

PART V

EARLY ITALY AND THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

CHAPTER 18

EARLY ROME AND ITALY

JEAN-PAUL MOREL

This chapter deals with Italy in the period from the beginning of the Greek colonization through 133 BC. It is difficult to approach such a broad topic – all of Italy over six centuries – without risking omissions and simplifications. I will therefore give more weight to new data and recent approaches.

Historians have mined literary sources exhaustively. The importance of this evidence is incomparable, but so are its drawbacks: the need to distinguish between technical and purely literary texts,¹ the absence of quantitative data, and ancient authors' generally limited interest in economic aspects of life. Inscriptions are very rare during our period, and have little to do with the economy. Historians agree that new findings may be expected above all from archaeology.² Its daily discoveries, the supposedly neutral nature of its findings, and its “auxiliary” disciplines (e.g., the study of amphoras, ceramic analysis, the study of storage facilities, agrarian archaeology and the analysis of the countryside, and underwater archaeology, as well as the application of the natural sciences to antiquity in palaeoanthropology, palaeobotany, archaeozoology, metallurgical analysis, sedimentology, etc.³) have provided many of the data presented in this chapter. For half a century, and especially more recently, archaeologists have explored new approaches in response to new demands: precise quantification (despite immense difficulties), wider and more diversified use of pottery (for example for the study of society and modes of production), and interest in “primitive” economies. But we remain very poorly informed in domains in which archaeology has not yielded comparable gains. In short, given the challenge of appreciating the nature of the ancient economy, all types of evidence, from a single sherd to Cato's treatise on agriculture, must be studied with the same degree of interest, the same respect, and the same reservations. This chapter focuses on the Italian peninsula, touching only briefly on northern Italy and the islands, or the world of non-Roman indigenous cultures. The wealth of the subject matter necessitates painful choices.

¹ Morel 1978. ² Cf., e.g., Nicolet 1977, *passim* (95, 97, etc.); see also Gabba 2001: 17.

³ E.g., Potter 1979: 62; Cristofani 1986: 115, 155; Gialanella 1994: 170–1; Coubray 1994; Morel 1997: 222–3; Carter 2001: 792.

For Italy and the Mediterranean in general, the history of these six centuries is largely one of conquests and submissions, of colonization in both senses of the word (the foundation of colonies and the phenomena of transformation and acculturation). Our core subject is Rome, but Rome only gradually became the major player in the economy (and politics). At the beginning of our period, the Greeks in the south (Magna Graecia) and the Etruscans enjoyed positions of primacy. How did Rome develop from one of many Italian towns into the most powerful polity in Italy and a leading Mediterranean power? To answer this question, we must examine the impact of wars, treaties, and the founding of colonies, Greek as well as Etruscan and Roman, reciprocal influences, forced or spontaneous transformations. In short, we need to analyze the driving forces and processes of evolution, the phenomena of reception and diffusion.

The traditional economic history of Italy assigns a primary place to agriculture and finances, a secondary place to exchange, and a sometimes derisory place to the activities of artisans and manufacturers as well as to technology. Given ancient realities and perceptions, this approach can to some extent be justified, but we must nevertheless correct this imbalance whenever it becomes excessive. It will also be appropriate to consider phenomena of production, diffusion, and consumption together. Finally, I will choose not to attach too much importance (without neglecting them altogether) to conventional and somewhat sterile historiographical debates (“primitivism” versus “modernism,” pre-industrial versus industrial, artisans versus manufacturers), and focus on concrete developments.

I will distinguish three major periods, despite the fact that this division is at times somewhat artificial: from the earliest Greek contacts with Italy to the middle of the fourth century BC; from the middle of the fourth century, which saw Rome’s military and political ascent and its rise to economic power, to the Second Punic War; and finally, from the Second Punic War, which caused profound upheavals in the Roman economy, to the period of the Gracchi.

I FROM THE EIGHTH CENTURY TO THE MIDDLE OF THE FOURTH CENTURY BC

When modern observers consider Rome’s geographic situation and the causes of its exceptional success, they often stress that it occupies a major “bridge site,” established at the crossing of important routes – a river route leading from the sea to the interior of Italy and a land route linking Etruria, Latium, and Campania. More importantly, however, Rome was situated between the two most advanced and enterprising civilizations in Italy, the Greeks and the Etruscans.

In an economic history of Rome's relations with Italy, it is hard to overestimate the consequences of this situation, given that both these cultures greatly stimulated and influenced Rome's social and economic evolution. They opposed Rome in rivalry or hostility, but also offered alliances and models, and finally provided Rome with opportunities of conquest. I will consider Magna Graecia and Etruria from these angles.

The four centuries under review are marked by the blossoming of the Greek colonial movement, the decline of the Etruscans, and the rise of Rome under Greek and Etruscan influence from a village of shepherds to a great power. While I will deal with these three aspects separately, we must remember that they increasingly interacted as the four centuries progressed.

(a) *Magna Graecia*

The term "Magna Graecia" is somewhat ambiguous; it can refer either to the Greek colonies of southern Italy and Sicily, or just to those of mainland southern Italy. For the sake of convenience, I use it in the former sense. The study of the economy of Magna Graecia has often been overshadowed by the rich record of arts and crafts in this region, to the detriment of more mundane questions of economic history and especially of its archaeological aspects, which hold little aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, the scale of its artisan production has often led to the incorrect assumption that Magna Graecia exported hardly anything except its pottery (and grain). This cultural splendor has made it easy to forget that "archaic hellenization has grafted a common civilization on a varied economy,"⁴ and masked the diversity of local economic conditions. Novel approaches allow more up-to-date readings.

Debates over the causes of Greek colonization continue (see above, Chapters 8 and 10): "primitivists" see land hunger, triggered by overpopulation in mainland Greece, as the main motive for overseas expansion, whereas "modernists" are more sensitive to commercial motivations such as the search for metals.⁵ This is an old, schematic, and endless debate, which does not alter the fundamental fact that any colonial movement is rooted in economic causes. The debate, reduced to these simple, even simplistic positions, is largely artificial, and should eventually be superseded by archaeological insights. Three main points merit attention.

First, the problem of ascertaining the ultimate causes of Greek overseas settlement disappears when we consider what is often called colonial "networks." The most important ones were the Euboean, Corinthian,

⁴ Vallet 1958: 209.

⁵ Vallet 1958: 199–205.

and Achaean networks, although the Megarian, Locrian, or Rhodo-Cretan settlements might also be described similarly. A whole range of motivations must be taken into account: land, or trade – one ought to distinguish further between exports (for example, pottery or wine) and imports (for example, grain or metals) – craft industries, strategic concerns, and of course demographic factors: all these characteristics would be intertwined in one complex process.

The twelve Euboean (mainly Chalcidian) establishments in Magna Graecia – Pithekoussai, Cumae, Parthenope (and later Neapolis), Rhegium, Zancle, Naxos, Catania, Leontinoi, Mylai, Himera, and Matauros – are a case in point. Some of them were (or appear to have been) mainly commercial centers (Pithekoussai, Himera) while others were agrarian settlements (Cumae, Catania, Mylai, Matauros, and *a fortiori* Leontinoi, an inland colony, located at the edge of a particularly rich plain). Others served defensive purposes (Parthenope), or provided ports or controlled maritime routes (Zancle, Rhegium, Naxos, Neapolis). These classifications entail considerable oversimplification, since each of these establishments in fact had diverse functions. Suffice it to say that over three centuries (c. 770–470 BC) an elaborate system developed, covering all the economic functions one might associate with a colonial movement.

