

Supplement

The World of Ancient Rome

Authors Foreword

The World of Ancient Rome is the newest iteration of my Imperium Romanum 211 AD map. By making it smaller but double sided, the new print follows a different approach than its larger, DIN A0 sized, brother. I hope that it will be a more attractive alternative for many students of Roman history. The new poster made it possible to combine all my previous Roman Era maps into one. The smaller format means less space has to be devoted if it should be displayed on a wall, while the map can now be comfortably studied elsewhere too. The additional space on the backside made it not only possible to include the Parthian Empire, Judea and Latium maps, but also to extend coverage and close some previously existing gaps between ancillary maps.

The largest ancillary map is dedicated to the Parthian Empire, Rome's great rival in the east. To include it in its entirety, it became necessary to have significant overlap between both maps. This opportunity was used to show the Roman East at an earlier stage, before the annexations of client states and military expansion transformed it to the state depicted in the 211 CE map. I chose the year 64 CE, after the end of the Roman-Parthian war for the control of Armenia in 58-63 CE, and before the outbreak of the great Jewish revolt in 66 CE. After its end, the new emperor Vespasian began to reorganize the entire eastern frontier, starting the aforementioned transformation.

However, neither this one nor the contemporary India map is strictly limited to 64 CE. Especially in the eastern part, in the Hindu Kush mountains and Indus valley, state entities developed very dynamically over the course of the 1st century CE. The relatively short-lived Indo-Sythian rule was replaced by its equally short lived Indo-Parthian successor. Their realm soon fragmented and was reduced to their old heartland in modern Seistan by the rising power of the Kushans, who should dominate the area in the 2nd century CE.

To depict the major actors of the east during the entire duration of the Principate, older and newer sites, including some phases of expansion of these states, are shown as well.



Michael Ditter
Michelstadt, November 2017

Additional Commentaries

In order to maintain consistency with the main Imperium Romanum map, as many parameters as possible were kept unchanged. This includes the scale of 1:6 million, as well as the numbering of the grid and the chosen symbols. Only the standard parallel of the equirectangular projection was changed to 30°N in order to obtain the map segment shown.

Just as for the Imperium Romanum map, the background was composed from landclass and bathymetry data, combined with a shaded relief. The underlying geo data again comes mostly from Natural Earth¹ and the shaded relief was calculated from the SRTM30 data set of the U.S. Geological Survey². The geo data was corrected in those places where the topography has changed significantly since ancient times, especially the coastal areas. In addition, numerous rivers were added.

Borders: During the early principate, both the Roman east and the Parthian Empire largely consisted of the territories of client states, governed by their own kings and dynasts with various degrees of autonomy.

1 <http://www.naturalearthdata.com>

2 <https://www.usgs.gov>

However, since these states were considered integral parts of the respective empires³, it was decided to emphasize the boundary of the imperial realms of influence, instead of the boundary of the actual provinces (as had been the case with the Imperium Romanum map).

In the east, only very little evidence exists for the exact boundaries of the Indo-Parthian Empire. A large part of its history can only be reconstructed from coin finds and their distribution. Even the relationship between the Indo-Parthian Kings and the Great King remains a mystery.

It should also be noted that the political structures on the Roman Levant also had to be simplified on this map. For instance, there are some smaller Tetrarchies that cannot be localized. Among them are the territory of Varus, later assigned to Agrippa II., which had only been written about by Josephus (BJ 2.12.8.), as well as Chalcis, Ampeloessa and Gabe (Plinius NH 5.74), which are suspected to have been located in the relatively unknown rural areas of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. They lacked large and easily traceable urban centers and lived centered around numerous local sanctuaries.

In the Roman world, the difference between villages and cities is often only of a legal nature. The Near East of the time was characterized by a network of villages, among which some had the role of regional centers and could rival both the size and the appearance of cities.

The Parthian Empire: Compared to its Roman neighbor, the Parthian Empire has seen relatively little research into its history and topography. So far, there is not even agreement on whether the 18 Kingdoms that made up the Parthian Empire (as recounted by Pliny, NH 6.112) were client states, such as Persis and Charakene, or the 18 direct subordinate regions of the Great King (as recounted by Isidorus in his *Mansiones Parthicae*), or a combination of both.

