For most of the history of ancient Italy, say 800 BC to 600 AD, we have only the most tenuous ideas about the total size of the population – though sometimes we can detect periods of fairly rapid growth or decline, and ‘carrying capacity’ is, as Saskia Hin points out, within our grasp. The one period when we have any ancient figures worthy of attention stretches from the third century BC to the reign of Claudius, but far from giving us some solid facts these figures have led to a radical division of opinion and an argument that has been going on for well over a century. Were there, to put it briefly, some six million people living in the peninsula by 14 AD, or as many as fourteen million? A well-worn question, to say the least. Parties have formed: ‘low counters’ versus ‘high counters’. H. has a novel solution, a ‘middle count’.

Bringing to the table a full range of the needed skills – she reads the texts carefully, she is deeply knowledgeable about comparative demography, and she is at home in other relevant areas too, such as climate history –, H. clears a good deal of confusion out of the way. It is not true, for instance, that the ‘carrying capacity’ of Italy was insufficient to support more than 7.5 million people, as once claimed by Neville Morley – a strike against the ‘low counters’ (25–26) (but the ‘high counters’ are immediately told that it is difficult to see how as many as 16 million people can have lived in Italy in 14 AD).¹ H. also argues against the view of Morley and others that the city of Rome, because of the density of its population, had an ‘urban graveyard effect’ comparable to that of nineteenth-century London. But the chief object of H.’s criticisms is Peter Brunt, the scholar who revived the study of Roman republican demography in his 1971 book ‘Italian Manpower 225 BC – AD 14’ (second edition, 1987). Brunt took the view that the late-republican population of Italy declined in fertility (he was in consequence a ‘low counter’): by the time of Tiberius, according to him, «the number of adult male citizens was at most about 1,500,000» (‘Italian Manpower’, 130). This position H. strongly assails.

The source of the demographic problem that H. addresses, as is well-known, is in a sense quite simple.² It is these transmitted Roman census figures that have caused the trouble:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>130 BC</td>
<td>318,823</td>
<td>Livy, <em>Periocha</em> 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>394,736</td>
<td>Liv. <em>Per</em> 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>394,336</td>
<td>Liv. <em>Per</em> 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>463,000</td>
<td>Jerome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>900,000 or 910,000</td>
<td>Liv. <em>Per</em> 98 versus Plegon of Tralles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>4,063,000</td>
<td>Res Gestae 8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4,233,000</td>
<td>Res Gestae 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 AD</td>
<td>4,937,000 or 4,100,900</td>
<td>Res Gestae 8.4 versus the *Fasti Ostienses.*³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Later, however, Morley re-thought his position and became a ‘high counter’: JRS 91 (2001), 50–62.
² I should mention that for a long time I have found the arguments in favour of the ‘high count’ to be the more persuasive.

³ https://doi.org/10.17104/0017-1417-2017-2-138
   Generiert durch IP '54.70.40.11', am 05.12.2018, 02:54:57.
   Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
The low counters suppose that, whereas the republican censors registered male citizens who were eligible for military service or all adult males, the imperial census, from Augustus onwards, must have registered all citizens whatsoever, or at least all adults and some children – hence the huge increase between 69 and 28. The high counters, noting that there is no clear reference in the sources to a changed basis for the census or any obvious reason to break with tradition, suppose that the basis for the census remained the same; they account for the increase in various other ways, by reference for example to defective registration under the Republic, to the spread of citizenship to Northern/Transpadane Italy, and more speculatively to natural increase.

Our author first (Part I) reviews in turn the general state of the Italian economy, 201 BC to 14 AD, and the possible changes in climate that occurred in that period. Not surprisingly, these chapters simply show that the low counters, the high counters, or for that matter middle counters, could any of them be right. Next (Part II) she turns to the determinants of demographic change such as the age of girls/women at the age of first marriage, the disease regime, and the sex ratio. Once again, nothing that we know for certain, or for anything like certain, knocks either the low counters or the high counters out of the game.

