A LOCALIZED APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF INTEGRATION AND IDENTITY IN SOUTHERN ITALY

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1. Introduction

Studies of the adoption of southern Italy into the Roman state have taken several different forms, but the most recent research methods that have been employed have been regional in scope. And yet, in central and northern Italy, the use of individual case studies has shown that through such investigations, new and different data can emerge that provide additional insight into the changes and continuities that took place at the local level, both in terms of the communities themselves, and in terms of individual family histories. The purpose of my current work is to apply a local-level study to a site in southern Italy, in order to add to the knowledge of the processes of integration that took place in the Republican period.

Early accounts of the integration of southern Italy into the Roman state, particularly those found in Roman literary sources, have tended to focus on the disruptive aspects of the process. Stories of Roman military campaigns against the Samnites and other native Italians, and of Sulla’s persecutions and proscriptions, present a picture of destruction on the part of the Romans, and eventual submission on the part of the Italians. Yet these accounts may be drastically exaggerated, and certainly did not apply everywhere in the region.

The site of Larinum, in fact, offers an example of successful non-disruptive integration, but only when examined in light of local evidence that does not rely on broader, regional assumptions as interpretive criteria. This paper begins by discussing the benefits of conducting local-level analyses when studying integration. Then, after a brief introduction to Larinum, the site chosen for this case study, and a discussion of the previous work conducted in this area, it will explain the types of evidence under consideration and will present some preliminary results. This study takes

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2 Terrenato (1998b).
3 For a typical example see Strabo 5.4.11.
into account all of the available evidence, both historical and archaeological, thereby creating as complete a picture as possible of the political, economic and social conditions at the time of Larinum’s integration into the Roman state. Such a study, in turn, should help to further our understanding of the complex processes of cultural change that were happening throughout the Italian peninsula at this time. The methodological framework of this study is one that can also be applied elsewhere in the Italian peninsula, and one that has the potential to provide substantially more detailed information than previous studies about the transformations and continuities that occurred in the latter part of the first millennium BC.

2. Why a Southern Italian Case Study?

As mentioned in the introduction, the most recent research on the adoption of southern Italy into the Roman state has been regional in scope. These regional studies have been critical in helping to change the ways that native Italian groups are perceived by modern scholars: Roman historical sources are no longer seen as the final word on the peoples of southern Italy, and scholars have moved toward the integration of various types of evidence in order to create a more accurate picture of the past, rather than privileging one type of evidence over another, or, for example, pitting archaeological evidence against the historical sources. The contributions of the studies by Dench, Isayev, and Volpe are undeniable; yet these works, in my opinion, underestimate local diversity and local power networks. As Terrenato has noted, “local work in various parts of Italy now strongly suggests the need to consider each area, almost each civitas, individually.” In other words, many of the processes of integration that took place in the first millennium BC were so intricate that they cannot be fully understood by regional-level studies alone.

The Romans often dealt with the incorporation of communities into the Roman state on a case-by-case basis, and so it is logical that a study of individual sites can provide new insight into the choices that were made by both Romans and non-Romans at the local level. To emphasize this point, one need only think of the differences in tactics and results seen in examples such as the Roman conquest of Veii, as compared with the case

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5 Terrenato (1998b, 94).