Similar caveats apply to the capitals of the empire. Sources note a whole string of cities along the Ktesiphon – Nisa axis as at least temporary seats of the Great King or sites of a royal palace. Examples are Hekatompilos, Rhagai and Ekbatana. The most likely sole candidate for the time frame of interest in this map is Ktesiphon, which is why it was marked as the capital here⁴.

The Great Wall of Gorgan, whose construction is often attributed to the Parthians in older literature, according to more recent research⁵ dates to the Sassanid era and is therefore not included in the map.

Even the earliest descriptions by Greco-Roman authors of what today is Iran include a people named Paraetaceni (or spelling variations thereof) at different locations and in place name references. This name is a generic term that describes mountain peoples living far from the large population centers and is most likely derived from the old Persian word *Paruta*, meaning mountain.

Road Network: The existence of a courier system along the King's Roads (similar to the Hellenistic and Achaemenid predecessors) is proven by mentions of royal stations in the *Mansiones Parthicae* of Isidorus Characenus or by the Parthian documents found in Avroman. Given the scarcity of sources, only the route described by Isodoros is noted on the map. It constitutes the backbone of the Parthian Empire, connecting the eastern and western border via all capitals. Most other roads beyond the Roman territories are based on those inscribed in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which shows a state during Parthian times in its eastern part.

Territories under Roman control at in the far east of that time also did not yet have many truly Roman roads. In the south, reliable proof only exists for a connection between the provincial capital Antiochia and the Claudian colony Ptolemais, which was established for military reasons in 56. In the Pontus area, an inscription north of Amastris shows that the coastal road was already under construction in 45. It is included in the map, up until Sinope at the boundary of the provincial territories.

Large scale extension of the road network in the east started only with the Flavians. This continued under the adoptive emperors and throughout the Parthian wars of the 2nd century and is documented by various mile stones from Iudaea and Palmyra up to Cappadocia and the Pontus.

It follows that the classification of roads is relatively problematic. Typically, a Roman Via Publica is differentiated legally and documented on site through road lists and mile stones, so that it can be clearly recognized even if the road itself does not consist of a man-made road surface. However, the transitions between non-public roads and paths remain fluid, especially in the areas that are adjacent to deserts. In addition, it was always the intention to maintain the road classifications that were used in the Imperium Romanum map. In the end, the decision was made to classify paths through densely populated, geopolitically organized areas as roads, and to include the various side branches of the Silk Road in the east.

3 For example, discussion in [6]

4 This is also discussed in [3]

5 See [5]

Iudaea Provincia: Under Roman rule, the entire region was thoroughly transformed. In addition to the various regime changes, this era brought the two Jewish Roman Wars, which led to the destruction of the second temple and the expulsion of all Jews from the region around Jerusalem. In consequence, the primarily Jewish realm of King Herod the Great became the mainly pagan province of Syria Palaestina, as it is depicted on our big map of The Roman Empire in 211 CE.

After the collapse of the Seleucid Empire more than 100 years earlier, the mountains of Libanon, Antilibanon and Hermon (north of the area of Jewish settlement) had become a haven for robbers and home to numerous small independent states. It wasn't until the reign of Augustus, that order was largely restored. Many of these small states, such as the tetrarchy of Lysanias around the town of Abila, or Chalcis in Libanon, survived as Roman clients with changing rulers long into the Imperial era.

Our map depicts the first phase of direct Roman rule in Judea. After king Herod died in 4 BCE, his quite extensive realm was divided. The Greek cities of Hippos, Gadara and Gaza were detached from royal rule and became part of the province of Syria, which already included the highly Hellenized enclave of the other Decapolis cities. Herod's son Archelaos received the title of Ethnarch and the heartland of his father's kingdom to rule: Judea, Samaria and Idumaea. His brother Philippos became tetrarch of Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Trachonitits and Auranitis, while his brother Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Peraea and Galilee. Already in 6 CE Archelaos was disposed of by the Emperor and his territories become the Province Iudaea, governed by an equestrian prefect. The prefect had his seat in Caesarea Maritima (once founded by Herod) and was a subordinate to the Syrian governor in Antioch.

