MIGRANT QUARTERS AT ROME?

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Introduction

This paper tries to address a simple question: where did migrants live in the city of Rome under the Principate? Underlying this straightforward question is the more complicated issue whether there is evidence for what is technically called residential clustering, which in its turn is highly relevant for discussions of integration.

In the case of the city of Rome under the Principate, the existence of significant levels of residential clustering is often taken for granted. So, La Piana, in his massive study of immigration to Rome wrote in 1927:

‘It is to-day, and has always been everywhere, the natural tendency of a body of immigrants from the same nationality in a foreign city to live together as much as possible in the same district, where they can reproduce the main characteristics of the social and religious life of the country from which they came. They form sections of their own, separate to a certain extent from the rest of the population, and keep their own language and customs at least as long as the current of immigration remains active. This is a universal phenomenon, of which we have evidence on a large scale in the numerous communities of immigrants from Europe and Asia in the large cities of America. There are reasons for believing that the foreign populations of ancient Rome were no exception to this rule, and that they yielded to this tendency so far as the social and
economic conditions of the city allowed them to follow this instinctive need.¹

Old though it is, La Piana’s statement is useful because it explicitly and concisely summarizes a type of argument that still lingers on: residential segregation is a timeless characteristic of immigrant societies, and such residential segregation implies a lack of integration.²

It is undeniable that Rome at the time of the Principate was full of immigrants. We do not know their numbers, but it seems safe to say that a large part of its population originated from elsewhere. They came from Italy and from the provinces, they comprised people of all social statuses, from senators to destitute peasants; and people of all legal statuses, from Roman citizens to slaves. Rome had become in every sense of the word a cosmopolis.

Where, then, did Rome’s immigrants live? Is it likely that they lived together? And if so, what are the implications for integration? In what follows, I will first discuss some theoretical issues, then move on to a discussion of the surprisingly few pieces of evidence from Rome, and then discuss some indirect ways to analyse the issue. My argument is that with exception of the Jews migrant quarters were absent, and I will end by discussing some of its implications.

1. Residential clustering: some theory

First some clarification of terminology. Residential clustering refers to the overrepresentation of a particular group in a particular section of the area in

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¹ La Piana (1927) 204.
² Cf. for example MacMullen (1993); Noy (2000) 152.
which the population lives. There are three important characteristics to such residential clustering: it can occur along several dimensions, it is a matter of degree, and it can concern more than two groups.

Residential clustering can occur along several dimensions. It can occur along social lines, with for example marginal groups living in separate areas, or with an elite that fences itself off in a nicer part of the city. Clustering can be along economic lines, with richer or poorer neighbourhoods, or with different kinds of industries and shops being located in different parts of the city. It can occur along ethnic lines, with people of a specific ethnic identity living together. Clustering might also occur in terms of migration, with home-born people and newcomers living in separate areas.

To some extent these dimensions are subject to construction. This is best visible in the case of ethnicity, which is not a natural attribute but an ascribed one (self-ascribed, or ascribed by outsiders). In other cases it is not the value itself that is subject to construction, but rather its relevance, the weight that is attributed to it.

Clustering can occur along several dimensions, but at the same time it is obvious that in practice they often overlap: clustering often occurs on several dimensions simultaneously. A segregated neighbourhood might comprise a socially marginal group that is relatively poor and consists of a people with a particular ethnic background who have recently immigrated. Thus, although my interest lies in the clustering of migrants, the other dimensions are also important.

The second characteristic of clustering is that clustering is a matter of degree, not something that is absolute. On each dimension, clustering shows a spectrum running from complete absence of clustering (zero-cases) to complete clustering. Here, I use clustering as a neutral term for any type of overrepresentation, no
matter how small. If the clustering is large, it is termed segregation. At the higher end of the scale, enclaves might be found. If clustering is total or near-total, with 90-100% of the population belonging to one group, it is a ghetto.

