

BOUNDARIES OF TERRITORIES AND PEOPLES IN ROMAN ITALY AND BEYOND

edited by
Franco Luciani and Elvira Migliario

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AFTERWORD: ABOUT BOUNDARIES

GIOVANNELLA CRESCI MARRONE
(*Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*)

Reflecting on the subject of boundaries is always an exercise that requires complex issues of political, administrative, legal and economic nature to be taken into account, as well as matters of identity. Reflections on boundaries periodically become topical, especially when geopolitical coordinates – which are subject to constant change – face individual sensitivities and collective consciences with problematic choices. Given the complexity of this issue and its implications, a reflection on boundaries through a diachronic perspective cannot but prove useful. It should also constitute an incitement to confront the realities of the past which, provided that appropriate methodological precautions are used, may help in gaining a better understanding of the ‘ideological toolbox’ necessary to face major challenges and problems of present times.

Resulting from a centuries-old process of expansion, ancient Rome was a macro-system that included a wide variety of ethnic realities and aggregative forms. Within that varied system, borders and boundaries were not only the object of sacralization, but also at the core of juridical reflection, cartographic reproduction and administrative management. The issue can, therefore, be examined from a multidisciplinary perspective. The present volume collects the contributions presented at a conference held in Trento, which was felicitously open to multifaceted approaches to the theme under scrutiny. Indeed, the plural nature of the sources discussed on that occasion has enabled a holistic analysis of borders and boundaries.

The two articles on the work of Strabo focus on how borders and boundaries became objects of his ‘narrative’. Edward Bispham and Elvira Migliario analysed the text of the geographer of Amaseia with the intent to reconstruct the conceptual background that forms the basis of Strabo’s representations, rather than inferring merely ‘physical’ information, and thus to illustrate the cognitive processes that underlie the

geographer's account. The analysis of the historical context of the subdivision of Italy into municipalities and the annexation of Alpine territories show that administrative boundaries were not Strabo's preferred territorial markers. Rather, his accounts encompass orography, hydrography and urban geography of the territories, together with odeporic notions. Strabo's keen interest in the anthropical landscape was not only strongly influenced by the interpretative tools of a well-established ethnographic tradition, but was also fuelled by – and sympathetic to – Augustan policies, especially when dealing with the description of peoples and tribes. In Strabo's representation of the Italian Peninsula, the definition of boundaries thus adds up to a stratified mix of historical, historiographical and ideological coordinates. As Bispham argues, such prevailing 'cultural' aspects cannot but jeopardize any reading of his text, aimed at finding historically certain geographical partitions. Besides, these could only hinge on the constant dynamism of settlements.

Migliario's contribution shows how, for Strabo, the Alps were no simple borderline. Far from that, they represented a large portion of territory, which was home to numerous communities, which, on both slopes, shared – despite some significant differences – similar settlements, as well as comparable resources and lifestyles. In Strabo's *Geography*, therefore, the Alps were a peculiar anthropical and cultural aggregate, rather than a dividing element or a catalyst of identities. As some critics sharply proposed in recent years, Strabo's account in this regard should be deconstructed, if the aim is to obtain a well-founded exegetical interpretation that remains philologically anchored to the text.

While, in the geographical literature of the Hellenistic age, boundaries and borders were often neglected, the Roman world, especially at the end of the Republic – in the effort to consolidate its bureaucratic apparatus of territorial control – was characterized by a pressing need for clear definitions and partitions, whereby borders were given paramount importance. Indeed, with the creation of official chorographic documents, borders became the backbone and the main regulatory criterion of descriptions in geographical literature and land surveyors' writings.

Borders – namely, the lines that administratively separated two autonomous territorial entities – must always be set by a political authority, which determines their shape and guarantees their respect. In Rome, such responsibility was entrusted to the Senate. In the case of disputes between allied communities that required arbitration, the assembly of the *patres* would receive the ambassadors of the counterparties, listen to their competing positions, appoint arbitrators and finally approve the shared resolution of the conflict. The case studies from Roman Italy, as discussed in Federico Santangelo's paper, first of all show the inherent relation between the definition of borders and the exploitation of the territory by its dwellers. Secondly, they bear witness to another inseparable connection that is typical of the Roman world: the net of relations linking urban settlements to their countryside, thus proving that it is not correct to consider city walls as the hallmark of local communities. Thirdly,

they provide evidence for the activism of the Senate, which interfered, on numerous occasions, the self-determination of single *municipia*, either by granting portions of *ager publicus* or by confiscating public and private lands.

