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Limes and provincial awareness in Roman Africa

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► **To cite this version:**

Sergio España-Chamorro. Limes and provincial awareness in Roman Africa. *L’Africa Romana*, vol. XX, pp.2133-2138, 2015. halshs-03548187

HAL Id: halshs-03548187

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Submitted on 9 Feb 2022

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L'AFRICA ROMANA

Momenti di continuità e rottura:
bilancio di trent'anni di convegni *L'Africa romana*

a cura di
Paola Ruggeri



Estratti

Carocci  editore



Collana del Dipartimento di Storia,
Scienze dell'Uomo e della Formazione
dell'Università degli Studi di Sassari

Serie del Centro di Studi Interdisciplinari
sulle Province Romane dell'Università degli Studi di Sassari

Direttore: Paola Ruggeri

49

*In memoria delle vittime innocenti
del tragico attentato
al Musée National du Bardo,
con la solidarietà di tutti gli studiosi
al popolo della Tunisia libera e democratica*

Sassari, 18 marzo 2015

In copertina: L'arco di Caracalla a *Volubilis* (foto di Piero Bartoloni)

1^a edizione, dicembre 2015
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Carocci editore s.p.a., Roma

Finito di stampare nel dicembre 2015 da EuroLit, Roma

ISSN 1828-3004
ISBN 978-88-430-7400-6

Riproduzione vietata ai sensi di legge
(art. 171 della legge 22 aprile 1941, n. 633)
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L'Africa romana

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Atti del xx Convegno Internazionale di studi
Alghero - Porto Conte Ricerche, 26-29 settembre 2013

A cura di Paola Ruggeri
con la collaborazione di Maria Bastiana Cocco,
Alberto Gavini, Edgardo Badaracco, Pierpaolo Longu

Estratti

Volume pubblicato con il contributo finanziario di



**Fondazione
Banco di Sardegna**



Università degli Studi di Sassari
Dipartimento di Storia, Scienze
dell' Uomo e della Formazione

e con il patrocinio e il sostegno del



*Ministero degli Affari Esteri
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SERGIO ESPAÑA-CHAMORRO

Limes and Provincial Awareness in Roman Africa

Ex Africa semper aliquid novi
Pliny the Elder

There is a huge amount of bibliography about Roman *limes*, *Fossatum Africae* and its conception, but just a couple of works have been written about the boundaries of a Roman province and the awareness of *Africa* as a boundary province. In this paper I point out the double awareness of boundaries in Roman Africa and I focus on the provincial boundaries epigraphy, such as *finis* and *terminus*.

Key words: boundaries, Roman identity, provincialization.

Introduction

Geography of Roman Africa is an interesting factor accounting for some important changes, mostly brought about by the socio-political situation: the foundation of the provinces of Africa and their joining with the Kingdom of Numidia mixed in the same administrative space a lot of areas with different ethnic and historic traditions. This was a sign of originality of a divided province that still in the age of Vespasian had some inscriptions in the *Fossa Regia*, despite the fact that by that time there were no frontiers between the Empire and the Kingdom¹.

Pliny the Elder quoted the limits before the annexation of *Africa Vetus* and *Africa Nova* with Numidia in the province of *Africa Proconsularis*. This provincial space was separated from the rest of Numidia through the *Tusca fluvius*, *Numidiae finis*².

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1. Cfr. MATTINGLY *et al.* (2013).
2. PLIN., *nat.*, 5, 2, 22.

Inscriptions and otherness

In this context we can find nine inscriptions referring to the provincial borders of *Africa*. This ensemble was perhaps a frontier dispute or a review of these limits³. It is not so common to find epigraphic proofs of border changes comparing this one with other provinces. This is the reason why the high number of inscriptions and the amount of examples in Africa are so relevant. The people who took over it were two imperial legates, *Sex. Sentiūs Caecilianus* and *C. Rutilius Gallicus*, the first one being the imperial legate in command of the *Legio III Augusta*. This is doubtless a demarcation to limit the space under administration.

[Ex au]ct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) Vespa/siani Cae(saris) Aug(usti) p(atris) p(atriciae) fi/nes provinciae no/vae et veter(is) de/recti qua Fossa / Regia fuit per Ru/tilium Gallicum / co(n)s(ulem) pont(ificem) et Sen/tium Caecilia/num praeto/rem legatos / Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)⁴.

[E]x auc[toritate] / [imp(eratoris)] Vespasian[i] / [Cae(saris)] Aug(usti) p(atris) p(atriciae) f[i]nes pro/vinciae novae [et] / [ve]ter(is) derec[ti] / [q]ua foss[a re]gia fuit per [Ru/ti]lium [Galli/c]um co(n)s(ulem) [pont(ificem) et . . .]⁵.

Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) Ve/spasiani Cae(saris) / Aug(usti) p(atris) p(atriciae) fines / provinciae / novae et vet(eris) / drecti [qua] / fossa re[gia fu] / it per (R)utiliu(m) Cal/licu(m) (!) co(n)s(ulem) pont(ificem) / et Sentiu(m) Caecil/ianu(m) pra(etorem) et leg(atos) / Aug(usti) p(ro) p(raetore)⁶.

[Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) Vespa]/[siani Cae(saris) Aug(usti) p(atris) p(atriciae)] / [fines provinci]/[ae novae et ve]/[t]er(is) drect[i] / [qua] fossa reg[ia] / fuit per Rut[i]/[l]ium Gallicu(m) c[o(n)s(ulem)] / [p]ont(ificem) et Sentiu(m) / Caecilianum / praet(orem) leg(atos) Au/[g(usti) pro] pr(aetore)⁷.

Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) Vespa/siani Cae(saris) Aug(usti) p(atris) p(atriciae) / fines provinc[i]/ae novae et veter(is) / drecti qua fos/ sa regia fuit

3. CORTÉS BÁRCENA (2013), p. 273.

4. EDH HD031815; CIL VIII, 25967.

5. CIL VIII, 25860; CIL VIII, 14882.

6. EDH HD028212; AE, 1912, 148.

7. EDH HD028215.

*per / Rutil(i)um Galli/cum co(n)s(ulem) pont(ificem) et / Sentium Caecil[i]/
anum praeto/rem legatos / Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)*⁸.

*Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) / Vespasiani Cae(saris) / Aug(usti) p(atris)
p(atriciae) fines pro/vinciae novae / et veter(is) derecti / qua fossa re/gia fuit
per / Rutil(i)um Gal/licum co(n)s(ulem) po/nt(ificem) et Senti/um Caecilia/
num praeto/rem legatos / Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)*⁹.

*Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) / Vespasiani / Cae(saris) Aug(usti) p(atris)
p(atriciae) / fines provin/ciae novae et / veter(is) derec/ti(!) qua fossa / regia fuit
/ per Rutilium / Gallicum co(n)s(ulem) / pont(ificem) et Senti/um Caecilia/
num praeto/rem legatos / Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)*¹⁰.

*Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) Vespasiani / Cae(saris) Aug(usti) p(atris)
p(atriciae) fines provin/ciae novae et veter(is) / derecti qua / Fossa regia fuit /
per [R]utilium Gal/licu[m] c]o(n)s(ulem) pont(ificem) et / Sentiu[m] Caecili-
anum / praetorem legatos / Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore)*¹¹.

*Ex auct(oritate) Imp(eratoris) / Vespasiani / Au[g(usti) p(atris)] p(atriciae)
fines / [provinci]ae no/[v]ae et veter(is) de/[re]cti qua fossa [re]/[gi]a fuit
per Rutiliu[m] / [G]allicum co(n)s(ulem) pon[t(ificem)] / [et] Sentiu[m]
Caecil[i]/[a]nu[m] pr[a]etore[m] / [l]egatos Aug(usti) / [---]FD*¹².

However, we also find some epigraphic documents in order to define the imperial territory and other *nationes* or ethnic groups. We can find another group of inscriptions in relation to the demarcation between «Augustus» and the nomad population of Musulamios.

*E]x auctori[tate] / Imp(eratoris) Nerva(e) Traiani / Caes(aris) Aug(usti)
Ger(manici) Dacici / L(ucius) Minicius Natalis / leg(atus) Aug(usti) pro
pr(aetore) / inter Aug(ustum) et / Musul(amios) XXXI / P(---) m(ilia)
p(assuum) [X]VI (et passus) DCCC*¹³.

8. EDH HD028218.

9. EDH HD028221.

10. EDH HD024240.

11. EDH HD010742.

12. EDH HD028735; CIL VIII, 23084.

13. EDH HD023444.

[--- inter A]ug(ustum?) et Musul[a]/mios. V ad p(alum) / (milia) p(edes) XXV¹⁴.

Ex auctoritate / Imp(eratoris) Nervae Traiani Caesaris / Augusti Germanici Dacici pontificis) / maximi trib(unicia) potest(ate) VIII imp(eratoris) IIII co(n)s(ulis) V p(atris) p(atriciae) / L(ucius) Minicius Natalis leg(atus) Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) inter Mu/ sulam<i>os et Valeriam Atticillam / LXXXX A(---) P(---) p(edes) CXVICD¹⁵.

[E]x auctor[itate] / [I]mp(eratoris) Ner(vae) Tra[iani] / Caes(aris) Aug(usti) Ger(manici) D[acici] / L(ucius) Minicius Na[talis] / leg(atus) Aug(usti) pro pr(aetore) [inter] / Musul(amios) et Tisiben[e]/nses II A(---) I[-] / CCC-CLXXII¹⁶.

Thereby we can see the double awareness through epigraphy¹⁷. In one way, some epigraphy shows the same process of delimitation as in other provinces. The use of epigraphs¹⁸ relating to the *fines provinciae*¹⁹, and other elements as the so-called *arae terminalis*²⁰ as a landmark to bind or the *terminus Augustalis* can also show the way to mark out provincial spaces. In the other way, we can see other proofs of the awareness, such as spaces in the edge of the Empire and the character of borderland with other ethnic groups.

This is just a very brief example of all the possibilities to study the understanding of the borders of Roman Africa. We need to understand that a boundary is more than a line. This has cultural, archaeological and identity components²¹. In this case, Africa belongs to the *limes Africanus* and *limes* cannot be understood as a simple line of defence, but as a space of change²². In this space the provincial identity can be expressed, even more

14. *AE*, 2000, 1629.481.

15. *EDHHD*025996.

16. *EDHHD*023450.

17. Provincial identity cannot be appreciated in every case, cfr. MARCOS (2011).

18. Very good studies in Hispanic and African provinces are by CORTÉS BÁRCENA (2006, for military territories, and 2013).

19. *Fines provinciae* is used by Cicero with a strong geographical character: RICHARDSON (2011), p. 9.

20. Even *mausolea* are an evidence of limit, cfr. PRADOS MARTÍNEZ (2013).

21. Cfr. DA COSTA (2008, 2011).

22. LEVEAU (1995), p. 64.

than in other parts because there is a confrontation of identities and otherness, a hybridation and an interaction too. *Limes* influenced the history of the province²³ and it marked the character, culture and identity of Roman Africans.

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23. CHRISTOL (2012), p. 120.

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