As for the Corinthian network, no one can dispute that Syracuse, Corinth's main foundation in Magna Graecia, was a major economic power. But it also protected the maritime front of its territory by founding Heloros in the south (and later, around 483 BC, by destroying its rival Megara Hyblaea). And, above all, it created a territorial "empire" (extending over some 4,000 km²) which ensured agrarian revenue by occupying the whole of southeastern Sicily, and by founding Akrai and Kasmenai in its hinterland, before completing this strategy with the creation of Camarina on the south coast. These activities, which we may probably call a program, pursued with tenacity for more than a century (from 733 to the beginning of the sixth century BC), helped Sicily become one of the granaries of Greece and later Rome.

Second, colonial foundations that were clearly "marked" by one dominant activity may turn out to be more complex. Pithekoussai (on Ischia), long seen as the archetypical trading colony, turns out to have engaged in manufacture (in metals, in particular iron) as well. The quest for metals is in fact regarded as the reason for the founding of this settlement, the first of its kind in the west (c. 770 BC).

Its proximity to Etruria and its metal resources do appear to offer the best explanation for its establishment, an interpretation that receives further support from the presence on Ischia of iron ore from Elba, processed by the local metallurgical industry. But agrarian activities are now also documented at Ischia, since a village has been found at Punta Chiarito, in the

south of the island, where farming took place:⁶ so far, this remains a modest discovery, but nevertheless indicates diversification and meshes with Ischia's reputation for fertility, in particular arboriculture (*eukarpia*, Strabo 5.4.9). Moreover, we know that shortly after its foundation and after that of Pithekoussai, Carthage received significant quantities of so-called Zita amphoras ("zentral-italische Amphoren").⁷ These containers, produced in Tyrrhenian central Italy from northern Etruria to Ischia, reveal that agricultural products (probably wine) were exported at a very early time. They also reached other sites such as Toscanos in Spain or Milazzo in Sicily. This discovery changes our understanding of early Italian agriculture and of the export capacity of Campania and Etruria in this period.

It is the Achaeans of Magna Graecia, with their four colonies at Metapontum, Sybaris, Kroton, and then Poseidonia, who offer the clearest examples of agrarian colonies, aiming to occupy "large" plains (compared to those of Greece). Let us furthermore note that three of these communities (Metapontum, Kroton, and Poseidonia) marked the core of their territory by building "extra-urban" temples dedicated to Hera. Metapontum offers a particularly clear example of agrarian colonization: an extensive and fertile territory, carefully cadastered and dotted with farms;⁸ the importance of the cult of Demeter; apparently modest commercial activities; a coastline unsuited to harbor installations; and a wheat ear as the local symbol on coins, recalling the main product of the city. Even so, matters might not be as simple, as is shown by the neighboring city of Sybaris, which likewise used to be seen as a prime example of an unquestionably rich and agrarian city without commercial influence, except perhaps for the diffusion of a small number of large bronze vases such as the crater of Vix. But recent research combining the study of amphoras with a re-examination of textual evidence suggests that Sybaris largely exported its wine in locally produced amphoras, which used to be thought of as "Corinthian B."⁹ The same may be true of Poseidonia. These discoveries help resolve the apparent contradiction between a Magna Graecia that was thought to be an agricultural and manufacturing giant and at the same time a commercial dwarf that failed to sustain significant exports. In addition, they also cast light on the economic history of importers such as Carthage.

Third, the archaeology of agriculture and the urban territories continues to yield new facts (or develops new analytical concepts), fine-tuning the typology of the occupation of the countryside of archaic Magna Graecia: for example, the range of uses of the territory of Gela, from cereal cultivation in the plains (without farms) to zones of tree cultivation in the hills (with farms), or, in the territory of Tarentum, the arrival of the "farming villages"

⁶ Gialanella 1994. ⁷ Docter 1997: 192–215.

⁸ Most recently Carter 2001. ⁹ Sourisseau 1997: vol. 1, 95–6.

of the seventh and sixth centuries, a new development that would transcend the traditional opposition of city and farmstead. This phenomenon was already foreshadowed at Pithekoussai¹⁰ and can also be seen in the Hellenistic period, for instance in the territory of Heraclea.¹¹ At the same time, comparable agrarian villages also appeared in the Roman sphere.¹² At the very end of this period, from the middle of the fourth century to the Roman conquest, the proliferation of farms – which came to occupy cities' territories in their hundreds – underscored the vitality of agriculture in Magna Graecia.¹³

We cannot complete this cursory general survey of the economy of Magna Graecia without emphasizing a factor which remains fundamental for any economic evaluation of Italy and Rome in this period: the diverse stock of models, concepts, and techniques that Magna Graecia bestowed on Italy in general and Rome in particular, either directly or via the Etruscans. The potter's wheel, olive oil and probably wine, and perhaps large-scale grain cultivation, as well as preconditions of economic growth such as ports, writing, coinage (adopted shortly after its emergence in the Aegean, around 550 BC), and perhaps banking techniques¹⁴ – as well as art and intellectual pursuits.

(b) *Etruria*

The economic history of the Etruscans poses serious problems: very few texts exist, and most are inscriptions that are difficult to interpret and in any case teach us little about economics. Further, even more than in Magna Graecia, the study of economic history has suffered from the fact that historians and above all archaeologists have until recently focused exclusively on cities at the expense of their territories, on cemeteries at the expense of settlements, and on art and craftsmanship at the expense of agriculture, manufacture, and trade. But external evidence, such as the import of Etruscan wine into Gaul, now illustrates the realities of the Etruscan economy. This discovery shows that in the first half of the sixth century BC, practically all the wine drunk in Marseille came from Etruria, shedding light on previously unknown agricultural production and commercial organization in the latter region.¹⁵ Etruscan economic history increasingly revolves around individual cities.¹⁶ These days, scholars take proper account of rivalries and alliances among the Etruscan polities, of the differences in their resources (such as ores),¹⁷ in the wealth of their territories, in their access to

¹⁰ Gialanella 1994. ¹¹ Greco 1996: 234–5, 238–9, 242. ¹² Morel 1994: 414–15.

¹³ Greco 1996: 241–2. ¹⁴ Andreau 1987: 344–5.

¹⁵ Bats et al. 1992, *passim*; *Gli Etruschi* forthcoming, *passim*.

¹⁶ Cristofani 1986 is essential.

