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Roman Colonialism as Settler Colonialism? Potentialities and Problems

Evan Jewell

Settler colonialism, which this volume ambitiously, yet critically and rigorously interrogates as a framework for understanding different colonial phenomena across multiple temporalities, scales, and spatialities, represents a promising lens for understanding some of the processes, motivations, and results of Roman colonization. The "deep historical" approach which Pelgrom advocates for, and the questions which he poses at the outset of his contribution, are indeed large in scope, but they importantly do not shy away from pushing the envelope in terms of the frameworks we can bring to an undertheorized field of Roman history, not least from studies of later forms of colonialism. This is much needed in the field (advocated, for example, in Isayev, Jewell, Gizaw and Schenck 2023). Pelgrom's inversion of the perennial binary of Roman colonizer versus indigenous/migrant/refugee victim, through the example of Machiavelli's reframing of the Gallic invasions, might seem at first look to fall into the trap of "replacement theory", which dominates current discourses within the conservative politics of immigration. Yet it nonetheless forces us to consider anew how issues of agency, intent and the *en masse* movement of coherent—cultural, political, religious or otherwise—groups of people determine what was, or is now, designated by historians as a form of "invasion" or "colonization", or rather differently, as a "migration". When does movement from one place of habitation to another become something other than just (a) movement? Does that movement broach, or pass into another taxonomy, at that moment of a displacement, and an elimination, of another group in the process of seeking emplacement in a new space of habitation?

Indeed, Pelgrom's nuanced consideration of Veracini's framework of settler colonialism versus the more recognizable *longue durée* phenomenon of settler colonization opens the door to a new mode of analysis, which is extended and implemented in Daniels' contribution on the Caesarian colonies at the end of the first century BCE. Daniels' underlining of the non-colonial options which Romans could avail themselves of to administer territories, such as Pompey's synoecisms in the Greek urban centers of the east after the Mithradatic wars, offers a crucial counterpoint to our understanding of Roman colonialism as the dominant instrument of imperial expansion and control. Moreover, his discussion of how *provinciae* and *coloniae* can perhaps find legibility in the distinction between extractive "colonialism" and more eliminatory "settler colonialism" is enlightening and nuanced in its explication, even if we do need to draw distinctions between citizen and non-citizen actors, or "exploiting agents of empire" and his point that both *provinciae* and modern colonies "saw a class of private traders and

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contractors that were indispensable for the exploitation of the provincia/colony." For we must ask, would a freedman, a freeborn Roman citizen, and an Italian (who was not necessarily a Roman citizen) all have the same extractive relationship to the *provincia* as that of the modern colonial actors and apparatus. Some consideration of colonial trading companies, such as the Dutch East India Company or British East India Company, as equivalents to, say, Roman and Italian *negotiatores* operating in Epirus or Delos, could offer fruitful insights.

Daniels' piece also offers an assessment of my own attempt to reorient our understanding of the motivations driving Roman colonization towards internal concerns—domestic politics and status-based struggles—especially in the Caesarian and Augustan phase of transmarine colonies. While I do concur in the belief that "the foundation of Roman *coloniae* at this time in the east … can be understood through their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire", Daniels proposes that we need to arrive at a far more complicated view of elite solidarity on the issue of colonization as a means of social engineering. In particular, he argues that Caesar's motivations for the creation of a transmarine colonization scheme were not necessarily tied to, nor driven by, an elite consensus—and its concomitant discourses—that the *plebs urbana* needed to be "drained" from the city. And this point is well taken: not everyone had precisely the same reasons for displacing the *plebs urbana*. Cicero did, after all, oppose land redistribution schemes, such as that of Rullus' in 63 BCE in his *De lege agraria* orations, both before the *plebs* in a *contio*, and before the senate.

Even so, we should refrain from equating Caesar's programmes with those of the Gracchi—an approach long abandoned for its anachronism—and instead consider that Caesar could have his cake and eat it too: he could tap into his fellow elites' desire to displace the *plebs urbana* from the *urbs*, and equally serve his own agenda (populist, *popularis,* or otherwise). That "Caesar initiated a 'settler revolution' not to prevent a revolution at home, but to anchor his own" reads as a false dilemma, inasmuch as the two aims were not mutually exclusive, so long as they were not at odds with each other—and rarely did that ever occur. Moreover, it is unlikely that Caesar could ever rely upon the transmarine *coloniae* for true political support—not least cold, hard votes in the assemblies—when the journey to Rome to vote obviated this for most citizens from the get go (Jewell 2019: 28). And even the struggle between Caesar's colonists and Atticus (and his fellow cattle ranchers) in and around Buthrotum—cited as a case in point—speaks to Caesar's desire, at least as Cicero understood it and transmits it, to satisfy a broader elite disregard for the *plebs urbana* and where they ended up through the displacement mechanism of colonial foundations: so long as they were *overseas*, and thus, they were no longer *over here, in the city*, seems to be all that mattered as a point of fundamental agreement, not disagreement, between elites (senatorial and equestrian) at this time in Rome—Caesar included (Cic. Att. 16.16a.3 = SB 407A- July 4 or 5-: c*um autem mare transissent, curaturum se ut in alium*