One of the most novel chapters in the book concerns mortality (Part II, Chapter 4), though in the end it too is inconclusive. Recognizing that no texts or physical remains can tell us, or are likely to tell us, what Roman life expectancy was, recognizing also the inadequacy of the so-often cited Coale-Demeny model life-tables, H. builds instead on the newer and more relevant life-tables first exploited for Roman history by R. Woods (‘Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding’, Economic History Review 60 [2007], 373–99). The trouble continues to be that we cannot get anything like a precise picture of the causes of death in republican Italy (let alone the Roman Empire as a whole). As H. observes (106), the current consensus opinion is that life expectancy at birth in the Roman world was about twenty-five years ($e_0 = 25$). But seventy pages of sophisticated analysis of life-tables do not lead to any correction of this figure, or to its being set on a significantly firmer basis. What H. believes that she has established in these first six chapters is that both the low count and the high count ‘sit uneasily with the facts’ (279) and hence that there is much to be said for a middle count.

In Part III, chapter 7, we come to the kernel of the argument, which is that if we reinterpret the census figures given above to take account of the likely differences in the rulers’ motives for conducting the census, and of consequent (hypothetical) changes in practice, we can see that most of the dramatic increase in the reign of Augustus can be accounted for. The republican censors wanted to know who was liable to serve in the army, who was taxable as a Roman citizen and who possessed the right to vote, but for none of these purposes did they need to include women. (Table 7.1, incidentally, ‘Population size and population trends in a nutshell: main interpretative scenarios as derived from key figures’, is only intelligible after prolonged study).

\[1\] The latter figure is probably the mistaken one: see the paper by C. Nicolet in ‘Epigrafia. Actes du Colloque international d’épigraphie latine en mémoire de Attilio Degrassi’ (Rome, 1991).
H. proposes that Augustus, changing the basis of the census, included those women who were *sui iuris*. She therefore declares herself to be a middle counter, as she already told us in an article published in 2008, though her count, like an Aristotelian mean, is not equidistant from the two extremes – it is closer to the low count than to the high count. As to why Augustus changed the basis of the census, her strongest argument (285–6), which is not without weight, is that he wanted to improve the tax base (but reintroducing taxation of all citizens would hardly have been a politic measure in the relevant years, 29 and 28 BC). The variables are so numerous, however, that H. concludes (292) that it is better to put forward a range of possibilities for the total free population of Italy in 28 BC. She offers three choices, ‘minimizing’ (4,997,136), ‘middling’ (6,725,871) and ‘maximizing’ (10,148,978), emphasizing that though she prefers the ‘middling’ solution, the others are perfectly possible. The divergence between the lowest and the highest possibility remains enormous.

A final, rather anticlimactic, chapter argues that this conclusion in no way collides with the results of archaeological surveys (but the other solutions that have been suggested don’t obviously do so either).

This is an original and in many respects expert account, certainly one of the most interesting of recent years. The author is ready to question any received opinion. She has imagination. The fact that I disagree with her central claim does not affect these judgements. She is sometimes perhaps a little too quick to label a doctrine as ‘orthodox’ or ‘traditional’ (and hence ripe for attack). She tells us, for instance, that «the long-accepted orthodoxy is that the free citizen population of Roman Italy declined over the last two centuries BCE» (7). Really? For ‘is’ read ‘once was’? One’s national perspective may make some difference. This orthodoxy is not now orthodoxy in Italy or, I think, in Britain.

H.’s central argument (chapter 7) does not in my opinion hold up as, at best, anything more than a set of guesses. There is in the first place no basis at all for her assertion that «there must have been multiple census listings» (266; cf. 274). She needs this hypothesis because she thinks that the numbers we have for the Republic are those of the *sui iuris* tax-payers but at the same time she can hardly deny that the republican censors needed a list of potential soldiers. It is much more likely that the censors constructed a single multi-volume list (as is indeed implied by the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus – which H. never mentions), presumably working from the list that their predecessors had deposited in the Atrium Libertatis (Mommsen, ‘Staatsrecht’ 2, 370–1). None of our fairly numerous sources about the contents of the republican census, such as the Herculanea Table, hints in any way that there were multiple lists.