¹⁷ Cristofani 1986: 121–4; in general, see *L'Etruria mineraria* 1981.

transport routes, and their relationships with other powers (Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, and Celts). Archaeologists have explored territories and, albeit to a lesser degree, inhabited sectors of cities, and have fine-tuned the typology of fine or coarse pottery and especially of amphoras. The study of the rich mineral resources has likewise improved, as has our knowledge of the Etruscan peripheries in Campania and northern Italy. We know more about Etruscan export to Gaul, Spain,¹⁸ and Africa, in particular to Carthage, where a large number of archaic amphoras of the “ZitA” type have been discovered, as mentioned above.¹⁹

Overall, the emerging picture is of a very diverse Etruria, characterized by farming as well as manufacturing. Some cities used land and workshops to produce goods for export (Caere, Vulci), while others were active in mining and industry (Vetulonia and above all Populonia), and others still, less endowed with agricultural and mineral resources, developed trade networks with the Greeks (Tarquinia, Pisa). In most of these cities, agriculture formed a solid economic base, but crafts, mining, and industrial activities were also remarkably successful. Large-scale exports of wine throughout the sixth century BC and beyond, notably from Caere and Vulci, document the capacity of Etruscan viticulture. Agricultural production not merely for domestic consumption but for overseas exports speaks against a rigid distinction between agrarian and mercantile economy. In the domain of grain cultivation, the remarkable yields of archaic Etruria (three times more than that of Latium²⁰) explain how the Etruscans could alleviate shortages in fifth-century BC Rome on several occasions. When we look at craft production, the massive production of “*bucchero nero*,”²¹ a high-quality ceramic fineware, and its export overseas (similar to that of wine), implies a scale of organization that made this the most widely exported Italian pottery prior to the rise of Campanian A wares in the second century BC. Mining and metallurgy also flourished, and left impressive traces in Populonia.

A systematic survey of a large zone in southern Etruria and the *ager Faliscus*, between Veii and Falerii, has allowed us to trace the evolution of settlement here and to understand better the relationship between the Etruscan countryside and cities over more than a millennium.²² For the period c. 750–550 BC, these data indicate considerable growth in population, in structures related to human occupation, and in the number of towns and rural sites. From early on, the Etruscans built a substantial subterranean drainage system, the *cuniculi*, to improve the land.²³ The Roman conquest subsequently led to further progress in land use.

It is remarkable that the Etruscans developed their economy as well on the land as on the sea. Of the large Etruscan cities, only Populonia is

¹⁸ Remesal and Musso 1991. ¹⁹ Docter 1997: 192–3, 198–9, 202, 204–5, 209–10.

²⁰ Cristofani 1986: 116, 119. ²¹ Gran-Aymerich 2002.

²² Potter 1979; 1992. ²³ Potter 1979: 84–7.

located on the sea, while some (Caere, Tarquinia, Vetulonia, Vulci) were established near the coast and had harbors. The Etruscan colonization of Campania (Capua, Fratte, Pontecagnano) and northern Italy (Felsina, Marzabotto, Spina, with extensions of trade across the Alps towards the Celtic heartlands) was essentially terrestrial. The Etruscans maintained communications with both regions by land rather than by sea. They established their main cities there (Capua and Felsina/Bologna) not on the coast but in the heart of the territories' particularly fertile plains, perhaps due less to the existence of earlier settlements in those places than to their intention to focus on agricultural exploitation. This, however, did not prevent the Etruscans from being counted among the "thalassocracies" of antiquity, from frequent naval warfare, or from vigorous maritime commercial expansion, often represented as "piracy" by hostile sources.²⁴ Etruscan navies (no doubt sometimes accompanied or relieved by Greek ships) were responsible for the export of the numerous amphoras and Etruscan vases described above. The wreck of Grand Ribaud F, recently discovered on the French coast near Hyères and datable to about 500 BC, provides remarkable evidence of this process.²⁵ In other words, the Etruscans were significant in both areas, *terra marique* (just as the Romans would be later on).

Etruria as a region was open to contact with other peoples, but filtered these contacts in two ways. The cities accommodated individual incomers, generally specialists in appreciated crafts, who contributed their know-how and were integrated into society. The rise, in the sixth century BC, of a class of "nouveaux riches" in the coastal cities, originating in manufacturing and trading and claiming equal status with the old landed aristocracy, documents the scale of social mobility.²⁶ In other cases, cities admitted groups which they confined to trading posts where Etruscan authorities maintained control. At Gravisca, a harbor of Tarquinia, an *emporion* was founded around 600 BC, and was frequented by Ionians and traders from Aegina. Much the same was true of Pyrgi, a harbor of Caere used by Carthaginians, as attested by the famous gold tablets in Etruscan and Punic from c. 500 BC (another harbor of Caere was called *Punicum*); and also of Spina, a mixed Etrusco-Greek city (but under Etruscan sovereignty, probably exercised from Felsina/Bologna) at the mouth of the river Po, where in the classical period Athenians obtained grain from the Po valley in exchange for their luxury pottery, which ended up in the local graves.²⁷ This controlled opening towards the Mediterranean was a powerful catalyst for economic development in central-northern Italy.

The Etruscans were late to use coins and did so on a relatively small scale. Nevertheless, perhaps from the sixth century BC onwards they were

²⁴ Cristofani 1986: 124–8; Camporeale 1992.

²⁵ Long and Sourisseau 2002.

²⁶ Cristofani 1986: 114.

²⁷ Rebecchi 1998.

probably responsible for the appearance in Italy of pre-monetary means of exchange in the form of bronze ingots, a special feature of ancient Italy: rough ingots (*aes rude*), or, in a more elaborate form, “ramo secco” ingots (with herringbone patterns), which may have been cut up into smaller units. These are mainly known from Etruria itself and the Po region, but spread thinly all the way to Croatia and Sicily.²⁸ Etruria opened up somewhat to foreign coins: a hoard found in Volterra, datable to around 500 BC, contains small issues of Etruscan silver coins, perhaps minted by *gentes* rather than states, and some issues from Phocaea and Greek Gaul. The latter reflect Etruscan links with the Phocaeans of Asia Minor and the west (who had perhaps founded the emporium of Gravisca)²⁹ to obtain Greek pottery and export their own goods to Gaul. The first “regular” gold and silver currency was issued by Populonia from the middle of the fifth century BC onward, followed at the time of the Roman conquest by bronze coins, a metal which other cities (Chiusi, Cortona, Arezzo, Volterra) also used for coins.³⁰

Finally, Etruria acted as an intermediary between Magna Graecia and Rome. But it also introduced to the banks of the Tiber its own customs or innovations, such as the pre-monetary use of bronze, perfected procedures of drainage (the *cuniculi*), methods of cadastration, and metallurgy.

(c) Rome

The traditional foundation date of Rome (753 BC) coincides with the first Greek settlements in Italy and the dawn of the “orientalizing” period in Etruria. Spectacular tombs in Latium suggest that wealth was being concentrated in the hands of elites, and that the economy produced a significant surplus.³¹ In the first part of this “archaic” period, Rome was merely one Latin city among others, albeit more profoundly “Etruscanized.” The excavations and research of the last decades have gone some way in rehabilitating the image of “the great Rome of the Tarquins.”³² After a period of crisis in the fifth century BC (characterized by the impoverishment of individuals and of the community as a consequence of continuous warfare with varied outcomes), the fourth century saw the start of lasting Roman expansion in Italy, improved access to land, a general rise in living standards, and “modernization” of the Roman economy. The chronology and turning points remain disputed, and cannot be considered in this context.

Agriculture was evidently of fundamental importance. The varied landscape of central Italy favored diversified agriculture and provided various natural resources (fishing and hunting, wood, stone and clay, thermal

²⁸ Cristofani 1986: 139–42. ²⁹ Torelli 1982: 323–5.

³⁰ *Contributi introduttivi* 1976; Cristofani 1986: 142–51.