Alongside with differences in percentages there are difference in degree of exclusiveness. At the outer extreme, the ghetto is dually exclusive: all members of a group live in the area, and no other groups live amidst them. The enclave, by contrast, is dually open: not every member of the group lives there, and the area also comprises others.³

A third property of clustering is that urban societies quite often consist of more than two groups. Each of these groups may show different rates and different forms of clustering: a particular group might live mixed with another, but remain aloof of a third.⁴

In discussions of residential segregation, agency and causation form large issues. Why do people live in separate neighbourhoods? Clustering might be regarded as the product of free choice (‘self-segregation’). But segregation may also be regarded as something that is forced upon a group: members of the host community might fence themselves off - a process known as ‘White flight’.⁵ It might also be produced by institutional constraints, for example by the structure of the housing market.⁶ Then, there might also be active involvement of the community authorities, either to foster such separation, or, as nowadays, to mitigate its effects.

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³ Peach (2009) 1388.
⁴ Iceland (2009) 5.
⁶ Bolt, Özüekren and Phillips (2010) 175: ‘The role of institutional racism in producing ethnic residential segregation can hardly be underestimated.’
A last issue is the relationship between residential segregation and integration. There is an understandable tendency to take an essentialist approach: to think that residential segregation is segregation itself, and conversely, to take the absence of clustering as a clear sign of integration. Scholars have warned that that is too easy. Contemporary studies show that mixing populations might just as well lead to social withdrawal and a lack of trust, even in members of one’s own group. Whereas it seems clear that there is a connection between residential clustering and integration, the relationship is not straightforward and should be determined on a case by case basis. Residential clustering offers a good approach to the study of integration, but should not be confused with the thing itself.

2. Migrant quarters at Rome: the evidence

What evidence do we have for clustering of immigrants and/or ethnic groups in Rome?

When the *regiones* and *vici* were reorganised by Augustus the districts were certainly not organised along ethnic lines. None of the (later) names of the regiones refers to ethnic traits, and the rather meagre evidence for ethnic *vici-* names is unimpressive. There is no Little Syria, or Little Greece.

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8 Suet., Aug. 30; Dio 55.8.7, with Robinson (1992) 9-10; Richardson (1992) s.v. ‘Regiones quattuordecim’; New Pauly s.v. ‘Regio’.
9 In general, see Lott (2004). A couple of the 120 vici that are known by name carry ethnic names. But the evidence is hardly compelling. The vicus Tuscanus derived its name from Etruscan immigrants in a distant past – perhaps even to the Etruscan phase of the regal period. As states that up till the reign of Augustus the cult of Vortumnus, of Etruscan origin, remained important into early imperial times, the neighborhood might have retained an ethnic connotation. (Tac., Ann. 4.65 with La Piana (1927) 200 n.29 and Lott (2004) 23.) Perhaps. The vicus Capitis Africae has been supposed to form a neighbourhood for people of African descent, but might with more probability be named after an allegorical sculpted head of Africa. (see Noy (2000) 152) Overall, the *vicus* seems to have a mixed ethnic composition. (It might also be relevant that the *ludi compitalicii* were performed in all
Nevertheless, specific regions may have had or acquired a specific flavour. Three parts of the city merit particular discussion, in ascending order of interest: the Campus Martius, the Subura, and Trastevere.

Three late Jewish inscriptions refer to a synagogue or Jewish community of the Campesians, which is normally thought to refer to the Campus Martius. Given the name, it seems reasonable to suppose that the synagogue catered for the Jews living in that area. There is however nothing that indicates that they dominated the Campus Martius. There is no evidence for clustering in any other sense.

The Subura, part of regio IV, is generally described as a poorer district of the city. It is an area where cheap and low-quality agricultural products are sold. It is also strongly associated with prostitution; so, Martial can use ‘magistra Suburana’ for prostitute. In none of the references there is a particular ethnic quality visible – and given the nature of the satirists’ works, one would expect such statements if there was a reason to make them. There are to be sure a number of references to a synagogue (or community) of the Siburesians. If this name does refer to the Subura, it seems reasonable to suppose that the synagogue served a locally residing Jewish population. But just as in the Campus Martius, it is unlikely that they dominated the area.

languages (omnes linguae): Suet., Caesar 39.1, Aug. 43.1 with Lott (2004) 23, who notes that that may also simply mean Latin and Greek.)

