

Building Bulwarks: An ArcGIS Model of Roads, Campaigns, and Colonies in Republican Italy

This paper presents a time-lapsed set of maps, created using ArcGIS (Global Information Systems) software, of Roman Republican military campaigns, road-building, and colonial foundations in Italy. While military success enabled the building of roads and foundation of colonies, the map demonstrates that the relationship between these three was neither simply causal nor static over time. Instead of roads and colonies arising automatically as symbols of Roman control over conquered territory, these large building projects resulted from a variety of motivations, which shifted in response to the needs of the founders or prevailing political conditions at the time of construction. To create the maps, I overlaid temporally distinct ‘layers’ of data about battles, colonies, and roads from Polybius, Livy, Strabo, et al., on a digital representation of Italy. The resulting maps show a simplified view of the activities which eventually spread Roman influence throughout the peninsula. When analyzed through landscape and network theories, however, this simplified view illustrates the effects of Roman statesmen’s personal ambitions and clientele building on the topography of Italy.

The analyzed map addresses the tension between ancient and modern interpretations of the relationship between colonization and Roman imperialism. Historians and politicians of the Middle and Late Republic took for granted that both road-building and colonization derived from Rome’s military superiority. Polybius comments on Rome’s prodigiously rapid dominance of the known world, thanks to Rome’s exceptional military (6.2.2). Livy reports that generals set their troops to road-building after successful campaigns to prevent idle trouble-making (39.2). Such roads later facilitated troop movements and also became the foci of colonization schemes. Cicero calls such colonies the ‘bulwarks of empire’ (*Agr.* 2.73). Based on these sentiments, which were expressed by men who had already witnessed a Rome in full command of a sizeable

empire, one might conclude that the Romans built roads and founded colonies as a direct result of military campaigns and for the purpose of promoting an imperialist policy during every phase of the Roman Republic.

Recent scholarship on Roman colonization efforts in Italy, however, demonstrates that there were several distinct phases of colonization during the Republic (cf. Chiabà (2011) on the early Republic, Bispham (2006) on the middle Republic, and Keppie (1983) on the late Republic). Especially in the early Republic, founding colonies was not necessarily a state-sponsored activity, but a private enterprise which might or might not have had anything to do with the army. Roman political and military institutions, too, underwent drastic transformation from the early to late Republic. Thus, it is implausible to expect that the relationship between conquest, transportation, and colonization remained both causal and consistent at all points in Republican history (Laurence, 1999). Instead, the visual representation of these phenomena over time suggests that the Roman senate did not pursue a static policy of road building and colonization as an expression of their imperial intentions so much as individual ambition and military planning shaped these major building schemes. This argument contributes to the recent focus on individual autonomy and social networking during the Republic (Versluys, 2014).

Bibliography

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