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## Roman Provincial Boundaries. A Multidisciplinary approach to the specific case of Baetica

Sergio España-Chamorro

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in Europe  
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# Student Archaeology in Europe 2014

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David Novák  
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UNIVERSITY  
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# Roman Provincial Boundaries. A Multidisciplinary approach to the specific case of Baetica

Sergio España-Chamorro

**Abstract:** Roman limits have been an important topic in the bibliography, but mostly in the frontiers of the Roman Empire. The Limes Congresses are a good proof, but not for the provincial boundaries. These, however, have not received desired attention. Currently, this topic is getting more important, but it is still not a completely developed field of study. Sometimes the overlay of boundaries, their fuzzy appearance and other complications make this job difficult. A multidisciplinary approach combining traditional perspectives, such as reviewing the Classics, with the study of archaeological remains, such as milestones, onomastic epigraphy, numismatic, “tituli picti” (amphoric epigraphy), pottery, ect., can sketch it out more clearly. Moreover, it will define provincial territories more accurately. Boundaries are not about a simple line, but there are more socio-economic factors influenced by Roman provincial policies, as well as identity, or other factors. In this paper are shown different methods, concepts of limit in Antiquity, problems of different regions, and a preliminary approach to Roman Provincial Boundaries in southern Spain (Provincia Baeticae).

**Keywords:** Roman boundaries – Baetica – Roman Provinces – methodology.

## 1.0.0 Introduction

The bibliography about the Roman frontiers is large and wide, mostly in the Imperial conception. On the contrary, the Roman provincial boundaries have not received so much desired attention. Marking out the provincial limits comes from the necessity of political form of conquest space in the Roman imperial organization. However, marking out space and time (Duțu 1993, 47) needs always the reference of the Rome as a territorial and temporal reference (Caballos Rufino 2011, 190).

## 2.0.0 Core problems

There are some core problems about the Roman provincial boundaries theories. Today, there are still two main tendencies: the notion of well-defined limits (Albertini 1923; Ozcáriz 2006) or on the contrary not-clear and fuzzy boundaries.

In my opinion, we need to think in well-defined borders because of the following reasons. In all areas, we can find changes of fringe of the boundary in the official or administrative epigraphic remains as *miliaria* (Estefanía 1958). This factor cannot be extendedly generalized because of the differences between *conventi* and provinces (Priteto Acinaga 1972). Archaeology has also revealed no epigraphic landmarks. We have also many hints about the interventions of *agrimensori* relating to territorial disputes (Burton 2000) or rebuilding and renewing these boundaries (CIL, II, 1438).<sup>01</sup> All of these clues report us an image of well-defined provincial boundaries.

The problem I want to face is the way of understanding the frontiers. The lack of clear documents, a faint or temporary vision of landmarks and other points have made the idea of fuzzy boundaries. Perhaps, this is the worst in the Iberian Peninsula, because the concept of *Hispaniae* must be understood as a plural and divided concept of province, not only as a whole.

Last question is the timelessness of this kind of studies. The limited testimonies do not allow us to know the variations of boundaries that could have happened through the time. We have documentation about territorial disputes thought the

Empire (Elliot 2004), but if we would like to study a regional dimension, it is not enough. For instance, we have only one proof for the province of *Baetica* (CIL II2/7, 776; CIL II 2349 (p 705); ILS 5973; HEp 1, 1989, 306; AE 1913, 3; AE 1986, 363)<sup>02</sup> and the only one in *Hispaniae* as well. On the contrary, we have reports of strong territorial changes in the Iberian Peninsula as the brief life of *Hispania Superior*, *Trasduriana Provincia* or the ephemeral *conventus iuridicus Arae Augustae*.

Therefore, we can face this topic with the idea that we can know just the most important and long lasting changes of the Provincial re-organization of Augustus and Diocletian with the exceptions of the ephemeral and bad known cases mentioned above.

Knowing this difficulties and restrictions, we can focus to discover the boundaries through a multidisciplinary approach.

## 3.0.0 How can we find the line? Search Strategies

Philological archaeology established the foundation of the provincial boundaries and created the most of the maps that we can see now. We must accept the importance of these foundations through the classical texts, but we need to compare and match the different resources. This allows us to be aware of the mistakes and errors. Therefore, other possibilities to study can be as follows.