³¹ Crawford 1976: 202; see also Ampolo 1970–1: 51–5. ³² Cristofani 1990.

springs, salt etc.). In all this, the grain supply was the main problem (and remained an issue throughout antiquity). This was one of the weaknesses of the Roman economy. In a long series of *frumentationes* regularly reported in the annalistic sources, Rome received wheat from the Etruscans, Italians (Volsci), the Greeks of Italy (Cumae) and Sicily (Syracuse), particularly in the fifth century BC, prior to the onset of its territorial expansion. The earliest recorded agrarian laws date to the fifth century (486 BC), culminating in the *lex Licinia Sextia* of 367 BC, which limited the amount of land and perhaps the number of cattle a single citizen could own. Early constraints on the availability of land are encapsulated in the tradition of the small size of the lots allocated in land distributions, the *heredium* of two *iugera* (about half a hectare), which was clearly insufficient to feed a family but sometimes seems to have corresponded to reality.³³ One assumes that these lots were supplemented by access to public land or that of rich individuals in return for rents in kind.³⁴

Techniques of land exploitation inherited from the Etruscans, such as the network of drainage tunnels (*cuniculi*) in the Pontine plain, appear from the fourth century BC onward. Animal husbandry was essential, symbolized by the role of cattle as the measure of wealth. Archaeology has made progress in detecting and interpreting the traces of these pastoral activities (through the study of soil, paddocks, and sheepfolds, and milk containers).³⁵

During this period, external trade played a negligible role in the Roman economy, but as a rising power in Italy, Rome came to be integrated in Mediterranean exchange networks. We may assume that Phoenicians had access to the Forum Boarium, Rome's harbor at the time.³⁶ These contacts may have been behind the first treaty between Rome and Carthage at the end of the sixth century BC.³⁷ Rome was drawn into overseas relations by its proximity to Etruria, where nearby Caere was allied to Carthage. The foundation (or restoration?) of temples such as those of Ceres and Mercury (495 BC?) also mark the modest beginnings of Roman interest in trade.

The chronology of Roman money use remains controversial. Relative to the Greeks and even Etruria, Rome was definitely late in adopting coinage. One hypothetical reconstruction assumes a progressive evolution from barter to money-cattle (hence the word *pecunia*), then to bronze ingots in various forms, marked or otherwise, with or without “ramo secco” – *aes rude*, *aes formatum*, and subsequently *aes signatum*.³⁸ This development was stimulated by the introduction of military pay (*stipendium*) in 406 BC. Another model places the adoption of metal as the principal form of wealth accumulation in the middle of the fifth century BC, the appearance

³³ Brandt 1985: 25–6. ³⁴ Crawford 1976: 205–6.

³⁵ Morel 1997: 216–19, with references regarding different periods.

³⁶ Rebuffat 1966. ³⁷ Scardigli 1991: 47–87. ³⁸ Zehnacker 1973: 199–222.

of coinage as a unit of metal in the second half of the fourth century BC (following the custom of Neapolis), and that of genuinely Roman minted coins in 269 BC.³⁹

The study of this process is complicated by the coexistence of two principles (value [money] and coins [coinage]), two metals (bronze and silver), and two techniques (casting and minting). Whatever the details, the transition from direct exchange to exchange via the medium of a convenient unit of value was an essential stage of economic development in which Greek and Etruscan influences were decisive.

II FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE FOURTH CENTURY TO THE END OF THE SECOND CENTURY BC

It might be tempting to call this period the “early Hellenistic period.” However, Rome’s economic development in these centuries owed little to the events surrounding Alexander the Great and his successors. Rather, the main changes resulted from regional events that began in the third quarter of the fourth century BC and elevated Rome to a central role in the Italian peninsula by giving it the means for hegemonic politics and causing profound transformations of its economy. Modern historians have long neglected this “*Roma medio-republicana*.” Its cultural as well as economic importance was not appreciated until a radical revision of the archaeological data about a third of a century ago⁴⁰ underscored the importance of Rome at the expense of Magna Graecia and Etruria, societies that were certainly brilliant and prosperous but henceforth increasingly weak relative to Rome. This period profoundly transformed Roman political and social structures, exemplified by the appearance of coinage and more general economic change.⁴¹

This period, and above all its early phase, saw a series of Roman victories over Latins, Campanians, Samnites, Etruscans, Sabines, Umbrians, and the Greeks of southern Italy from 348 BC onwards. This was also the time of the “great Latin colonization” – a colonization program organized by Rome that also involved Latins and other subject peoples and led to the creation of “Latin” as well as “Roman” colonies: from Ostia at an unknown date in the middle of the fourth century BC if not earlier,⁴² to Antium in 338, Cales in 334, Cosa and Paestum in 273, and finally Placentia and Cremona in 219, to name but a few.⁴³ By 200 BC, the Roman state and its allies controlled a territory of some 130,000 km² with an estimated free population of about 3 million (and a somewhat larger overall population including slaves). The Roman state in the narrow sense covered some 30,000 km²

³⁹ Pedroni 1993: 191.

⁴⁰ *Roma medio-republicana* 1973.

⁴¹ Pedroni 1993: 13–16.

⁴² Brandt 1985: 29.

⁴³ In general, see *La colonizzazione* 1988.

with an estimated citizen population of around 1 million.⁴⁴ Colonization was vitally important both in military and strategic terms, but inevitably had social and economic motives and consequences as well, notably for agriculture and trade.

The foundation of a colony in Ostia underlined Rome's interest in maritime activities and expansion,⁴⁵ an interest reinforced by victories over its Etruscan, Latin, and Campanian rivals that confirmed its leading role in Italy and (soon) beyond. In 353 and 351 BC, Rome defeated Caere and Tarquinia. In 352 or 348 BC, a second treaty between Rome and Carthage confirmed Rome's status as a regional west Mediterranean power.⁴⁶ In 343–341 BC, the First Samnite War involved Rome in the affairs of wealthy northern Campania around Capua. In the following years Rome gained the upper hand over the Latin League, which was dissolved in 338 BC. Its victory over Antium in particular, an ancient maritime city and refuge for pirates, suppressed dangerous competition on the sea. The pro-plebeian reform of Q. Publius Philon in 339 BC resulted in a strong push toward the south, in particular into Campania. From 339/8 BC, Romans settled in the *ager Falernus*, and *Campani* became Roman citizens. In this way, Rome came into commercial contact with Neapolis and in 326 BC formed a *foedus* with this city, whereby Neapolis supplied much-needed warships. The Second Samnite War (327–304 BC) accelerated Rome's contacts with southern Italy. In 310 BC, new victories over the Etruscans expanded Roman control in Etruria.

All this set the scene for new enterprise on land and sea: *terra marique* was to become the motto for an expansion which made Rome master not only of all of Italy – Greek, Italic, Etruscan, and Gallic – but of the whole Mediterranean. Rome's will to assert itself assumed more concrete expression in 311/10 BC with the creation of two *duoviri navales*, in charge of the navy, followed in 306/304 BC by treaties with maritime powers, including Rhodes and Tarentum as well as Carthage.⁴⁷ The First Punic War (264–241 BC) was a consequence of this involvement. Despite Rome's success and the concomitant reversal of Rome and Carthage's military and economic status, this conflict seems to have left its mark as a period of stagnation in Italy's economic development. This lasted until the Second Punic War, suggesting that Rome barely profited from its new maritime supremacy. It was in Italy proper that Rome continued to consolidate its advantage in successful campaigns against the Gauls in the Aemilia and the Po Valleys (236–218 BC), thereby opening up new territories of great agricultural abundance, and also against the Ligures (238–233 BC, a conflict

⁴⁴ These figures, obviously approximative, were taken from Nicolet 1977. For the methods and problems of such calculations, see Morley 2001.

