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TOTA ITALIA

Fay Glinister

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TOTA ITALIA

M. TORELLI: *Tota Italia. Essays in the Cultural Formation of Roman Italy*. Pp. xv + 191, ill., pls. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Cased, £65. ISBN: 0-19-814393-1.

Over the past forty or so years, the name of Mario Torelli has been associated with some of Italy's most significant archaeological excavations, while a stream of publications on an enormous variety of subjects has poured from his pen. With some justification, he may be classed as one of the 'gods' of Roman studies in Italy. Here now is a welcome collection of papers in English, which, along with those translated by H. Fracchia and M. Gualtieri in *Studies in the Romanization of Italy* (Edmonton, 1995), makes more of T.'s influential work on this topic accessible to a non-Italian-speaking and student audience.

Tota Italia comprises a series of essays, mainly reworkings of articles previously published in Italian, all originating as lectures delivered in Oxford in 1988. Though a glance at the contents page may suggest a book with quite disparate elements, in fact there is a clear central theme and approach. The work embraces both cultural and historical aspects of the republican and early imperial periods. It offers an analysis of

how, in these periods of great social change, the manipulation of mythic and cultural elements provided legitimacy for those who acquired power, enabling both 'winners' and 'losers' to restructure and renegotiate their place in the new order and construct a new, unified 'Italian' identity. As a result an intense revival of local cultures occurred in Italy following the Roman conquest, exhibited in literature (e.g. Cato's *Origines*) and in art (e.g. temple-friezes), and contributing to the creation of *tota Italia*.

T.'s perspective on republican history is particularly powerful because his work is informed by expert command of past and current Italian archaeology. This is fully integrated with an extensive knowledge of literary and epigraphical sources, creating an influential analysis. For example, Chapter 2 ('Religious Aspects of Early Roman Colonization') offers an imaginative approach to a traditional topic, revealing Roman mentalities determining the establishment of colonial cults (much, however, is hypothetical). The vitality of T.'s analysis may be seen most strongly in the concluding chapter, '*Tota Italia: At the Roots of Augustan Nostalgia*', which pursues an archaeological inquiry into the uses (dynastic and collective) of the Trojan myth, a unifying theme of the volume. The development and employment of the myth in archaic and republican Italy is usefully examined; T. then describes how, through the colonization process, there was a drawing together under the Roman umbrella of various Trojan myths adopted (and reworked) by various peoples of Italy.

Chapter 6, which unravels the fascinating history of the Corsini throne, demonstrates characteristic features of T.'s scholarship. T. argues that the throne is a copy of a lost fifth-century-B.C. bronze original, created for an aristocrat claiming descent from Etruscan kings for purposes of self-glorification in the rapidly evolving world of Augustan Italy. T. proposes Livia's friend Urgulania as the owner of the original throne, then copied for display in the house of the family she entered around 40 B.C. (the Plautii Silvani). Following the extinction of both branches of the family and the confiscation of their villa (A.D. 64), the throne and other prized family possessions (including portrait busts) were dumped, to be rediscovered only in the 1732 excavations of St John Lateran (p. 161). This chapter illustrates, first, T.'s wide interests: a few brief pages cover Etruscan art and history, the creation of *tota Italia* by the new Augustan and Tiberian municipal élites, prosopography, the reconstruction of Roman topography, the classical tradition, and the history of archaeology in the city of Rome. Secondly, it highlights his mastery of a wide range of source material, and from this the creation of a dense network of coincidences, possibilities, and probabilities, sometimes fanciful, but sometimes highly plausible.

Perhaps more typical of the volume as a whole is Chapter 4, 'The Romanization of Daunia'. Once again, the evidence drawn into the argument is impressive and comprehensive. Yet key questions surrounding the issue of Romanization get short shrift, as a result of T.'s conception of the nature of Roman imperialism, and belief in the Rome-driven nature of Romanization. The massive scholarly interest in and problematization of Romanization over recent years has little place here. T. explicitly comments that the 'profound economic and social transformations' of Romanization were '*imposed* on subjugated peoples' (p. 89; my italics). In the religious sphere, he argues that specific cults were 'developed by the ruling Roman class' as part of a deliberate strategy to make colonies 'centres of ideological integration' with indigenous peoples (p. 96). But was there really a 'Roman model'? To what extent did Rome have a coherent policy for extending 'Romanization' over the peninsula? T. has a desire to see Romanization present at all levels and in all periods, emphasizing how the Roman conquest changes everything—but is this really supported by the evidence? Moreover, the notions of the superiority of Roman culture implicit here

are particularly problematic, not least a mindset which sees cultural acquisitiveness and openness as a 'weakness' on the part of local peoples (p. 89). (Is Rome's famed openness, in contrast, a strength?) The overall impression is of a somewhat old fashioned, Rome-down, Rome-dominated view of Italy during the last four centuries B.C.

Despite these criticisms, *Tota Italia* remains a fertile study of Roman Italy; it is written with verve, and illustrated, beautifully, by maps, plans, drawings, and photographs. A number of illustrations are wrongly cited in the text, and there are various minor typographical errors—the 'tomb of the Jogglers' (p. 155) ought to have rung bells with proof-readers. But these niggles should not detract from a volume which is always a pleasure to read. T.'s great value has always been as a creator of complex constructions which stimulate rather than close off debate; he does that here.

University College London

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