### 3.1.0 Itineraria Romana: Re-Reading the Classics

The sources of pathways study are notorious in the Iberian Peninsula (with the exception of the Peutingerian Table). If we search the liminal place names more in depth comparing with the Roman surveying text, we can discover another place with the same functions. For instance, everyone accept the name *Finis* or *Ad Fines* as a boundary element but other as *Ad Aras* or *Ad Turris* could be marking the same function.

Roman surveyors say that an important element that has the use of boundary could be an altar or else, the name quoted in Hyginus is *Aras terminalis*. This place name appears in the Roman

01 CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.

02 AE = L'Année épigraphique; Hep = Hispania Epigraphica.

Itineraries four times in the whole Empire. Three of them are placed in the Iberian Peninsula, two in Baetica. These places are *Ad Aras* (quoted by the Antonine Itinerary 8, Vicarelo Vases 1, 2, 3), nowadays El Garabato (La Carlota, Córdoba) and *Ad Aras 3* (quoted in Vicarello Vases 2, 4) nowadays near of Linares (Jaen).

These kind of places (“Ad” + word in accusative) take the names of any object in the surroundings (Roldan 1966 was the first one to note this; another place names as *Ad Aquas*, *Ad Altrum Flumen*, *Ad Basilicam*, etc.), so we can find *Ad Pontem*, *Ad Flumen*, *Ad Statua*, etc. In this case, we can recognize this kind of place name as a mansion nearby any altar. We do not know the exact location of most of these places but counting the miles of the itineraries, we can enclose a short area. Archaeological approach to any remains has discovered the opposite situation. Now we do not know any altars as a boundary, which are not quoted in the itineraries (Canto de Gregorio 1994; Gómez-Pantoja 1994); (Fig. I; II).

### 3.2.0 Epigraphy

Thanks to the discovery of inscriptions, we can do a review of boundaries. For instance, we had no reports about any *praefecturae* of Emerita Augusta out its *ager*. The discovery of inscriptions in Montemolín in Valdecaballeros revealed this possibility. Nevertheless, these inscriptions also opened a debate, because we do not know the way to administrate that. The so-called *praefectura* of Montemolín (Hitos de Montemolín, ERBC 154a y ERBC 153) <sup>03</sup> is 100 kilometers far from Emerita, in another province. We also have reports about another *praefectura* of Ucubi (Hitos de Valdecaballeros, AE, 1986 y CIL, II, 656), a city in Lusitania, in the surroundings of Metellinum, Lusitania (Fig. III).

We also have a location called *trifinium*, near to Villanueva de Córdoba. This marks the point, where the three cities meet. In addition, we know another one between the two cities (Cisimbrum and Ipoculbulcula; AE, 1977) and another in the fringe of the province, in Murgi (HEp 9, 1999, 67). We have also reports on a monumental inscription through the milestones and the Classics – the so-called Arch of *Ianus Augustus unde Incipit Baetica*. <sup>04</sup>

<sup>03</sup> ERBC = Epigrafía Romana de la Beturia Céltica.

<sup>04</sup> “ab Arcu | <u>nde incipit Baetica | viam Aug[ustam]” (CIL II, 1869: n.4721; Sillières 1990, 300; Toscano San-Corzo Sanchez 1992, 126; Urueña Alonso 2010, 78).

### 3.3.0 Milestones

A study of the formal epigraphic structure of milestones in the northwest corner of Hispania Tarraconensis allowed us to perceive the differences of jurisdiction between the two zones. The foundation of this theory was that the *conventus iuridicus* of the northwest were administrative spaces, so we can notice the changes of administration in the imperial structure of milestone epigraphy in the same pathway and contemporary in the time.

Following this theory, Dulce Estefania could draw the boundary line between the *conventus lucensis* and *conventus bracarenensis*. Alberto Prieto tried to apply the same theory in Baetica. He did not notice any change. The problem is that the *conventus iuridicus* has been understood as the same kind of institution in each part. If we study this institution, we can observe the difference of use in differing provinces, even in the Iberian Peninsula. Anyway, extending this method at other pathways to a provincial level, we can discover some differences as Dulce Estefania proposed.