⁴⁵ Cf. Brandt 1985: 29. ⁴⁶ Scardigli 1991: 89–127. ⁴⁷ Scardigli 1991: 129–62.

which ended with the foundation of Genoa), laying the ground for the complete conquest of the territory of modern Italy. Rome had already annexed Sicily and Sardinia after the First Punic War.

In a period of abundant change, I can merely focus on a few distinctive elements of economic development.⁴⁸ The creation of infrastructure facilitated the exploitation of Italy and shored up Rome's presence overseas: most notably, a road building program,⁴⁹ starting with the Via Appia (312 BC) between Rome and Campania, which illustrates the notion that it took a generation after territorial conquest to set up roads.⁵⁰ These roads symbolize Rome's intention to impose its footprint on Italy: many of them bypassed older cities, as they were conceived solely to serve the economic and above all the strategic needs of the center.⁵¹ Replacing an earlier unplanned and "flexible" network linking cities that were now downgraded, the new road system created a planned and "rigid" network radiating exclusively from Rome. The roads' usefulness for the heavy transport is controversial, and the view⁵² that land transport was not hugely inferior to transport by sea appears debatable. It cannot be doubted that Rome, like Etruria, expanded both by land and by sea. However, while the strategic and political value of Roman road building is clear, the solid yet bumpy surfaces were not particularly good for carts. Packsaddle animals, on the other hand, move equally well on ordinary tracks. Above all, we must remember the importance of river routes, even if there are only few major rivers in Italy: the Tiber, Anio, Arno, and Po played a major role in this context.

Agriculture remained the main engine of the economy. The *ager Romanus* grew from 5,525 km² to 26,805 km² between 338 and 264 BC. Between 340 and 290 BC, the first centuriations appeared east and south of Rome, from Alba Fucens to Norba and Minturnae, then Sinuessa, indicating the appropriation, partition, and rational exploitation of the conquered territories of the Latins, Volsci, Campanians and other peoples.⁵³ Models of cadastration and land partition were available in both Magna Graecia (where the bronze tablets of Heraclea in Lucania in the same period mention a scheme to measure, divide, and distribute land)⁵⁴ and in Etruria, particularly at Volsinii.⁵⁵ The first *villas*, heralds of the great transformations of the second century BC, appeared in central Italy by at least the third century.⁵⁶ At the same time, many areas, especially in Bruttium and Lucania, experienced a dramatic decline and desertification from the second quarter of the third century onward, following the Roman victories over Pyrrhus and Tarentum. Their prairies and forests were used by a sparse population, woodcutters and charcoal burners who perpetuated what have been called

⁴⁸ *Società romana* 1981: vol. 1; Coarelli 1982a. ⁴⁹ Coarelli 1988. ⁵⁰ Laurence 2001: 597–8.

⁵¹ Potter 1979: 80, 93, 102; Morel 1991: 129–30; Morel 1997: 226. ⁵² Laurence 2001: 594–8.

⁵³ *Structures agraires* 1987: 87–90; Morel 1997: 220. ⁵⁴ Greco 1996: 242.

⁵⁵ Cristofani 1986: 119, 136; Scardigli 1991: 97. ⁵⁶ Morel 1997: 221.

“residual” or “pre-Roman” modes of production.⁵⁷ They produced food or raw materials (e.g., wool, meat, dairy products, wood, pitch, charcoal), which were then put to “industrial” use in economically dynamic centers in the plains such as Capua and Neapolis, Brundisium and Canusium, and of course in Rome itself: a genuinely “colonial” manner of exploitation, which continued for centuries. In other regions, less marked by mountains and forest, Roman conquest accelerated population growth and rural cultivation thanks to land distributions such as those that had earlier occurred in Veii and in the *ager Faliscus*. Resistance, as in the case of Falerii, might trigger brutal reprisals: that town was destroyed in 241 BC and the farms in its territory were abandoned (although even in this case cultivation soon reappeared).⁵⁸ The exploitation of new agricultural territories could be just as deliberate and, on occasion, brutal: by means of great works of at least partial drainage of lakes or marshes (e.g., at the Alban and Nemi lakes from the early fourth century BC onward);⁵⁹ by roads that disturbed the traditional organization of the countryside; and by the despoilment and redistribution of land. The Adriatic coast is a different case: the coastal regions of the Adriatic and adjacent parts of the Apennines (such as Samnium) retained their trading orientation towards Greece and the east. In the following decades they imported much more wine from Rhodes than the Tyrrhenian regions; while Ancona, a true Greek enclave, continued to produce or import decidedly Hellenistic pottery. Overall, great regional differences persisted. It is significant that Rome’s interests in the southern interior did not go hand in hand with acculturation and that these regions remained under the influence of Magna Graecia, notably in terms of architecture.

Research on the Roman and more generally Italian agriculture of this period must take account of the evidence of the “Greco-Italic” amphoras.⁶⁰ These took over from vessels produced in Magna Graecia and Sicily in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the so-called “MGS” (i.e., “Magna Graecia-Sicilia”).⁶¹ The new types emerged in the middle of the fourth century, concurrently with Rome’s increasing stature in international trade. In fact, the Greco-Italic containers were typical of a much more “Romanized” Tyrrhenian central Italy: the northern and Vesuvian Campania (*Sinuessa*, *ager Falernus*), Latium (Fondi, Astura), and maritime Etruria (Albinia). We can observe a shift of Italy’s economic core from the south towards the center, from Magna Graecia and Sicily towards a zone around Rome. These amphoras were used to export wine from these regions to Gaul, Spain, and Africa. The *lex Claudia* of 219/218 BC which forbade senators and their sons to own ships of a capacity of more than 300 amphoras (80 hectoliters)

⁵⁷ Lepore 1981; see also Giardina 1981. Rathbone 1983: 161. ⁵⁸ Potter 1979: 98–101.

⁵⁹ Leveau 1995: 378. ⁶⁰ Empereur and Hesnard 1987: 25–30. ⁶¹ Vandermeersch 1994.

(perhaps intending to confine them to the role of a “landed aristocracy”)⁶² must refer to containers of this type.

Crafts were evidently much less important than agriculture and less important than in the following epoch, although we should note the quality and vitality of artistic activities from the first decades of this period onward. The pottery workshop of Petites Estampilles⁶³ reveals an interesting evolution. At the end of the fourth century and in the first third of the third, it produced good-quality pottery with black glaze mainly in Rome but probably also in one or several workshops in Etruria, as did a few dozen workshops across Italy in this period. The wide spread of its vases in central Italy and, most importantly, its exports to Marseille, Carthage, and their respective zones of influence are a unique phenomenon that bears testimony to Rome’s commercial opening-up to the Mediterranean at the time of the third treaty with Carthage and the creation of the *duoviri navales*. Rome, Marseille, and Carthage formed a kind of “trade triangle” in the western Mediterranean, as they did again a century later at the time of Campanian A pottery.

