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## AUGUSTUS'S GEOGRAPHY: DURABILITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE REGIONALIZATION OF THE ITALIAN TERRITORY

“Praefari necessarium est auctorem nos Divum Augustum secutores discriptionemque, ab eo factam Italiae totius in regiones undecim”.

With these words Gaius Plinius Secundus, known as “the Elder”, gives Caesar Octavianus Augustus an undeniable license of geographer in the third volume of his *Naturalis Historia*. The eminent and extremely equipped scientist from Como, in fact, disseminating the human and environmental geography of Italy, believes that the regional subdivision introduced by the second Caesar is excellent for the description of the most remarkable part in the world, significant both concretely and ideally, for the presence of the large city and for the condition of the citizenship of all its inhabitants (Plinio Gaio Secondo, Bologna, Einaudi, 1984).

A subdivision, although not respected in its ordinal enumeration, due to the fact that it is not functional to the geographic description, proved to be, according to Pliny's evaluation, the most pertinent to the comprehension of the environmental, settlement, historic-cultural wealth and, ultimately, the local organization of the Italian geographical space.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Augustan subdivision of Italy, introduced around 10 b.c and, almost certainly, inspired by the closest army mate, the emperor's son-in-law, his coruler and his authoritative minister, Marco Vipsanio Agrippa, was suitable for letting the complexity of the Italian geographical context emerge, as it had been modelled by the Italic civilization and on which it was practicing and where Rome would have intervened afterwards. A territorial management, the Roman one, that respecting the

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<sup>1</sup> Taken into account the fact that it is commonly known how the Augustan Age has determined the moment of systemization, even from an encyclopedic viewpoint, of the geographical knowledge until that period accomplished (Aujac G., 1984) on the conception of the geography in Augustan Age in general and on Pliny the Elder 's work, in particular, the interpretation given by Roberto Almagià a century ago is still valid (1914). Interpretation collected and confirmed by himself (1938) from a celebratory point of view and with evident political significance during the celebrations of the two thousand year anniversary of Augustus's birth.

local roots, gave to Italy and would have even more determined a fundamental unitary thanks to the appeasement executed by the prince.<sup>2</sup>

Italy's regional configuration wanted by Augustus, if apparently it did not meet the unambiguous standards prevailing, in the delimitation, from time to time, the ethnic element instead of the environmental one, rather than the structural one, it is actually inspired by a firm functional standard, that is, the distribution of the urban element. The city scaffolds, consolidated and just founded, with their prerogatives and their addictions, represent the backbone of the regions approved and they define the Peninsula's layout, at once, divided into compartments and united.

An unmentioned and only enumerated layout, but in any case mentionable, as time will, indeed, do and as Pliny the Elder will do. A layout that, for the standard that inspires it, serves its government and its scheduling and that equally represents its description and is able to give substance to processes of identitarian recognizability.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, a frankly geographic layout, in the wide meaning of the geographic term, that refers to the territorial organization and its dynamics. Circumstance that revitalizes the hypothesis of the influence of Agrippa, husband of his only child and Octavian's successor, Pomponia Attica, in the imperial decision, since they were used to studying geography for having written the report of the *Orbis pictus*, the "paper" of the world (most probably the Roman world) executed, following his orders, on marble plates and exposed in Rome, in *Campus Agrippae*, within the *Porticus Polla* or *Vipsania*.<sup>4</sup>

Agrippa's authority, recognized by Pliny and by Strabo, for what concerns measurements and distances, after all, can be called into question, to revitalize the division adopted on the basis of scientific and meta scientific space principles, typical of the Roman culture, and to denominate regions given to the identified territorial areas. (Porena, 1883).

As for the first aspect, if the territorial organization, both rural and urban, had to descend from the divination practice, with particular attention of the priests, its actualization had to be entrusted to land surveying abilities and, more broadly speaking, geo surveying ones based on topographic and geographic knowledges scientifically deduced (Aujac et Alii, 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, Agrippa was a relative and Octavian's political, military, administrative and technical collaborator. He was also the faithful and convinced coauthor in the project of "restoration" of the foundations of the Republic.

<sup>3</sup> As it will be precised later on, the "regions operation" wanted and launched by Augustus was supposed to confer ideal centrality, in the field of geographic-political layout of the empire, in the Italian space. The identification of the regions on an enumerated basis, a kind of egalitarian taxonomy (nicolet, 1989), should coincide with the purpose, although recognizing the joint, of letting Italy's unitary and peculiarity emerge.