### 3.4.0 Network distribution of pottery

Nowadays, a new methodology is trying to come up. In this case, the University of Sidney (da Costa 2008; 2011) developed a new system of the border detection through the network distribution of pottery in the same provincial territory. This project was developed on the boundaries of the Arabia and Palestine. The foundation of this theory is that cultural regions were preserved with the Roman Provinces in this part. Due to these “fossilized” regions, this theory supports the idea of maintenance of network distribution of pottery. In this sense, it can be studied by comparing the different ceramic typology on the both sides of the boundary.

This could be a very fruitful system in any part of the Empire, but we cannot generalize it to zones as *Baetica*. This Hispanic province has one of the densest urban space in the whole Empire. It was also one of the most important manufacturer of olive oil and amphoric packages for its distribution. In this context, it is impossible to do any similar. The main problem is the assertion of ethnic spaces preserved in administrative spaces. It has been proved that boundaries don not follow the ethnic spaces mainly (Ozcáriz 2006).

Nevertheless, there is a new possibility to use pottery as boundary system of definition. The amphora epigraphy of *Baetica* is called *tituli picti*. It has some kind of indicators. One of them indicates the *conventus iuridicus*. The amphorae also have the stamps from the *figlinae*. Currently, the archaeological excavations in the Testaccio in Roma are revealing hundreds and hundreds of amphorae. When we have even bigger archive of this *tituli* and stamps, we could link stamps with *tituli* and stamp with the *figlinae*. This will provide us a map of the *figlinae* of each *conventus*.

### 3.5.0 The Nearest Neighbor Algorithm

Comparing the ancient source as Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy, we can find any Hispanic town that never was included in any *conventus iuridicus*. We can find 26 town in the case of *Baetica*, where the *conventus* is not named, but we can deduce it. In another 27 cases, we have no idea in which *conventus iuridicus* were these cities placed. With GIS models, we can use the NNA (Nearest Neighbor Algorithm). With this option, we can calculate the most probable *conventus* for these cities (Urueña Alonso 2011).

Combining all the systems, we can discover and clear more accurately some geographical unknowns of the provincial boundaries.

### 4.0.0 What is the purpose of looking for the boundaries?

As I said at the beginning, frontier studies of the Empire are more fruitful due to a presence of physical line in most of the cases. This promotes the research about army, economy, social studies, otherness, or identity.

When we think about provincial boundaries, we use to have the idea of an administrative space, especially in the case of group of provinces as *Galliae* or *Germaniae*, or in our case, the *Hispaniae*. Most of the times, provincial boundaries allow the identification of a city in one or the other province. Some authors have even defined Roman Provinces as a “league of cities”.

Anyway, we must avoid the positivist perspective of recovering the boundaries in a standardized way. The objective must be appreciate to the strategies of marking in the Roman world and explore new strategies for research of the social role of the modified landscape. In this way, it would allow us to get over the static view of an absolute concept, letting us to explore the dynamic of the processes and the strategies of its creation. Furthermore, we could perceive, as much as possible, the diachronic changes that were produced.

It is vital to understand the space in its context. It allows us to understand the differences of boundaries as administrative institutions related to other similar ones, but not the same. These limited spaces were the administrative areas under control of a magistrate, but they also could have different functions in spaces, which are apparently similar. <sup>05</sup>

Identifying the limits of provincial and *conventual* areas are the first steps to know why they had this kind of extension and how they defined the territorial organization. This is important to resolve any question about the social and ethnic structures. For instance, we can clear the strategies of integration between different ethnic groups in the same space, studying ethnic pre-Roman structures and kinds of their relations before the Roman arrival.

Last years, the re-studying of the *conventus iuridicus* has revealed the importance and role of these structures within the provincial administration in any aspect. For example, the *conventi* of the *Tarracensis* were strongly important for the religious administration. We have no proofs of the religious administration linked to the *conventus*, but we have some data about the fiscal function, as said before.

With respect to the identity, it is indeed hard to know how much influence these *conventus iuridicus* or provinces had. Analyzing the origin of people, we could have a brief idea about that. If we look for the origin of the *Hispanii*, who were abroad (in Italy, France and Britannia), we obtain different data from the people from three provinces of the *Hispaniae*. For example, *conventus iuridicus* from the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula is the most frequent for people, who were abroad. On the other hand, the *conventus iuridicus* from *Baetica* did not appear.

