takes the model of the 'internal' frontier developed for the study of historical Sub-Saharan Africa by Igor Kopytoff (1987), and thus presents a departure from linear and one-directional models of frontiers. The questionable relevance of the latter to the Roman world has already been pointed out for other geographical areas and later time periods by other critics (chiefly, Whittaker 1994). This paper identifies four key areas of cultural similarity between historical sub-Saharan Africa and South-central Italy that render the 'internal frontier' an attractive proposition within the context of the present discussion. By doing so, this adds a decidedly theoretical slant on this issue of culture-change and, furthermore, focuses exclusively on the processes involved in the emergence of 'Roman culture' during the period of the city's expansion across the south-central part of the Italian peninsula.

The 'internal frontier'

For the Sub-Saharan African scenarios of his study, Kopytoff's prime concern is to explain how frontiers could serve as forces in bringing about transformation (as previously argued in a classic study of North American frontiers by F.J. Taylor), as well as continuity and stability (not accounted for by Taylor's model). The combination of these three factors in the majority of African societies, Kopytoff argues, could only be explained satisfactorily once evolutionary models of social change (i.e. from primitive to increasingly complex) are replaced by one that focused on intra-regional frontiers as the lines of engagement along which such societies emerged 'out of the bits and pieces – human and cultural – of existing societies' (Kopytoff 1987: 3). Specifically, Kopytoff takes issue with the anachronistic dichotomy between tribal and more developed societies, as well as with the concomitant postulate that conflicts between the two – along supposedly linear boundaries – should always result in the former being superseded by the latter (Kopytoff 1987: 3–4). In addition to drawing on an inappropriate paradigm rooted in nineteenth-century nationalism, the orthodox view is at odds with the evidence provided by a large number of case studies conducted widely across the southern part of the African continent. These suggest much more dispersed patterns of new settlements emerging: while the majority of these may only have been of short-term significance, others came to form nuclei of more durable structures and, in some cases at least, of future metropolitan areas (Kopytoff 1987: 5–6).

Two shared factors, in particular, underpin the emergence of such settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa: first, they result from an underlying tendency towards human mobility,

which may become especially acute when triggered by factors such as political conflict and shortage of resources in the migrants' societies of origin (Kopytoff 1987: 17–18). Second, the migrant groups head for and eventually set up new settlements in areas that are perceived as providing economic opportunities and 'as lacking any legitimate political institutions and as being open to legitimate intrusion and settlement – this even if the areas are in fact occupied by organized polities' (Kopytoff 1987: 11). Rather than being situated between large geographical areas, these 'open areas nestling between organized societies' are usually 'internal to the larger regions in which they are found' and may therefore be defined as 'an "internal" or "interstitial frontier"' (Kopytoff 1987: 9).

To this might be added a third factor which would also appear to be especially significant in the context of south-central Italy: the frontiersmen, produced by their polities of origin, provide the agency at the centre of internal-frontier dynamics. These take the form of interaction between frontiersmen 'from culturally kindred or at least similar societies', and thus contribute to 'a structured distribution of culture patterns, some being very widely distributed and others being more locally confined' (Kopytoff 1987: 14–15).

Four factors provide the basis on which the frontier zones involved in Romano-'native' interactions in south-central Italy (as well as in other areas) may, in general, be defined as 'internal' in Kopytoff's sense. These are, first, a widely shared tendency towards human mobility; second, the existence of micro-regions and thus micro-regional boundaries within wider cultural and geographical entities; third, the absence of comprehensively enforced means of control by one centre, be it Rome or one of the south Italian coastal *metropoleis*; and, fourth, the existence of considerable, structural homologies amongst the societies interacting along and across those frontiers. The following discussion fleshes out these general points of congruence with some more detailed observations.

Human Mobility

During the Archaic and Hellenistic periods, south-central Italy saw the movement – at different levels of intensity and scale – of various population groups. Amongst these, the phenomenon of transhumance is probably the most widely discussed but, at the same time, also the thorniest and most easily misunderstood issue. For the most part, these problems relate to the chronology of transhumant behaviour. While it is now clear that many of the drove-tracks identifiable in the landscape date to the centuries following the Roman conquest – as a result of large-scale cattle herding – or do not even go back further than the Aragonese period, the geography of the area would have lent itself to mobile herding since prehistoric times. In a number of cases, this is furthermore confirmed by evidence for ritual activities along those routes, which dates to the period before the Roman conquest. One effect of seasonal mobility was, of course, an increased level of contact and potential conflict both amongst different mobile groups, and between them

and settled populations upon whose territories they encroached, and thus in areas that could be defined as internal-frontier zones, as defined above.