10 JIWE II.288; 560; 577/
11 Varro, Ling.Lat. 5.48 for etymology; Martial, Ep. 5.22, for the area having dirty stones and steps never dry; 12.18 for noise (clamosa).
12 Mart., Ep. 7.31; 10.94.
13 Mart., Ep. 6.66 (quales in media sedent Subura), cf. also 2.17; 11.78; see also 11.61.
14 JIWE II.338; 428; 451; 452; 527; 557
15 As Noy comments ad JIWE II.338, adding that in non-Jewish inscriptions the spelling with an i does not occur. The problem then is that it is difficult to think of another explanation for the name – though note that some other synagogue-names have not been explained satisfactory either.
Trastevere is normally regarded as a, if not the, migrant quarter. The evidence for this is a statement found in Philo’s *Embassy*:

‘How then did he [i.e. Augustus] show his approval? He was aware that the great section of Rome on the other side of the Tiber is occupied and inhabited by Jews (*katechomenen kai oikoumenen pros Ioudaion*), most of whom were Roman citizens emancipated’. (...) Yet nevertheless he neither ejected them from Rome nor deprived them of their Roman citizenship because they were careful to preserve their Jewish citizenship also, nor took any violent measures against the houses of prayer, nor prevented them from meeting to receive instructions in the laws, nor opposed their offerings of the first-fruits.’

In itself the statement undeniably points to strong residential clustering of Jews in Trastevere. At the same time there are reasons for worry. In the first place (and obviously), we are in the world of rhetoric. Philo needs the Jews to live clustered. Secondly, it is somewhat disturbing to find that this is the single mention to clustering that we have – in fact, it is the only mention of any type of migrant quarter of Rome. Thirdly, it is difficult not to think that Philo is influenced by the case of his home-city Alexandria, where a great part of the Jews lived the Delta quarter. Philo’s statement is in itself straightforward, but raises the question to what degree clustering occurred.

There is clear evidence that Jews were not exclusively living in Trastevere. They can be found to live elsewhere in the city – as the evidence for the synagogues / communities of the Siburesians and Campesians mentioned above already implies.

It is also clear that other groups lived in Trastevere as well. Based on the presence of foreign cults in Trastevere it has been argued that many eastern

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immigrants resided in Trastevere. The relation between foreign cult and ethnic groups is a complex issue that cannot be treated here. Personally, I am suspicious of the argument that foreign cults served as local community centres for migrants. The openness of the polytheistic system is one crucial issue, another that the ethnicity of at least some of the supposed cults was a constructed one, a third that these cults had to be located outside the pomerium anyway, and a fourth that it is not a given that adherents lived in the vicinity of the cult places. However, to avoid charges of hypercriticism we may accept that the presence of the foreign cults indicates to some extent that foreign groups lived in Trastevere. At the same time, as such foreign cults can also be found elsewhere in the city, the presence of these foreign groups cannot have been confined to it.

The evidence for ethnic clustering is flimsy. All we have in terms of hard evidence is one passage in Philo. In itself this passage is quite explicit: a great part of the Jews clustered in Trastevere. In their case there is nothing that points to the double exclusivity that is associated with the strongest forms of ethnic segregation: not all Jews lived in Trastevere, and other groups lived there as well; and both the Jews and these others can be found in other parts of the city. Otherwise, evidence of migrant quarters is absent.