The corpus of the *Gromatici veteres* provides abundant references to the manifold ways in which boundaries were usually made visible on the territory and how they were accurately recorded in appropriate cadastral documents. The description of the boundary line in the text of the so-called *sententia Minuciorum*, an arbitration between two Cispadane communities – Genuates and Veturii Langenses – dating back to 117 BCE, is counterpointed by the repetition of the expression *ibi terminus stat* (*CIL* V, 7749 = *ILS* 5946 = *CIL* I², 584 = *FIRA* III², 163 = *ILLRP* 517). The wide range of space-defining elements, partly coinciding with elements of the landscape and partly corresponding to especially manufactured markers, bears witness to the conservative outlook that drove the Roman authorities on many occasions.

These documentary sources pertain to the domain of *Realien*, of material culture and of epigraphy, and show a formulaic style codified by tradition, which captures and eternalizes the outcomes of often-complex demarcations (*terminationes*). As a consequence, inscriptions are among the privileged tools that modern scholars use to rebuild the map of administrative partitions. Inscriptions can positively contribute to this goal if they are engraved not only on boundary stones, but also on milestones found in situ, as well as if they mention voting tribes in the onomastic formulas on funerary or honorific monuments. The range of sources that contribute to the reconstruction of the organization of the territory is, however, very wide and diverse. Included are the technical and theoretical writings of the land surveyors (*Gromatici veteres*), natural geographical features and landscape toponyms, and the partition into dioceses, which, according to some scholars, used to be superimposed on former Roman administrative boundaries. Consequently, it is necessary to adopt suitable methodological devices that may allow for the identification of elements of continuity, as well as of discontinuity, in the rural landscape, as sources often tend to show examples of continuous/subsequent revisions. Of particular significance was the case of *Albingaunum*, whose *ager* was redefined 30 times: *Ingaunis agro tricies dato* (Plin. *nat.* 3.5.46). The cases of partitions within municipal territories concerning the so-called ‘secondary settlements’ are especially noteworthy. Franco Luciani’s examination of a significant number of case studies in Italy shows how rural districts (*pagi*) were commonly located at the edges of civic territories and sometimes on the border between the *agri* of two or more cities. The contribution on this topic also investigates the theme of their respective competences in terms of land management, political representation, and relations between centre and periphery.

As in all cases concerning antiquity (so poor of material evidence compared to more recent eras), the discovery of new documents yields potential new insights and a fruitful rethinking of familiar problems. The recent publications on an opisthographic *cippus* found in the area of Ramaceto, a site in the Ligurian Apennines, aroused crit-

ical interest in the laconic nature of its text. This unique piece of evidence certifies a demarcation (*terminatio*), which involved imperial properties. Marco Maiuro formulated a significant hypothesis about its content: it appears to be signalling an *ager extra clusus* (a typology actually documented in the literature of the *Gromatici veteres*), namely, a portion of land outside the *limitatio* of the territory of Genua and belonging to the Ligurian municipality, within which a *subsicivum* belonging to the imperial treasury would have been located. The originality of this interpretation lies, first of all, in the dating method, which is based on the trends in land policy of the Flavian era. Secondly, it lies in the emphasis that Maiuro placed on the quality of resources in the area where the *cippus* was found: wood – generally used for shipbuilding – bears witness to the strategic and economic relevance of the Apennine forests and suggests the imperial interest in delimiting such profitable properties.

In the Western Provinces, inscriptions provide particularly useful documentary evidence, not only for the identification of the extension of civic territories. Indeed, boundary stones found in numerous regions of the Roman Empire supply a vast body of topographical, chronological, institutional and administrative information. Carolina Cortés Barcena's study of boundary stones of the imperial age suggests the need for appropriate contextualization, while revealing the great typological variety of this material, as well as its monumental significance. It is apparent that boundary stones had the clear and, at times, ostentatious purpose of conveying a message that was not always geared towards strictly legal needs: sometimes, for instance, they were intended to distribute imperial propaganda or reaffirm the legal status of a community. Thus, boundary stones might also have performed the function of memorials.