Next, south-central Italy is known for a historical phenomenon to which ancient literary sources (e.g., Livy xxii. 9–10) refer as 'sacred spring' (*ver sacrum*). This seems to have taken the form of a ritual selection of a young sector of the population, who subsequently departed from their area of origin in search for new settlement. Although it was represented in ritual terms, the 'sacred spring', of course, fulfilled an important demographic function by easing potential pressures on resources which, in the mountainous areas of the inner peninsula, could have been scarce in places. This search for new economic opportunities and a new home, together with the resultant emergence of new group identities closely corresponds to some of the internal-frontier patterns identified for Sub-Saharan Africa by Kopytoff, and which may, of course have happened in conjunction with the movement of livestock discussed in the preceding paragraph.

It was remarked above that violent interaction could be a result of the kinds of mobility patterns discussed here. A particular type of mobility, known from both the archaeological record and literary sources, married economic motivation to violent results. This is the phenomenon of mercenary warfare (Tagliamonte 1994), which saw men from the Lucanian and Samnite populations be employed in the services of the Greek cities of the coast, and which often resulted in the long-term resettlement of these mercenaries following their armed service, sometimes in direct contravention of their former employers' wishes.

Finally, it is essential to discuss the subject of colonisation within the context of human mobility. Since the Archaic period, the coastal areas of south-central Italy as far north as Campania and Apulia had been settled by Greek colonists and their descendants. This had, of course, led to interaction – both peaceful and violent – between the Greek and indigenous populations, and, as a result, the emergence of shared cultural traits that has traditionally been explained in terms of a process of 'Hellenisation' (*cf*. Curti, Dench and Patterson 1996), and the long-term significance of which is discussed in more detail below.

As far as the period of the Roman conquest is concerned, however, it is even more important to discuss the subject of Roman colonisation, which is here used to refer to the foundation of colonies of different legal status ('Latin' and 'Roman'), as well as to that of other types of settlements such as *municipia*. The debate of the last two decades has arrived at a point at which it has become generally accepted to question the function of such settlements as exclusively strategic expansions of Roman and Latin populations into enemy territory (contributors to Bradley and Wilson 2006). It is tempting to explain these levels of variability in the context of the different frontier situations into which such new settlements were inserted, and which conditioned both their internal structures and their relationships with the regions around them. In an extreme case such as the coastal citizen colony of Buxentum this even went as far as the gradual migration of the settlers from the urban centre of the colony into its hinterland (Fracchia and Gualtieri 2011), which further illustrates that human mobility did not necessarily have to cease with the completion of the Roman conquest of south-central Italy. In another case, the Lucanian

centre at Civita di Tricarico appears to have been deserted after the Hannibalic War, and its inhabitants to have moved to the new settlements at Venusia and Grumentum. Yet, the old centre appears to have continued to serve them as an important point of reference within the ritual landscape, as is strongly suggested by the second-century *domus* and temple that have been excavated on the acropolis, and which were frequented at least until the time of the Social War (De Cazanove 2001). Finally, some of the colonies of south- central Italy, such as Paestum, were constructed within existing urban contexts that had their own – in this case, Helleno-Lucanian – traditions (Gualtieri 2003); and these, in turn, may well have affected the character of the 'Roman' town-planning in this and in other cases (Russo Tagliente 1992; Isayev 2007: 43–45; *cf.* Sewell 2010). Thus, each instance of – as in the case of 'colonisation' – formalised mobility may have responded to the specific requirements of the frontier situation in which the movement took place, as well as to the cultural traditions of the frontiersmen, which informed how they interacted with those whom they encountered in the frontier zone. Even though the movements themselves may have been directed by certain authorities, which in many cases would have been the Roman state and its agents, their results should, therefore, be interpreted as specific to each case within its regional context.