It is amazing to see how much has been build on so little – a fact that can only be explained by the fact that scholars have been projecting their own preconceived notions on the city. At the same time, the explicitness of Philo raises a problem. The fact that the evidence is flimsy does not necessarily mean that no residential segregation occurred. Put differently, the evidence of Philo can be made to fit with more than one scenario. As we saw, clustering can also occur on other dimensions. Is there evidence for clustering along social and economic lines in Rome?
3. Housing and social clustering at Rome

I start with social clustering. Did specific social groups live in specific parts of the city?

Although the archaeological record for elite *domus* is surprisingly poor, it is quite clear that at least after the Republic the elite *domus* were distributed over large parts of the city. The distribution seems not to have been completely random.\(^{18}\) Quite naturally *domus* were located in the better (i.e. higher) parts of the city, and those areas may have concerned more the eastern than western part of the city, but within these parts no real concentration of elite houses seem to have occurred, and even less popular areas attracted some elite housing.\(^ {19}\) Ironically, elite housing can also be found in the Subura, precisely the area that is otherwise described as one of the poorer parts of the city.\(^ {20}\)

In addition, elite residential mobility probably was high. As is well-known, the *domus* was one of the main venues for the expression of elite identity. We may therefore assume that a high premium was placed on remaining in the same place. But at the same time the sources suggest that there was a high turn-over rate in elite residences.\(^ {21}\) It need not be forgotten that there was a continuous influx of new members of the elite from outside Rome, and a relatively high attrition rate.\(^ {22}\)

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\(^{18}\) Eck (1997) 176-183.

\(^{19}\) In addition to Eck (1997), see also Noreña (2006) fig. 4-5 for the distribution of water pipes and location of elite *domus* over the city. My interpretation differs slightly from both.


\(^{21}\) Eck (1997) 172, 187-190.

\(^{22}\) Hopkins with Burton [diff].
In one sense the domus themselves did show social clustering: a great part of Rome’s slaves lived within them – and even some freedmen remained there. At the same time slave households were mixed: they were mixed ethnically, and they were mixed in the sense that a part of the slaves was homeborn, and a part consisted of imported slaves.

The great majority of the free (and part of the freed) population lived in insulae. The quality of their housing is open to debate. What is clear is that their inhabitants were not confined to the urban poor. One of the most remarkable features is that insulae contained literally a cross-section of urban society, with the poorest tenants living in cellae high up, but wealthier and more respectable people living at the lower levels of the same buildings. The insulae were both highly stratified and socially mixed.

Scholars of modern forms of clustering emphasise that institutional barriers often help to reinforce if not produce residential segregation, and they point in particular to the structure of the housing market. No such institutional barriers seem to apply to Rome. Again, turn-over rates seem to have been high. The openness of the rental market for housing where short-term contracts were quite normal must have been conducive to significant residential mobility. Evictions could occur easily in the case of non-payment of rent, and people could themselves voluntarily and on short notice decide to look for other living space. Furthermore, the lack of solid construction led to collapses and fires, and all other kinds of housing problems, which also militated against prolonged stays.

To sum up: there is no evidence for strong clustering along social lines. The evidence points rather to the reverse: social mixing, at all levels. Given the

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24 Frier (1980).
highly stratified nature of Roman society this in itself an extremely interesting feature that merits closer study. For our purposes it is important because it decreases the possibilities that migrant quarters arose.

4. Economic zoning

Lastly, clustering along economic lines can be studied. This issue normally comes under the heading of economic zoning: the clustering of specific economic activities in specific parts of the city. This is not only indirectly relevant for the subject, but also directly. Not because specific types of work are associated with migrants or ethnic groups – there is hardly such evidence. But rather because in the case of workshops residence and place of work often were the same.

Some zoning seems to have occurred, but it was not complete. Polluting industry might have been located at the margins. An example is formed by the recent find of a very large fullery or tannery at Casal Bertone at the eastern part of Rome outside the walls. The areas outside the city functioned of course primarily as burial area. In addition, there was in Rome a noticeable tendency to create horti around the city. The areas around the city thus functioned in three quite distinct ways: burial, recreation, and industry. I keep finding it difficult to envisage how such a multifunctional space would work, and in the case of Rome the other two functions are much better attested than the industrial one – but this does not preclude its simultaneous occurrence. Be that as it may, at the same time some of the supposedly polluting industry was also located in the city itself.