<sup>05</sup> According to my theory, the functions of *conventus* are not the same in different countries.



1



2



3

Fig. 1. Ethnic spaces in Baetica following to the Classics – (1) Strabo, (2) Pliny the Elder, (3) Ptolemy (García Fernández 2012).

### 5.0.0 About frontiers and ethnic spaces

There are great discussion about administrative Roman spaces and ethnic territories. For instance, Strabo gave us some indication about the province of Asia. He explains that the Roman administration did not preserve the ethnic structures. Is this model valid for the whole Empire? The problem in the province of *Baetica* is that there are neither regular concordances with ethnic territories, nor a systematic divergence. Some authors proposed that ethnic structures were not the main factors for the configuration of administrative spaces, but this could influenced any areas (Fig. 1).

A quick look in the *Baetica* give us some interesting cases. One of the most problematic areas was the so-called *Baeturia*. This region was defined by Pliny the Elder as divided in two zones: one is the *Baeturia túrdula* and the other is the *Baeturia céltica*. Having a look at the material culture, some authors have said that there are not so clear divisions between these communities. However, if we use other elements like numismatic, we discover a polarize situation. The *Baeturia túrdula* minted its own coins. On the contrary, the *Baeturia céltica* never minted coins, they used imported coins from other areas; it is the same strategy as the *vaccean*. Maybe Pliny reports us the ethnic geography of this zone

influenced by the administrative limits, because he divided the two *Baeturiae* in two different *conventus*. It is hard to know when the administration and ethnic description begins and when it ends in his text.

Other example can be found in Castulo, in the edge between the *Baetica* and *Tarraconensis*. This city was a part of the *Hispania Ulterior* in the Republican Era. With Augustus, *Hispania Ulterior* was divided in two, *Baetica* and *Lusitania*, but this part of the new province of *Baetica* was moved to the *Tarraconensis*. Castulo had a very long ethnic link with another oppidum of *Baetica* and the geographical features promoted the link with the Guadalquivir valley. In spite of its change to another province, this city preserved its links with the *Baetica* even many centuries after that, as we can see for example in the necropolis.

### 6.0.0 Conclusions

As we can see, the different kind of boundaries can have different functions in the space. We need to understand the *Baetic* landscape as a complex system. In this system, every structure has its role and creates an integrative model. From the *civitas* as the core of urban life, *conventus iuridicus* adds a gear in the administration model of the provincial system as a whole.

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Fig. I. Ad Aras in geographical context (based on Tabula Imperii Romani).



Fig. II. Ad Aras in geographical context (based on Tabula Imperii Romani).

Fig. III. Praefecturae of Emerita (blue) and Ucubi (Green; based on the Atlas of ICA).



Fig. IV. A – Portrait of emperor Elagabal, 218-219 AD, Chalcedony - Nicolo, two-layered: bluish and very dark brown colour, 1,42 x 1,16 x 0,32 cm, inv no.: MNK-Ew-IV-Zl-337; B – Portrait of empress Bruttia Crispina, 178-180 AD, Chalcedony – Agate, three-layered: pale brown, white and very dark brown colour, 1,20 x 0,94 x 0,32 cm, inv no.: MNK-Ew-IV-Zl-1521; C – Portrait of Octavian as god Mercury, 43–40 BC, Chalcedony - Nicolo, two layered: bluish-white and very dark brown colour, 1,23 x 0,90 x 0,29 cm, inv no.: MNK-Ew-IV-Zl-385; D – Portrait of a young member of Julio-Claudian family, Gaius or Lucius Caesar?, 5 BC – 14 AD, Chalcedony - Cornelian, orange colour, translucent, 1,51 x 1,14 x 0,26 cm, inv no.: MNK-Ew-IV-Zl-310; E – Portrait of young emperor Marcus Aurelius, 138-147 AD, Chalcedony-Sardonyx, four-layered: orange, milky-white, dark brown and white, 1,34 x 1,22 x 0,44 cm, inv no.: MNK-Ew-IV-Zl-613 (all gems from the collections of the National Museum in Krakow).