Micro-Regionalism

As has been pointed out elsewhere (Roth 2012; *cf.* Antonacci Sanpaolo 2000: 90; contributors to Bradley *et al.* 2007), the 'region' presents a complex set of issues in the context of ancient Italy. More so than to any other case, this applies to central Italy during the period in question, owing to the patterns of mobility discussed in the preceding section, as well as to other cultural dynamics that have traditionally been analysed under the heading of 'Romanisation' (e.g., contributors to Roth and Keller 2007 [especially Herring 2007; Roth 2007a]; Wallace-Hadrill 2008; Herring 2010). In addition, the geographical features of central Italy add a physical aspect of connectivity and fragmentation. In symbiosis with the cultural dynamics, these conditions resulted in the emergence of individually distinctive yet interconnected and analogous micro-ecologies underpinning the phenomenon of micro-regionalism. Expanding on the model proposed for the study of Mediterranean history by P. Horden and N. Purcell (2000), these micro-regions formed dynamically changing units, and they were defined by the inseparable parameters of cultural action and physical space, kaleidoscopically viewed and thus ranging from the decidedly local to super-regional or even pan-Mediterranean levels. To name an example, Roman domination of the peninsula led to changing behaviours of production, distribution and consumption across central Italy as a whole, black-gloss pottery providing a useful case in point. At the same time, the resultant patterns were not homogeneous across the peninsula but, more often than not, they varied down to the level of individual settlements (Roth 2007b; Roth in press).

Micro-regionalism, of course, lends itself to producing a multitude of potential frontier-zones, be they between two or more individual, or two or more sets of micro-regions. Human mobility, then, decisively affected the shape of the south-central Italian

regions, so that routes of communication could become such frontier-zones or facilitate movement to and from a frontier zone (see also the discussion by Antonacci Sanpaolo 2000: especially 90–92); and it should be stressed here that the fragmented spaces of south-central Italy featured a variety of interconnected routes of communication, including roads, mountain tracks, rivers and, of course, maritime transport ranging from long-distance trade to *cabotage*. Thus, for instance, it would appear that the centres commonly known as hill-forts related to each other in a hierarchy of some kind, and that such hierarchies (or, possibly, heterarchies [see below]) may have been specific to certain micro-regions that had frontier-zones running between them. At the same time, there was a frontier between the interior areas settled by hill-forts and the land towards the coastal plain, and it may be plausibly suggested that this divide was not merely a result of geographical determinism but just as much resulted from cultural traditions and the choices resulting from them.

De-Centralisation

The cultural system of the micro-region was encouraged by the absence of rigorous forms of political control and organisation by a central government. It is undeniably the case that certain of the Greek colonies, such as Tarentum, as well as a number of indigenous centres in the interior (as, for example, the settlements at Monte Vairano [De Benedettis 1991] and Roccagloriosa [Fracchia and Gualtieri 1990]) seem to have exerted cultural and political influences that reached well beyond their immediate territories, thus making them ‘central places’; in addition, Rome increasingly entered the picture from the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. and, through her network of colonies, laid out a settlement hierarchy that has in the past been explained as a tool designed to relay systematically her central authority to the regions. However, it now needs to be acknowledged that the settlement structures which emerged in the context of the Roman conquest were far more heterogeneous than has previously been assumed, and the mobility which these patterns represented were shared by Romans, Latins and other population groups alike (e.g., La Regina 1970–71; Tagliamonte 1997: 152–153). In addition, even the Latin colonies were independent political units that – despite their shared place within the Roman military alliance system – often pursued their own interests and which may, furthermore, have differed from one another in their internal organisation (see also the preceding section). Indeed, it has often been remarked that the Roman political constitution provided little scope for the integration of outsiders and that, for this reason, her colonies and allied cities were, with the obvious exceptions of foreign and military policy, largely left to their own devices. In addition, the possibility and desirability of centrally controlled economic structures must have been strictly limited to a few instances and specific types of goods, and even in these cases – such as the supply of essential foodstuffs to Rome – the ‘central’ economy would have been dependent on what was available regionally and how it could be procured using the full gamut of supply routes (Morley 1996). The logic of this seamless interdependence of different levels of the economy – to the extent that the existence of a truly ‘central’

level may be called into question – is particularly well illustrated by the fact that, even within 'greater Rome' (the *suburbium*), the production, supply and consumption of craft-products and agricultural produce largely operated through networks and a system of mutual interdependence that could appositely be described as micro-regional (*cf.* the contributions to Jolivet *et al.* 2008).