The location of industry could also depend on transport possibilities and the availability of resources. This could lead to location both within and outside the city. An obvious example of the former is industry that was directly connected to the harbor facilities of Rome: the marble district in Emporion forms a good example. By contrast, brick industry was sited near the clay beds outside Rome.

Whereas it has become increasingly clear that there existed a variety of scales in production units in the Roman urban economy, there can be no doubt that in the case of Rome the small-scale shop/workplace remained dominant. Normally they were located on the ground floor of insulae. The fragmented form of production is in itself suggestive that the workplaces/shops were dispersed all over the city. The fourth century regionaries suggest an almost complete dispersal of warehouses, baths and bakeries over the fourteen regiones.

However, dispersal was probably not complete; and some economic zoning might have occurred. Two types of evidence have been adduced for some form of clustering of shops/workplaces. Firstly, the evidence from inscriptions where people with a particular occupation state where they work shows that some occupations are mentioned more than once in the same area. In the second place some vici were named after trades. Neither of them is fully convincing in itself: the fact that people mentioned where they worked and the fact that some craftsmen mentioned the same area or street proves little in itself. Vicus names could refer to old qualities – and the simple fact remains that the overwhelming majority of known vicus-names is not referring to economic activities. Streets

27 Morel (1987), who places it in the context of a tension between state attempts at centralisation and regulation, and the interests of private individuals. I am not sure.
29 Morel (1987) 141; Morel in his study noted that where there is much evidence for districts that are ‘particulièrement industrieuses’, at the same time the evidence shows ‘une dispersion considérable des activités’.
31 See MacMullen (1974) 130, 132 for a list.
and districts were named after the dominant trades, but nothing precluded the presence of other shops, nor the presence of the same trade elsewhere. Some clustering rather than exclusive zoning took place.

One last topic merits attention. A somewhat unexpected part is played by the evidence for prostitution. In particular at Pompeii prostitution has raised discussions not so much of economic zoning, but of moral zoning: the idea that brothels had to be kept out of the more respectable or vulnerable parts of society. The evidence is complicated, because interpretation hinges on the definition and identification of what counts as a brothel. Estimates of the number of brothels vary radically: one is certain, others have been identified with differing degrees of plausibility. The more are counted, the greater their distribution over the city. Again, some clustering might have taken place, but again this was hardly complete. This might also help to understand the connection made between prostitution and the Subura. As McGinn remarks:

‘I do not deny that the Subura had its brothels and its prostitutes. But the brothels were just one element in the urban mix of residential (both upper- and lower-class) and commercial buildings.’

Only a very modest form of economic clustering seems to occur, and in no sense do we find exclusivist areas dominated by one trade. The dominant pattern is

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34 McGinn (2004) 21, who continues: ‘If any one factor made for a somewhat higher concentration of brothels in the Subura it was the relative absence of public construction, which would have meant more emphasis on residential and commercial establishments overall. Nevertheless, the presence of prostitution in the Subura was likely to have been more a matter of perception than reality. Its proximity to the Forum heightened its profile in the eyes of the male members of the elite who wrote the texts that define for us the nature of the life in the capital’. Cf. 80-81, where the argument is also turned around: because of the fact that cities were socially homogeneous, ‘there is simply no rationale supporting the theory of moral zoning.’
one of random scatter, with a modest degree of clusters of specific shops and industries.

**Implications**

Let me end with what I started with, with La Piana.

‘The question which confronts us at the outset is whether these foreign masses were assimilated by the native element, and if so to what extent, or whether they formed a racial mixture in which the native element itself finally lost its identity.’

Though the question would be phrased differently, it is still valid.