After the end of the Republic, the complex mosaic of administrative partitions in the Roman age, combined with the juridical regime of the land and the property rights (public and private, individual and collective, laic and religious) had an intrusive and highly autonomous protagonist: the emperor, whose *fundi*, which belonged to the *fiscus*, were exempt from taxation. The project of a 'global' census of these land units highlights the problem of their relationship with the civic entities within which they were located, as the presence of imperial estates – sometimes as the result of testamentary legacies or as confiscation proceedings – entailed a depletion of local finances.

Alberto Dalla Rosa's analysis of the presence – or absence – of imperial properties in different regions of Asia Minor is useful in understanding the strategies adopted, from time to time, by the imperial authority as to the use of land that had come into the possession of the *fiscus*. Its immediate sale on the market could, in fact, be an option fuelled by the will to respect the financial balance of local communities; the degree of urbanization of the territory could consequently represent a determining factor that affected the fiscal choices of the Roman authorities.

Davide Faoro's new exegesis of the text of the *Tabula Clesiana* – a document that prompted a long and complex series of interpretations in the past – confirms that the

peoples defined as *adtributi* became part of the citizen body of the relevant administrative centre (in this case, the *municipium* of *Tridentum*) and their lands actually fell within its civic territory. This analysis also confirms that the tablet, through its evident memorial function, eternalized the outcome of a dispute that was not so much related to the legal status of the inhabitants of the Alpine valleys but rather – once again – to the ownership of the land and, therefore, of the related fiscal condition.

In this collective volume, boundaries are analysed from a range of different perspectives: their ideological dimension; their role in the imagination of a writer such as Strabo; how they impact on the structural hierarchy of the landscape; and how they affect the management of the land. The contributors also dwell upon the relations: between borders and the memorial meaning of the boundary stones; between borders and administrative partitions; and between borders and economic resources, taxation, judicial controversies and land ownership. The wide range of issues discussed nonetheless shows some recurring focal points: 1) the delusion concerning the perpetuity of territorial borders, which is systematically denied by the dynamism of historical changes; 2) the network of relations between centre and periphery, which constantly underwent reconfiguration and rethinking; and 3) the constant relevance and meaningfulness of certain sites over time, often connected to the exploitation of economic resources.

Underlying this rich, insightful and case-based research – ranging from the age of the Republic to that of the Empire, from Italy to Africa, from Gaul and Spain to Asia Minor – is the role of politics. The range of the agents involved runs from senators to officials, from emperors to local administrators, from single subjects to collective entities; but, in all cases, it is confirmed how the management of borders has always implied the taking of political decisions that had a strong impact on society. Contemporary politics should be expected to demonstrate sensitivity to the issues of humanitarian, social, economic and identity-related problems connected to borders, by becoming more effectively involved in the management of conflicts and aiming at their resolution in the name of mutual respect and civil coexistence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Elio Lo Cascio

Preface

Edward Bisham

Boundaries in Strabo's Italy: Space, Time and Difference

Elvira Migliario

Ethnic Affiliations and Political and Cultural Boundaries between the River Po and the Alps

Federico Santangelo

Roman Senate and Civic Territories

Franco Luciani

On the Margins of Civic Territories in Roman Italy: Defining, Shifting and Locating Boundaries

Marco Maiuro

Between City and Fisc: *Caesaris n(ostris)* on an Italian Boundary Stone

Davide Faoro

Beyond the Borders of *Tridentum*: A Textual Interpretation of Claudius' Edict in the *Tabula Clesiana*

Alberto Dalla Rosa

Imperial Properties and Civic Territories: Between Economic Interests and Internal Diplomacy

Carolina Cortés-Bárcena

Demarcation and Visibility of Civic Boundaries in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire

Giovannella Cresci Marrone

Afterword: About Boundaries

Bibliography