

"Sullan" as Historical Arrangement and Discourse

This paper argues that post-Sullan Rome can be understood through the concept of a *political epistemic network*, a framework that explains how a critical mass of political actors operating within a network alongside experts in other domains of knowledge tend to reinforce a homogenous perspective and embed this within a society's institutions. During Sulla's dictatorship, his supporters wielded coercive state power through political violence. The group comprised those who joined with Sulla in the civil wars and benefitted from arrangements like the weakened tribunate, the marginalization of the equestrians, the redistribution of property, and the threat of violence. After his dictatorship, however, the term "Sullan" remained useful as "Sullan" influence persisted, not through continued violence but through the network effects stemming from institutional control, redistributed wealth, and strategic alliances. "Sullans" after Sulla are thus best understood in spatial terms, comprising those who remained literally and conceptually "in the city" where institutional proximity lent legitimacy, brought material benefit, and shaped intellectual discourse.

In comparison, the simultaneous expansion of Rome's imperial borders, paired with the widespread exclusions of the proscriptions, pushed competing perspectives away from the city into Italy and further afield. By the 40s BCE, what it meant to be "Sullan" emerged as a core site of contestation. Alternative viewpoints that had been excluded from Rome after the proscriptions had coalesced into what I call the *Italian Perspective*, that is, a discourse on *Sullanitas* that flourished in Italy among both Italians who blamed him for the outcome of the Social War, and Romans who faced exclusion under his regime.

“Sullan” is best understood both as an spatially-situated arrangement anchored “in the city” of Rome after the proscriptions, and as a discourse that sought to represent this arrangement from the standpoint of those affected by its exclusionary effects. After Sulla’s death, one didn’t need to choose to be “Sullan” to be a “Sullan,” as such. Rather, the institutional and discursive architectures resulting from the proscriptions constrained those who remained in the city even after the formal cessation of violence. Yet, simultaneously, the meaning of the term was contested later by strategic actors who exploited its instability to reframe the past and shape events in their own time. These representations continue to muddle the modern understanding of the term “Sullan” with far-reaching consequences for scholarship on the period.