

Ager Publicus: A Re-Examination of *Imperium* and *Provincia* in the Second Century BCE

Richardson's excellent argument, tracing the use of the word *imperium* through the development of the Roman Republic and early Principate, asserts that the Roman state had little concept of itself as a territorial empire prior to the very end of the Republic, when authors such as Cicero and Sallust used the term *imperium* to specifically refer to geographically-defined state territory (Richardson, 1991). Although an elegant and convincing argument, by Richardson's own reasoning (namely that certain connotations may be latent within a word, and developed fully at a later date (Richardson, 1991)), the territorial understanding of *imperium* could well have been present earlier than Cicero. By limiting ourselves, however, solely to references made to *imperium*, we do a great disservice to our understanding of Roman imperial policy. In order to address this problem, we ought also to examine epigraphic evidence specifically dealing with the legal definition of Roman territory, documents such as the *Lex Agraria* of 111 BCE, and the Customs Law of Asia, a repurposed Attalid tax law.

This paper will examine the language of these inscriptions, and in doing so, will highlight the connection between geographical demarcation and the Roman state's understanding of its territorial empire, even in a period when, according to Richardson's argument, the Romans had little concept of their territory as such a thing, their understanding limited to *provinciae*, or duties assigned to magistrates (Richardson, 1991). Special attention will be paid to the demarcation of *ager publicus* in the *Lex Agraria* and the Customs Law of Asia, defining the *provinciae* as explicitly defined geographical areas, rather than simply magisterial assignments, thus proving that these *provinciae* were equivalent to the geographical *pars imperii* of the Principate. Based on the evidence of the *Lex Agraria* and the Customs Law of Asia, I argue that

the Romans did, in fact, possess a concept of a territorial empire even in the 2nd Century BCE, at a time when Richardson determined the Romans had no such thing.

This project, therefore, provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of how the Romans viewed themselves, and their territorial gains, by carefully examining the epigraphic evidence of the *Lex Agraria* and Customs Law of Asia, sources rarely used to specifically discuss the territorial empire of the Roman Republic. By re-examining Richardson's argument, this paper will also allow us to expand on his findings, and further our knowledge of Roman territorial policy.

Bibliography

Richardson, J. S. "Empire and the Language of Power." *The Journal of Roman Studies*. Vol. 81, 1991. pp. 1-9. Print.