On the other hand, the ceramic data indicate that the last two thirds of the third century were marked by the double process of Italy withdrawing into itself and the splitting up of production among local areas. Should we assume that the First Punic War, despite Rome’s victory, undermined the dynamics of economic and cultural integration, or that it interrupted trans-Mediterranean trade networks? Either way, in southern Latium and northern Campania the new trend in pottery production coincided with expressions of artisanal pride, advertising the identity by potters, mostly free men who signed their vases with name markers signaling their filiations, origins, and specialties. Sometimes, known families were involved in craft production, for example in Praeneste or Cales. The conquest of southern Italy brought about an important change in the production of bricks and tiles, the *opus doliare*, which – in Magna Graecia and among the Italian peoples of the same region (Mamertins, Bruttians, Lucanians, Samnites) – was public, monitored by cities or communities under the aegis of their magistrates, as the marks on them indicate. In Rome’s orbit, this production devolved upon private *figlinae*. An analogous privatization in the southern zones also affected transhumance, which was previously communal. Significant private capital formation favored these developments. Certain agglomerations such as Atina and Ferentinum with their *fora pecuaria*, or Saepinum, became important landmarks or crossroads of the *calles*, the routes reserved for herd movements, and owed their prosperity to transhumance.⁶⁴

⁶² Crawford 1976: 202–3. ⁶³ Morel 1969.

⁶⁴ See the references in Morel 1991: 134–5; on transhumance in general, Gabba and Pasquinucci 1979 (esp. 92–4).

Finally, it might be worth investigating links between manufacturing and colonization, again through the medium of pottery.⁶⁵ These differ greatly from colony to colony. Some settlements, like Brundisium, ignored Roman models. Others, like Ariminum, were strongly influenced by them, perhaps through the collaboration of Roman artisans and the transfer of specialists. In general, however, Rome's colonies did not specifically consume products manufactured in the center. Indeed (and this extends into the next period) there was no such thing as a "colonial preference" in Republican Italy or beyond: in other words, the Roman provinces did not consume more, or fewer, products of Roman Italy than those Mediterranean regions that remained outside the empire (except for the regular and faithful clientele of Roman troops that were scattered over the Mediterranean world and whose camps offer archaeologists the best samples of Italian products).

Our understanding of Roman coinage is inevitably affected by the same uncertainties as in the previous period: for example, modern proposals for the date of the introduction of the *denarius* range from 269 to 187 BC! It is however clear that coinage first appeared in the third century. 339 BC has been suggested as the date of the appearance of *lateres signati*, "marked ingots" guaranteed by the state, which provided pre-coinage units of value for internal use and for exchange between Rome and other economies. At the same time, Campani who had become Roman citizens issued coins with the Greek legend "Romaion." Soon after, between 318 and 310 BC, the first professional bankers set up shop in the Roman forum.⁶⁶ In 289 BC, Rome issued the first series of cast bronze coins, and in the following years, ateliers in Magna Graecia and Sicily (and perhaps even in Alexandria)⁶⁷ issued bronze and silver coins on behalf of the Roman state. In general, the onset of Roman coinage fits into a series of contacts with the cities of Magna Graecia or farther away, in which technological, iconographic, artistic, political, military, and of course economic factors were intermingled. Two dates are essential here: in 290/89 BC, Rome created special magistrates, the *triumviri monetales*, who might have presided over the appearance of series of libral bronze coins); and in 269 BC, Rome opened a mint. Roman motivations developed from a desire to operate with set units of value to a wish for closer technical and monetary collaboration with Greek cities in southern Italy and Sicily. The notion that the late beginning of Roman coinage is merely an aspect of Rome's general isolation in this period⁶⁸ is not self-evident.

Although Italian regional craft production and exchange flourished in this period, large-scale export trade had barely begun to develop. There were certainly exceptions, some modest in scale (such as black-glazed vases of the

⁶⁵ Morel 1988. ⁶⁶ Andreau 2001: 65.

⁶⁷ Pedroni 1993: 19–55. ⁶⁸ Crawford 1976: 197–9.

type group Petites Estampilles mentioned above) and some more significant (such as the proto-Greco-Italic and the earliest Greco-Italic amphoras), but these were not at all comparable to the massive volume of exports of the following period. The fact remains that during this century and a half, Rome came to dominate the Italian peninsula, Sicily, and Sardinia, and not least in economic terms.

III FROM 200 TO 133 BC⁶⁹

The First Punic War had little (or perhaps a slightly negative) influence on the Roman economy. By contrast, the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) was a turning point. It is difficult (and of secondary importance) to know whether the changes began before, during, or after the war. It is most likely that trends which had already formed before the war accelerated during or after it, and that the conflict itself created experiences or circumstances that favored change. Is it legitimate to speak with Toynbee – or as commentators summarize his view – of “disruptive effects,” of a “catastrophic break,” or of the “moment of deconstruction of the Italian reality both on the political and socio-economic level”?⁷⁰ Certainly, many communities were severely affected by the war and the long presence of Punic armies on their land, notably in southern Italy. With respect to the Roman economy in general, however, we are rather dealing with substantial change and significant restructuring. The extent of the “catastrophe” depends on our perspective. For most of Magna Graecia, for example, the crisis had begun before the Second Punic War. For cities such as Tarentum and Syracuse, it occurred or culminated during this conflict. And when we consider the broader picture in Greece and Carthage, the main crisis only came half a century later.

The Second Punic War marked the beginning of Rome’s conquest of the entire Mediterranean, an ambition that was largely realized by 133 BC. In 206 BC, Spain with its rich mines, perhaps the real reason for the outbreak of the Second Punic War was reduced to a Roman province, as were Macedonia in 148 BC and Africa (modern Tunisia) and Greece in 146 BC. Within sixty years, Rome had established control over some of the richest regions of the Mediterranean. Further, Italian traders gained footholds and Italian goods likewise appeared in regions that had not yet been annexed, particularly in the east, Gaul, and Numidia. The presence of Italian *negotiatores* on Delos, and especially when the island became a free-trade zone and Athenian colony (166 BC), must have stimulated Roman trade.

⁶⁹ Nicolet 1977 is essential.

⁷⁰ Toynbee 1965: iff.; and the comments in Lo Cascio 2001d: 5 and Gabba 2001: 16. In general see also Lo Cascio and Storch Marino 2001.

Additional factors included rich plunder from conquests, heavy tributes imposed on the defeated, and more generally the financial resources accumulated by the Roman state, by those in power, by businessmen and “wheeler-dealers” (one might speak of “robber capitalism”)⁷¹; the influx of slaves as well as free specialists, artists, and technicians into an Italy and particularly a capital city where demand for manpower of all kinds and employment opportunities kept growing; and finally, the availability of new resources (e.g., silver and lead), new materials (e.g., marble), and new models for agriculture and crafts. Rome’s absolute domination of the central and western Mediterranean stimulated exchange in this area and, in Italy itself, encouraged mass production for export. At that time Cato wrote in his practical manual for landowners, the *De agri cultura* (2.7), that the *paterfamilias* who owned land ought to be *vendax*, that is, to try to sell whatever could be sold. In reality, a whole part of Italy became *vendax*, combining commercial aggression with economic expansionism. In addition, in the domains of art and craft, the defeat of Asia and the annexation of Greece⁷² opened a gap between elite “great art” and the declining crafts industry of the *plebs*, a gap between innovation and tradition. The gap would not be bridged until the Augustan era, and then only for a short time.