With one notable exception the evidence points to the absence of migrant quarters. In the case of the Jews ethnic clustering occurred: a major share of them lived in Trastevere. This was certainly not exclusive, in both senses: not all Jews lived in Trastevere, and Trastevere did not consist solely of Jews. It was an ethnic enclave rather than a ghetto. Otherwise, migrant quarters are absent. We do not hear of a Syrian quarter, or a quarter of the Gauls. We do not hear about groups of North-Africans living together. In fact, about some groups of migrants we hear very little at all. General theoretical considerations predict that a significant part of the free migrants must have consisted of Italians. They are almost invisible in the written evidence from Rome, and it seems a fair guess that they lived dispersed among the rest of the urban population. The evidence of absence of other forms of clustering along social and economic lines suggests strongly that in this case the absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

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35 La Piana (1927) 200.
It is in my view no coincidence that the sparse evidence that we have relates to the Jews. This was the group with the clearest demarcated identity, in which – famously – ethnic and religious traits merged. It was also a very large group, numbering in the thousands if not tens of thousands. In the case of other groups it is clear that ethnicity did not function as a primary marker of identity. Epitaphs show a much greater propensity to record social ties, occupation, or legal status than origin.

In addition, one might not only look at the extent to which ethnicity functioned as a marker of endentity, but also to patterns of migration. Migration to Rome was an extremely unruly phenomenon. People of all statuses were involved in it, and it was massive. It seems likely that the diverse nature and the continued immigration actively prevented the development of stronger forms of residential segregation.

Seen from the perspective of residential clustering, immigration thus occurs as a relatively unproblematical issue. Immigrants lived amidst the rest of the urban population. But does the relative evidence of residential clustering suggest successful integration?

As we saw above, scholars of modern forms of residential segregation have warned no to take residential clustering as a straightforward index of integration. How, then, should we perceive the relationship in the case of Rome?

At an admittedly much more abstract level than we have been talking about thus far, it seems to me that people in the city expressed and constructed their identity primarily in terms of Romanness. Romanisation-and acculturation theory of the past two decades has offered a model in which people constructed
their identity through selective appropriation of elements of two (or more) cultural repertoires: one their home culture, the other Roman culture. It is clear (at least clear to me) that this type of interaction was asymmetrical: Roman culture was dominant. At the same time this Roman culture was open: it could be joined by outsiders, and it could be redefined in the process. In a deliberately circular definition, Woolf has defined Roman culture as ‘the range of objects, beliefs and practices that were characteristic of people who considered themselves to be, and were widely acknowledged as, Roman’. But what counted as ‘Roman’ changed over time. ‘Becoming Roman was not a matter of acquiring a ready-made cultural package, then, so much as joining the insiders’ debate about what that package did or ought to consist of at that particular time’. This process applied to all levels of society – to culture in the broad sense of the word.

Although this notion has not been brought to the city of Rome, the process of becoming Roman must have been just as important in the heart of the empire as it was elsewhere. Of course, not everyone was participating to the same degree. But the power of Roman culture must have been alluring. Migrants might have been involved to greater or lesser degrees in becoming Roman, but at the same time this process changed what was considered to be Roman. At the heart of the empire, Roman culture became cosmopolitan.

Residential mixing provided a setting for such processes. It is the humble, everyday quality of it that makes it important. Not so much because it brings us back to antiquarian descriptions of Alltagsleben. But rather because it brings a quality back to our discussions which is often missing from it. Society is defined not only in ideology, or in collective public rituals, but also in its daily routines.

It is in day to day encounters that individuals define themselves, their social relations and thereby society.

To conclude. In doing research for this paper, it has surprised me (and hindered me!) how little has been written on the topic of residential clustering in the Roman world. I suggest we place it higher on our research agenda. Slippery subjects like integration need concrete research questions. It need not be forgotten that in debates about integration in contemporary society the question of residential clustering is accorded a very large amount of attention. In the Roman case, the absence of evidence is only relative, and in itself indicative. In any case paucity of sources has never deterred ancient historians from doing research.
Bibliography