Therefore, the absence of a strictly hierarchical system of political and economic authority created many points of intersection and contact between the different levels of cultural agency that were involved. These spaces of interaction could be defined as precisely the types of pockets of opportunity that constitute a central aspect of Kopytoff's concept of the internal frontier (Kopytoff 1987: 11; *cf.* above). At the same time, the fragmentation of the physical landscape, as well as the vacillation between economic marginality and abundance that could be found within relatively small areas, invites the suggestion that the interdependence created by such situations be expressed by the existence of structural heterarchies (*cf.* Crumley 1979: especially 144; McIntosh 2005: 14, 43–44): if even an area like the *suburbium* of Rome essentially behaved like a set of micro-regions, one should expect the same to have been the case in wider geographical units that were significantly more fragmented and internally diverse with regard to what was produced in one place but needed to be consumed elsewhere and thus supplied across a given region. Just as in suburban Rome, certain micro-regions and specific central places within them may have been hierarchically related to each other in terms of, say, political authority. At the same time, a politically superior place may have depended on another, politically inferior one in religious or economic terms. And just as the city of Rome was, in the event, politically superior to every other place in Italy, more so than any other city did she rely not only on a plethora of regional ecologies to satisfy her many requirements but also on the cultural dynamics along the internal frontiers – the zones of friction and interaction between those ecologies – that supplied the fragmented peninsula with its structural lifeblood and cohesion.

Structural homologies and shared cultural traditions

Much of the debate over the mechanisms of 'Romanisation' has focused on the potential for, and the reality of conflict that existed between different types of societies in south-central Italy and beyond. Thus, a contrast is frequently drawn between the urban centres of the Graeco-Roman and Etruscan traditions that existed on the coastal lowlands, and the tribally organised societies of the Samnites and Lucanians in the interior. In fact, both historiography and archaeology clearly document that the Greek cities of the Campanian and Apulian coast-lines had repeatedly fallen victim to the raids of their inland neighbours during the fifth century B.C. Most prominently, but not exclusively in the case of Paestum (see above), this resulted in the conquest of the city and a uniquely Helleno-Lucanian urban culture that not only produced celebrated tomb-paintings but also manifested itself in the use of the Lucanian language, written in a Greek alphabet, in official inscriptions (Gualtieri 2003: 19–23). Further north in Campania and Latium, Samnite tribes had successfully entered the coastal plain and settled into urban ways of

life that, as in Paestum, fully shared in what has been defined as the cultural *koine* of the time. Concurrently – and, again, in analogy to Paestum further south – these Samnites continued to maintain their links with the hinterland, to which they were ethnically, religiously and, no doubt, economically tied (e.g. by exchanging urban goods for the produce of a pastoral system); and it is through such links that one could also explain further waves of migration from the interior to the coast.

Thus, when the Romans started to become increasingly involved in south-central Italy, they entered a picture that, rather than by dichotomies between 'Greek' and 'native', or 'urban' and 'tribal', was characterised by a much more fluid and dynamic scenario of interaction in what may be described as shifting frontier zones. From what has been said so far and is evident from the historiographical record, this contact sometimes took the form of violent conflict. Yet, for the most part, one should be cautious not to be drawn into the moralising and ethno-centric agenda of the historiographical sources – which, interestingly, did take issue with the Italiote Greeks for being too involved with their barbarian neighbours (*cf.* Herring 2007) – but should, rather, focus on structural hybridity as a benign result of mobility. For example, the relative isolation that Greek colonies might have experienced during the early part of their existence would have been gradually removed once interaction with the 'native' hinterland intensified. It should also be emphasised that to imagine the frontier between Greek colonies and the interior as rigidly drawn would be anachronistic. By contrast, two or more potentially mobile groups were exploring the frontiers that were internal to their wider region, and which provided both sides with challenges and opportunities between and for each other. For a Greek city such as Paestum, a history of engagement with the hinterland in both violent and peaceful terms would have entailed both threats and opportunities, while the Lucanian takeover followed by the cultural 'Hellenisation' of the new dominant group – that was probably relatively small to start with and lived in symbiosis with the Greek inhabitants – meant that perceived ethnic and cultural boundaries between the populations of the region became increasingly blurred.