The most emblematic manifestation of these new developments was what has been called the “slave mode of production,”⁷³ forms of economic activity that fundamentally depended on slaves acquired by conquest in war, by piracy, or born to slave women. (Child abandonment and debt slavery provided additional sources.) From the first half of the second century BC onward, slaves came to constitute a significant proportion of the Italian population.⁷⁴ Delos, where “myriad” (literally 10,000) slaves were said to be sold per day (Strabo 14.5.2), was a hub of the slave trade. It was not by coincidence that Roman merchants were particularly active there, and the building known as the “*agora* of the Italians,” where their presence is amply attested from the last decades of the second century BC onwards, was probably the island’s slave market.⁷⁵ Slaves included appreciated specialists or technicians, artists, doctors, architects, secretaries, accountants, luxury domestic slaves, and so on. But most slaves were unskilled laborers for building, farming, or manufacturing. This had several consequences. The unskilled labor force needed strict supervision; production processes became standardized (evident in the large workshops producing pottery for export); and simple techniques spread, which could be used under the guidance of specialists (as in the new architectural methods of the period, particularly the *opus caementicium* discussed below).

⁷¹ Lo Cascio 2001d: 7. ⁷² *Devicta Asia* (Plin. *HN* 34.34); *Graecia capta* (Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.156).

⁷³ *Società romana* 1981 is essential; see also Rathbone 1983.

⁷⁴ Dumont 1987: 71. ⁷⁵ Coarelli 1982a.

Slavery certainly introduced formidable competition for free workers. This does not mean that the latter disappeared, but their working conditions grew more like those of slaves. In other words, the convergence of free and slave working conditions tended to transform craftsmen into workers (significantly, signatures disappeared almost completely from manufactured products in this period). The slave mode of production was commonest in central Tyrrhenian Italy, between Etruria and Campania, a region centered on Rome and characterized by mass-produced agricultural goods (signaled by the Greco-Italic amphoras). Elsewhere in Italy and beyond, more traditional – or even, notably in certain parts of southern Italy, “residual” (as described for the preceding period) – forms of labor and economic exploitation prevailed.

The new system undeniably stimulated the economy, but also entailed inconvenience and risk. By limiting skilled labor to slaves trained for this purpose, slaveowners destabilized the free labor market. It also muted competition between workers and machines, impeding technological progress. Finally, the slave supply depended largely on war and piracy.⁷⁶ Large concentrations of slaves also posed security risks. Polybius (*apud* Strabo 3.2.10) asserts that in his time, 40,000 slaves worked in the silver mines of Cartagena in Spain alone.

Infrastructural improvements such as roads, aqueducts, and warehouses continued to be made in Italy. The harbors were particularly important for an economy that came to focus on large-scale trade. In 194 BC, the Romans founded the colony of Puteoli (Livy 32, 1–3), revitalizing an old harbor in the gulf of Naples which they had used from the war years of 215/4 BC onward and where they established a custom post (*portorium*) in 199 BC. Puteoli became Rome’s main sea harbor, retaining this position until the expansion of Ostia in the first century AD. But the transformations were most spectacular in Rome itself. One year after the foundation of Puteoli, the magistrates decided to replace the old river harbor of the Forum Boarium, exposed to fire and flooding and encumbered by temples, with a new river harbor outside the city limits, on the left bank of the Tiber downstream from the Aventine. This installation was named an *emporium*, which evoked a Hellenistic context despite its revolutionary and specifically Roman innovations. Between 193 and 174 BC, the authorities constructed a giant warehouse, the Porticus Aemilia, 487 meters long and 60 meters wide (i.e., nearly 30,000m²).⁷⁷ In its immediate neighborhood, the so-called “Monte Testaccio” – a hill-sized pile of discarded amphoras – began to rise. The censors of 179 BC gave the capital a new market (*macellum*). All these dates reflect the dynamism of developing maritime trade routes, and their extensions along rivers and on land, in the wake of Rome’s victory over

⁷⁶ Vallet 1958: 210. ⁷⁷ Gros 1996: 465–6.

Carthage. *Opus caementicium*, a typically Roman construction technique, was essential in these facilities: concrete needed only cheap (salvaged) raw material and low-skill laborers supervised by expert foremen or architects. This “molded architecture” made possible very large complexes at little cost, thanks to the reusability of the formwork, which could be dismantled and reassembled as the work progressed. It also allowed new boldness in architectural forms, such as vaults, cupolas, and curved walls. In the second century BC, a variant called *opus incertum*, characterized by facings made of rough stone, became most common in new construction projects.

More than ever, agriculture drove the Roman economy. In this period, it underwent important changes (reflected in Cato’s *De agri cultura*) and a masked agrarian crisis, which came to a head at the end of our period as rural migrants swelled the ranks of the urban *plebs*, “landless farmers” claiming “farmerless land.”⁷⁸ In large parts of central Italy in particular, where nature favored subsistence agriculture, landowners introduced olives and wine as cash crops. Elsewhere, intensive agriculture displaced extensive nomadic animal rearing: in the *elogium* of Polla (Forum Popilii), at the end of this period, a magistrate prides himself on having caused shepherds to make room for farmers on *ager publicus* (“*ut de agro poplico aratoribus cederent paastores*”).⁷⁹ Techniques of foreign origin stimulated this change. After the defeat of Carthage, the Senate commissioned a Latin (and later a Greek) translation of the work of the famous Carthaginian agronomist Mago, the Romans’ authority of choice on olive cultivation and viticulture, in a period when olive oil and above all wine spearheaded Italian exports. The underlying “idea of plantation”⁸⁰ is diametrically opposed to the subsistence agriculture which traditionally dominated central Italy, and which continued elsewhere. Recent surveys, excavations, and research projects finally permit us to draw a differentiated picture of land use around Italy. Some areas – particularly many mountain zones of southern Italy – were exploited in the “archaic” manner as outlined above (forestry, grazing, extensive agriculture, and even semi-desertification). In Etruria, the allied inland cities and the coastal Roman or Latin colonies witnessed dynamic agricultural development, and it was from this period that the agricultural potential of the Tuscan interior was fulfilled.⁸¹ (In this context, it is hard to understand Plutarch’s account (*Tib. Gracc.* 8) of a semi-deserted Etruscan countryside worked by slaves in 133 BC).⁸² Finally, specialized high-yield agriculture gained ground in zones where the nature of the soil and access to transport and export permitted. Once again, commercial amphoras are a

⁷⁸ Nicolet 1977: 117–30. ⁷⁹ *CIL* 1.551; X.6950; *ILS* 23; *ILLRP* 1.454.

⁸⁰ Carandini 1989b: 509. On the discontinuity represented by the “plantation” of post-Hannibalic Italy, cf. Toynbee 1965: 296–312.

⁸¹ Cristofani 1986: 151–4. ⁸² Harris 1971: 203–4.

precious source of information. During the first half of the second century BC, just as in the preceding period, Greco-Italic amphoras continued to be the principal containers in which abundant Italian wines were exported across the west Mediterranean. Shortly before the middle of this century, however, they began to be replaced by a new type, the Dressel IA amphora, the first typically Italian vessel: less elegant than the Greco-Italic amphoras, but more solid and easier to handle and store on ships. In the late Republic, they were exported overseas – mainly to the west – in the tens of millions.⁸³ Confirming the specific character of the Adriatic zone of Italy, other types of amphoras soon appeared there and particularly in Apulia, to export its wine and oil to Gallia Cisalpina and the eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁴

After the first and modest *villas* of the third century BC,⁸⁵ the second century saw a huge increase in the number of more or less large, intensively exploited estates, the slave *villas* that are often called “Catonian.” They are mostly found in Tyrrhenian central Italy.⁸⁶ This was a gradual development, accelerating in the second half of the second century.⁸⁷ Overall, the general picture of Italian agriculture remained one of great diversity, including *latifundia* (still rare), large and medium *villas*, farms, and *vici* or hamlets (distinctions not easily made on the basis of archaeological evidence alone, given that a farm might either have been an independent unit of production or formed part of a large estate).

