The Roman Conquest of Italy (Ancient World)

Jean-Michel David

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This is an account of the turbulent centuries in which the forces of Rome subdued the peoples of Italy, incorporated their aristocracies and created, by the end of the first-century BC, a unified Italian state of Roman citizens. At the time of the second Punic War when Hannibal descended from the Alps, Italy consisted of several ancient settlements and peoples: among them, the Gauls in the North, the Etruscans in the centre, the Greeks on the Southern coasts and in Sicily, and the indigenous Phoenicians in Sardinia. The Romans themselves occupied little more than one-tenth of what is now modern Italy. The process by which these people were incorporated into the Roman Polity was violent and effective. The state that Augustus inherited was not only the largest in the ancient world, but efficiently ordered and administered from the Roman centre. The book opens with a description of the peoples of Italy at around the end of the fourth-century BC. It describes the early success of Roman diplomacy and force in creating client populations among the Etruscans, the Latins and the Hellenized populations of the south. Hannibal's invasion both accelerated and accentuated the process of incorporation. Those people who sided with the Carthaginians were ruthlessly punished, their lands confiscated and tens of thousands massacred. Those people siding with the Romans required their protection. Whereas at the beginning of the period the Italian peoples sought to preserve their independence and ethnic traditions, by its end those who had not achieved Roman citizenship were demanding it, by argument and by force. The author shows how the social and civil wars stemmed more from a desire for inclusion in the Roman state than independence from it. Jean-Michel David describes the dramatic change in the Roman economy and polity during the period. He also examines the causes and consequences of the changes in population that took place, including the effects of the enslavement and importation of large numbers of defeated rebels (including, for example, over one million Gauls). By the end of the period many of the slaves had, too, graduated by a process of emancipation and economic well-being to the citizenship which had once held them in thrall. This is a history of the formative years of Roman power. It takes full account of recent scholarship and archaeological discoveries in Italy.

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