agrum deducerentur; "once they [sc. the colonists] had gone overseas he would see to it that they were settled on some other land"). Where Daniels' analysis proves salutary is his insight that the aims of the average—often freedperson—colonist could come into conflict (sometimes physical, as at Buthrotum) with those of the Roman elites who had already settled in the provinces.

By the same token though, noting how it was the *plebs*, for instance, who requested the vengeance against the Aequi for their terrorization of Roman colonists, Pelgrom suggests that some of the impetus for Roman "elimination" campaigns came from the collective *plebs,* and not simply the "Roman state and the military". Here, some nuance could be lost in such an analysis, since Livy's (9.24) account only attributes to the *plebs* a desire for the safety of any Roman colonist, which drove their push to seek vengeance against the Aequi, while equally, the majority of the voting (propertied) *plebs* would have also constituted the men of age serving in the military (*iuventus*)—what the (propertied) *plebs* wanted, was in all likelihood synonymous with what the military wanted, outside of the imperatives of the senatorial class and its own agenda. Our understanding of the agency and intentions in such an episode are further muddied by the fact that it is Livy who transmits them, and again, that these may be inflected by the discourses surrounding colonization from the late republican debates over land redistribution and then Caesar's transmarine colonies (see Jewell 2019: 24 with n.125).

One other front, however, where settler colonialism might be brought into fruitful conversation with Roman colonization is the factor of environment, since many a Roman colony and New World colony failed due to environmental factors, from lack of water sources to malaria and yellow fever. Connected to this, too, was cultivation of racial differences between colonist and colonized, but also between metropole and colony, sometimes themselves based on racialized theories of disease and environment (see e.g. Nash 2006). Differential immunity and the erstwhile Black Swan of mosquito-borne viruses, such as yellow fever, which could influence, if not wholly determine, the outcomes in the arena of Caribbean colonial competition (see e.g. McNeill 2010), could just as easily have had an impact on the relative outcomes of Roman colonization ventures. In 186 BCE, the colonies of Buxentum and Sipontum were found to be abandoned, perhaps partially for environmental reasons, while at Salapia the colonists did in fact ask to move due to the pestilential nature of their site, just as Placentia and Cremona asked for supplementary colonists due to disease outbreaks ravaging their numbers; the sources also seem to link Liternum's issues with its marshes (Buxentum and Sipontum: Livy 39.23.3; Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.71. *Pace* Salmon (1970: 99), opportunism from locals who sought Roman citizenship, cannot be the overriding reason for abandonment—every foundation had a healthy number of Roman citizens among it. Cf. Gualtieri and de Polignac (1991) on the lack of a shift of location for Buxentum towards the coast. Placentia and Cremona supplement in 190 due to disease: Livy, 37.46.10. Salapia: Vitruv. 1.4.12. with Sallares (2002: 264–66). Liternum: Val. Max. 5.3.2). Cosa suffered from lack of a

water source and, as ingenious as its water recycling and storage systems were, it was also likely hampered by the malarial nature of the Maremma region, just as its sister foundation, Paestum, also suffered from similar issues linked to the "diseased" environment (See Sallares (2002: 193, 197-8, 250); and now Glennie (2022: 44-8). On Paestum: Strabo, 5.4.13. On the Maremma: Pliny, Ep. 5.6.2). At another level, land reclamation projects, such as those in the Pontine marshes (Attema et al. 2024; Davies et al. 2023; Sevink 2023), should also be viewed similarly, within the matrices of settler colonialism, just as Zwiers does in this volume for the Dutch colonial landscape, and as Six does for the potential space colony and its hostile environment.

The colonial ground, so to speak, from questions of political agendas and social engineering to environmental factors, recast through the matrix of settler colonialism frameworks, seems to present a wealth of new opportunities for revisiting old questions and evidence for the study of Roman colonies anew, and this volume, not least the contributions of Pelgrom and Daniels, go a long way to setting the terms for future research and debate in this sphere.

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