The republican censuses must at least have counted all men of military age, regardless of whether they were *sui iuris* or not. H.’s claim (278) that «during the Republic only adult men *sui iuris* were included in the summary statistics» is

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1 ‘Counting Romans’, in L. de Ligt and S. J. Northwood (Eds.), ‘People, Land and Politics. Demographic Developments and the Transformation of Roman Italy, 300 BC – AD 14’ (Leiden, 2008), 187–238 (it is worth including this reference because the article includes some points that are omitted from the book). The suggestion had previously been put forward by R. Witcher, Journal of Roman Archaeology 18 (2005), 125–32; but H. makes the full case.
wholly unconvincing; it was the adult men *sui iuris* who made the declarations to the censors, but the censors must have included in their total adult sons [sc. those who were seventeen or older] who were *in patria potestate*. The census could not otherwise have fulfilled its military function. It must also have included, in theory at least, all men over 45, so that a man who wished to prove that he was exempt from military service could appeal to the census list, just as a citizen whose rights – his right to vote, for instance – had for some reason been contested could appeal to the same list (see further Brunt, *Italian Manpower*, 22).

There is only room here to comment on the single most important piece of evidence that H. relies on, the passage in Liv. *Per.* 59 where he gives the total that the censors reported in 130 BC and adds the words *praeter pupillos* *pupillas* et *viduas*. H. argues that these exceptions were specified because Livy (and Livy’s readers?) knew that the basis of the republican census was a list of *sui iuris* citizens except that orphans and widows, though they were (well, most of them anyway) *sui iuris*, were excluded. She adopts Walter Scheidel’s suggestion¹ that Livy included this detail because he was writing Book 59 in or shortly after 8 BC when Augustus carried out the second of his censuses, doing so according to the new rules he had established – which meant that he included the *pupilli*, *pupillae* and *viduae*. Including them will in H.’s view have been enough to account for most of the difference between the 900,000 of 69 BC and the 4,063,000 of 28 BC.

This theory will not wash, if only because it implies that Livy grossly misunderstood the republican census: he could have said that the censors’ totals represented citizens *sui iuris*, which is supposedly what he thought, but what he actually said, repeatedly, was that – just as common sense would suggest – they represented the number of *capita civium* (adult males, as it was hardly necessary to add in an ancient state). There is just no way in which *capita civium* can mean *capita eorum civium qui sui iuris sunt*. In short, the middle count may well be right, but this book does not present a strong case in its favour.

One orthodoxy, or at least widespread opinion, that H. does not question, incidentally, is that the demography of late-republican Italy was seriously affected by malaria. The weakness in this argument is that only a minor part of the peninsula can be shown to have been subject to malaria – mostly low-lying coastal plains from the Maremma southwards. The subject is too complex to be debated here, but H. seems insufficiently critical and perhaps has a certain tendency to overstate malaria’s likely prevalence (e.g. 93, 119–20, 125–6). Another claim against the high counters is also ill-founded, namely that divorce was «not uncommon» (272); Susan Treggiari having argued for the opposite view,² such an assertion needs to be given a hypothetical numerical value and defended.

The main body of relevant material that H. neglects – the very large amount of archaeological evidence for the economic conditions of Italian towns, from Aquileia to Velia, in the second and first centuries BC – might not in the end have changed her conclusions very much. Minor slips and implausibilities are surprisingly frequent, but in the end don’t affect the argument much either. Rome was not at war with Macedon during the census of 194/3 (145), and it is significantly misleading to suggest (146) that Rome was at peace after 201. It is hard to make

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¹ CQ 59 (2009), 653–8.
any sense out of the argument that the *comitia tributa* was more important than the *comitia centuriata* (267). H.’s account of the late-republican economy conspicuously fails to take adequate account of the destruction of fixed capital during the long series of wars that took place on Italian soil between 91 and 36.

Why, finally, does it not occur to anyone that the census figures in the *Res Gestae* may be seriously exaggerated? Roman public figures sometimes played fast and loose with big numbers (Pliny, *Natural History* 7.197, provides an excellent example, concerning Pompey). Augustus longed to show posterity that under his regime Italy was populous (cf. *Res Gestae* 28.2). The numbers themselves were of entirely symbolic significance, as the twenty- and twenty-one gaps between them demonstrate.¹

All in all, however, H.’s is an excellent first book, and it makes one want to read a demographic history of the whole Roman Empire written by the same hands.

New York

William V. Harris

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¹ Augustus’ numbers do not become more credible just because they are consistent with each other, as claimed by A. Launaro, *Peasants and Slaves: the Rural Population of Roman Italy (200 BC to AD 100)* (Cambridge, 2011), 14.

² L. Grig/G. Kelly (Eds.), *Two Romes. Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2011.