The craft industry also saw major upheavals, visible in potsherds, modest but imperishable witnesses of history. The foremost example is Campanian A, a black-glazed ware originating from Naples. Its production began in the third century BC, with modest diffusion toward Gaul, Spain, and Africa. After the Second Punic War, prodigious quantities were manufactured and exported. Around the Mediterranean, Campanian A was, at its peak (c. 250–50 BC), the most abundantly distributed type of terracotta vessel between Attic pottery in the fifth and fourth centuries BC and the African sigillated pottery of the late empire: estimates suggest that some nine million pieces were exported to Gaul alone during a century and a half.⁸⁸ These wares were mass-produced and abandoned artistic pretensions by narrowing the repertory to very utilitarian forms, standardizing the modest decoration, simplifying the manufacturing process, and imposing absolute anonymity. This broke the direct link between producers and consumers. The pottery was intended for export, notably overseas, and loaded as complementary freight onto ships carrying amphoras. This enabled it to compete successfully with local products in distant markets. These features were also essential elements of the slave mode of production. Campanian B, which

⁸³ Cf. Tchernia 1986: 85–7.

⁸⁴ Cipriano and Carre 1989.

⁸⁵ Vallat 1987; Torelli 1981: 422; 1990.

⁸⁶ Morel 1989: 496.

⁸⁷ Tchernia 1986: 57, 65–6.

⁸⁸ Morel 1986: 344, and more generally on this pottery 335–51.

first appeared in northern Etruria (Volterra) in the first half of the second century BC, differed from Campanian A in technical characteristics but otherwise represents a substantially analogous case, especially once production moved to Cales in northern Campania, where this “B-oid” pottery documents increasing industrial and commercial dynamism. Later still, sigillated “Arezzo” pottery was partly produced in Pisa and Lyon. With the exception of Pisa, the Etruscan or Etruscanizing pottery workshops referred to above (Volterra, Cales, Arezzo, Lyon) were situated far from the sea, and this pottery, in contrast to Campanian A, was widely distributed inland in Italy and elsewhere.

These three large productions (Campanian A, B, and B-oid) came from regions where land use preferentially followed the new system of production (the high-yield *villae*), amphora factories allowed export of their products, and *opus caementicium* was used. They were located in cities of some importance: Volterra, Naples, Cales (just as the later “Arretine” sigillated pottery came from Arezzo, Pisa, and Lyon). At that time, Italy was the manufacturing center of the western world. In Carthage in the first half of the second century BC, the bulk of semi-fine pottery was Campanian A from Naples; the same was true throughout that century in Numidian Hippo, the *oppida* of southern Gaul, and numerous sites in Spain. (In Greece, Cyprus, Alexandria, and the Black Sea, however, these vessels are rare: despite the spread of Italian *negotiatores*, a commercial divide continued to separate the western and eastern Mediterranean.)

Large-scale trade was coupled with commercial agriculture and craft production: none was conceivable without the others. Italian wines and Campanian A were not sold because they had been produced; they were produced to be sold. It is with good reason that for this period, we speak of “a trade system based on slavery.”⁸⁹ It is likely that the (freedmen?) supervisors of production were also behind the commercial enterprises.

Italy was full of workshops dedicated to various branches of craft production but more modest in scale than the large factories for Campanian A. Various indicators suggest that they too were influenced by the slave production mode, for example in the simplification of their products or anonymous production. We should note Italians’ reluctance to adopt certain techniques that would have facilitated mass production, such as the use of moulds for pottery or lamps, which were fashionable in the Hellenistic east in the same period; but large-scale production, exceptional as it was, and the organization of maritime transport, certainly set the tone for this period, for Italian manufacture, and for Italy’s relationship with the rest of the Mediterranean. This phenomenon contradicts claims that

⁸⁹ Schiavone 1977: 44.

“ancient transportation was too costly to make commerce in cheap wares profitable,”⁹⁰ that “even in cities situated near the sea an article produced on the spot was much cheaper than one imported from a distant place,”⁹¹ or that “the prosperity of a pottery owes less to faraway markets than to those nearby.”⁹²

These developments, above all in Italian wine and Campanian A pottery, remind us *mutatis mutandis* of Marx’s dictum that “the low price of goods is the heavy artillery of the bourgeoisie.”⁹³ However, an important question remains to be settled: to what extent did this success in agriculture, manufacturing, and trade bring prosperity to their promoters, their workers, and their regions of origin? To whom did the profits go, and how?⁹⁴

Transport on water played an essential role. However much land transport of people and goods was improved by Roman roads and the increasing use of mules (from the second century BC onwards) as packsaddle animals or to pull carts,⁹⁵ it is doubtful whether land routes ever competed with sea or river routes for cost or convenience. The Dressel 1 amphoras of the Tyrrhenian coastline were hardly ever transported toward the Adriatic coast, and Campanian A not at all. The massive diffusion of these wares toward central Gaul⁹⁶ owed much to regional river networks. In general, the growth of maritime trade (for agricultural and manufactured products) is attested by the spectacular proliferation of shipwrecks from 200 BC onwards: of 103 ancient wrecks found along the French coast before 1975, 48 come from the period from 200 to 50 BC,⁹⁷ and recent discoveries have barely affected this proportion.

Finally, two comments on coinage. From the Second Punic War onwards, Rome increasingly asserted its monetary hegemony. Silver *denarii* struck in Rome circulated throughout Italy, accompanied at times (until 161 BC) by other silver issues, the *victoriati*.⁹⁸ The exact role of this coinage is difficult to ascertain, and we do not know the price of a Campanian A plate, how the sale of an amphora of wine was arranged, or how transactions between producers, intermediaries, and buyers in Gaul or Carthage worked in practice. In other words, it is almost impossible to connect erudite and precise numismatic considerations with the concrete realities of everyday economic life.

Our analysis has arrived at a point where Roman society went through a grave crisis. The number of adult male Roman citizens, which had grown from 258,000 in 188 BC to 337,000 in 163 BC, dropped to 318,000 by 135 BC. The slaves were stirring and became a danger. The leadership was

⁹⁰ Frank 1927: 112. ⁹¹ Rostovtzeff 1957: 177. ⁹² Goudineau 1974: 109.

⁹³ Cited by Carandini 1979: 205. ⁹⁴ See below, Chapter 22.

⁹⁵ Laurence 2001. ⁹⁶ Tchernia 1986: 77–85.

⁹⁷ Lequément and Liou 1975; Morel 1998. ⁹⁸ Crawford 1985: 52–74.

divided as to which measures to take. In 133 BC, the tribune of the people Tiberius Gracchus proposed a project to deal with the agrarian problem and to revitalize the countryside. He was assassinated. But the long period of factional strife that was about to commence would not change the economic structures that were formed during the period covered in this chapter: the heyday of the slave mode of production was not over yet.