This arrangement survived for some decades until the death of Philippos in 33/34. During this epoch, the Tetrarchs founded the cities of Tiberias in Galilee, Iulias and Caesarea Philippi at the places of Bethsaida and Panias in lower Gaulanitis, as well as Iulias/Livias in Peraea.

After the death of Philippos, his tetrarchy became a part of Syria and was placed under direct Roman administration for a few years. But with the inauguration of the new Emperor Caligula, it was given to the grandson of Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa I. He later also received the former tetrarchy of Lysanias, the title of King, Herod Antipas' territories and, after playing his part in the ascension of the new Emperor Claudius, also the province of Iudaea. Thus, for a short time, almost all of his grandfathers' realm was united once again.

The self-administrating city states were the basic units of the Roman Empire's and its Hellenistic predecessors organization. Since the age of Alexander the Great, over 300 years earlier, the new rulers of the Near East had either refounded the ancient cities of the region as Polises with Greek constitutions or promoted the foundation of new examples of this kind.

Especially, the territories of the old Phoenician coastal cities in some cases encompassed vast areas. Sidon and Damascus had a common border somewhere around Mt. Hermon and Augustus' new Colonia, the old Phoenician town of Berytus, included at least the northern part of the modern Bekaa Valley with the great sanctuary at Heliopolis.

Etruria et Latium Vetus: Due to the later dominance of Rome even this early era of Roman history is well covered by ancient sources. However these accounts were all composed several centuries after the described events. The early historians of the Rome and their Greek counterparts tried to reconstruct a coherent narrative of Rome's first centuries out of the evidence still available to them. For the modern historians, which have much less material to work with, it has become barely possible in many ways to judge the accuracy of their ancient predecessors.

Archaeology too can only partially help to unravel the first centuries of the Roman state. Excavations did show that archaic Rome was a wealthy city state which could effort to construct numerous monumental public buildings. Its limits however are revealed if we look for the boundaries of Rome's power and her internal organization.

An important document to answer this question is the first treaty between Rome and Carthage, which was only passed to us in Greek translation by Polybios (Book 3.22), a historian writing in the mid 2nd century BCE. Polybios dates the treaty to the first years of the Republic, for many a doubtful date. A crucial argument for the authenticity of this document is Polybios remark that the archaic Latin could barely be understood by contemporary Romans, which fits well into what we know about early Latin and its development in the first centuries of the Republic Latin from texts and inscriptions, such as the stele from the Lapis Niger or parts of the Law of the Twelve Tables which kept their original wording.

The Pontine Plain: To the south east Latium is bordering the extended marshes of the Pontine Plain, which was also called Pomptinae Paludes (Pontine marshes, or swamps) by Roman authors since the late Republic. They formed in place of an ancient lagoon, filled with sediments and plagued by a poor drainage towards the sea due to the dune belt between Terracina and Circeii. Only in the 1930s the marshes could be finally reclaimed and converted to farm land.

Even in quite recent literature authors often assume that the 6th and 5th century BCE Pontine Plain was a mostly drained and highly productive center of settlement. Such as Linoli: „*During the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, the Latins and Volscians founded numerous settlements in the area, consequently managing to control the waters (even partially), but with Roman occupation, the area declined. The Volsci were the first to undertake drainage works in the Pontine areas they inhabited, and to exploit the fertile lands for farming purposes... At that time therefore, the marshes – thanks to the works carried out by the Volsci – must have been limited to localised areas lying lower than sea level*“⁶.

It is mandatory for this hypothesis that the Volsci, a people who just begun to emigrate from the interior to the coastal regions in the late 6th century, were already masters in the art of drainage.

However, in recent years new archaeological field work⁷ has shown that this case has to be rethought.

According to their finds the core parts of the region at this time were an uninhabited marshland, used only seasonally by transhumance herdsman. During the 5th century, when all of Latium was plagued by crises and wars the existing settlements declined.

Only with the construction of the Via Appia and the parallel Decennovium canal an era of colonization and reclamation begun. Agricultural use of the Pontine Plain peaked during the middle Republic, the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Only in the centuries before and after the turn of the eras many settlements were slowly abandoned and the marshes mentioned by contemporary sources returned.

References

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6 In [4]

7 The Pontine Region Project (PRP), see for example [1] or [2]