For this and other reasons (see above), this paper takes issue with the tenet, frequently expressed, that the 'Roman' practice of colonisation deliberately threw the spanners into the cultural workings of Samnite and Lucanian societies by interfering with routes of communication and imposing a way of urbanised existence, the latter including the settlement of peasant-smallholders in the hinterlands of the colonies. The conflicts that arose between different groups – and the Neapolitan example serves to demonstrate that these unfolded along lines that were by no means clear-cut (see above) – concerned resources and opportunities for which all parties involved competed in the frontier zones of their encounters; and which, more often than not, they may have shared with each other by the strategic, commercial sharing and redistribution of these resources in a peaceful manner. In contrast to F.W. Taylor's North American scenario, the frontier zones involved in this cross-frontier interaction were not necessarily 'closed', with one side being predisposed to dominate the other(s). Rather – and to follow a recent study of historical, two-way frontier-interaction in the Northern Cape of South Africa (Penn 2005) – south-central Italy before and during the period of the Roman conquest may be

conceptualised in terms of a space of open, internal frontiers: it was an arena of interaction between groups who were equipped with cultural knowledge that empowered them to be participants in a frontier situation, and who, as a result of long-term involvement, were able to accommodate self-interest with a sense of the motivations which they shared with those whom they encountered along the frontiers.

Conclusion

Four salient aspects of cultural dynamics in south-central Italy during the fourth to late third centuries B.C. invite a specific comparison to the internal-frontier scenario proposed by Kopytoff for Sub-Saharan Africa during the historical era. These are, first, a tendency towards mobility which, in the Italian scenario, explicitly includes colonisation; second, the existence of micro-regions in symbiosis with each other; third, and in connection to the fragmentation that also favoured micro-regionalism, the absence of all-encompassing central authorities going hand-in-glove with a potential tendency towards heterarchical structures, which merits being assessed in more detail elsewhere; and, fourth and finally, a significant degree of shared cultural traits that penetrate below the level of an elite-centred *koine*.

The significance of this model lies in the fact that it allows the incorporation of multiple situations involving cross-cultural encounters: it accounts for diversity without resorting to parochialism and, thus, to a heuristic *aporia* in dealing with regional diversity at an explanatory level (Terrenato 2001; *cf.* Patterson 1987). At the same time, internal-frontier dynamics help to account for the congruencies in cultural behaviour that can be observed across south-central Italy and beyond during the Hellenistic period. Mobility is, perhaps, the key factor that deserves further scrutiny here and has rightly done so in the past (*cf.* Torelli 1996). However, the fact that the motivations for mobility were so widely shared amongst contemporary societies of central Italy is in need of serious attention. Too much ink has been spilt during recent years on trying to de-centralise – and thus regionalise – the debate over 'Romanisation'. Yet, the pivotal challenge lies, first, in defining these very regions – and thus their boundaries – and, second, in finding plausible models to explain not only how these regions may have interacted but also how their interactions with one another may have led to cultural change. As demanded by N. Terrenato (1998) in an earlier volume in this series, such an explanation needs to aspire to be comprehensive. However, the model of *bricolage* proposed by him in that volume – whilst admirably disposing of the parochialist *aporia* alluded to earlier – is based on too structuralist a premise of binary opposites, the one of 'urban – non-urban' being a case in point. By contrast, and to remain with this specific binary opposite, the paradigm – which is, perhaps, a more felicitous expression than 'model' in the context of the present discussion – of the internal frontier makes it possible to conceptualise more fruitfully the ways in which the expansion of Rome across the Apennine peninsula could be analysed in terms of a wide variety of modes of cross-cultural interaction.

To end on a controversial note, and to go back to where this discussion began: the appropriateness of imperialism and the nation-state as paradigms for 'Romanisation'

have been in dire straits since M. Millett's *Romanisation of Britain* (1990; *cf.* Roth 2007b: chapter 1): for the study of Roman culture in Italy, it is now time to realise that, similarly, the presence or absence of cities and city-states as determinants of regional, cultural processes has to come under serious scrutiny, too. In contrast to the tenets of the literary record and, thus, text-driven excavation and survey, the paradigm of the internal frontier of Sub-Saharan Africa offers a plausible and, in fact, more realistic alternative to viewing these dynamics as foregone conclusions of simplistically conceived hierarchies.

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