<sup>4</sup> On the reflection carried out from the *Orbis Pictus* in the cartographic production and in the same diffusion of the geographic culture in imperial Rome, as are read notes about Filippo Porena on the figure of Agrippa "geographer" (1883).

As for the second aspect, it is necessary to consider the original significance of the royal term, which etymology, although not excluding the concept of withstanding and therefore of the government, needs to be led back essentially to the idea of regularization of space, in tracing limits (through straight line) in the land extensions and broadly speaking territories.

Agrippa's excellence is verified in the first and in the second aspect. Therefore, we can deduce that his influence in Augustus's general decisions worked out, particularly, in the specific political subject of the territorial layout and its financial tributary implications, represented by the real estate registration, taken into account that such implications, as the military one, were linked to the estate property, to its dimension and distribution (Cinque, 2002).

The fact that the purpose of a systematic and general real estate registration of Italy and provinces, with all its explorations, measurements and descriptions, was already present during the first Caesar's reign (Nicolet, 1989), and become a systematic commitment during the reign of the second one, is by now completely ascertain (Giroire, 2014).

In the *dicriptio Italiae* there is also a highlighting political-ideal purpose. A kind of manifesto about Augustus's territorial politics, which has the aim of giving centrality to the state Rome-Italy, to rout every orientalist deviation and/ or universalist of the Empire.<sup>5</sup> To establish a new constitutional agreement with the "Roman-Italian" citizens to whom was recognized and reconfirmed a primational role in the articulated assortment of the populations enslaved in Rome (Cardinali, 1938).

The contemporaneity of dividing Italy into regions and of Rome can be interpreted, in fact, as a sharing full of the same territorial-administrative status: a sort of formal and significant equalization of the territory of the large city and of Italy and viceversa, of the Roman tribes to the Italic community and viceversa; a sort of unitary identification of the Italian nation, in the diversity of its ethnic-territorial components, as Rome was one of them, no matter the different people that had created it and that represented it.

Rome's joint in 14 regions (7 b.c), in fact, still today preserved in the contract form of districts, met the same logic of functional-territorial organization of the Italian one connected to the urban scale, expressed itself nominally through the enumeration (as done nowadays with the districts before and municipalities afterwards) rather than the toponymy, even if, in this case as well, as for the regions of Italy, in time, the single urban regions will find their own identification toponym.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The inclination to a universalistic dimension of the Roman space and to its consequent territorial organization corresponds to Julius Caesar's vision, while an orientalist push was certainly in Antony's perspective of action and "geopolitic" conception.

<sup>6</sup> The new Caesar, but also the new Romolo, Augustus-priest for excellence-proposes himself as the new founder of Rome, reshaping the map according to the geometric orderly principles of space inherited by the Etruscan tradition whose aim is to

Italy, therefore, that like Rome and next to Rome assumed the identity-making features of a homeland and required the reinforcement of a specific territorial status that distinguished it from the rest of the (Roman) world.

This was also the result of the Augustan propitiation followed by the civil wars that hadn't only lacerated the Roman society, but also its territorial projection, it led to Julius Caesar's project to establish a settlement of the empire inspired by ecumenical ideals, it had fostered dividing hypothesis of the political space that would have been inevitably translated into the division of the state space and in sharing the centrality of Rome with other urban- irectional centralities, first of all Alessandria (Cardinali, 1938).

Caesar Augustus divided, instead, the full return, certainly symbolic, but especially factual, to the centrality of Rome and Italy, where this last one becomes space of close coalition in the prince's government, through the restoration of its republican prerogatives, although they are adapted to the administrative, financial and geographic-territorial evolution of the empire and to the practice of the *auctoritas* and *imperium maius* that the same Augustus asked for himself and of which he made effective daily procedure, on the basis of a "power originated by a revolution and achieved to an original form of restoration" (Canfora, 2015). A compartmentation of Italy that has to be interpreted also in this perspective and that had to be functional.

Therefore, Italy is extended to the territories of Cisalpine Gaul absorbed to Italy itself immediately after Caesar's death, articulated in regional units that take into account, as already mentioned, environmental determiners, but that obtain foundation by the anthropic component, in its ethnic-cultural dimension and in its settlement, productive and exchange projection. Four regions structure the Tyrrhenian arc: two on the northern side and two on the southern side of the mouth of the Tiber; six of them the most shattered Adriatic arc: two on the right side and the left side of the river Po, along the northern section; three along the central section, where the Apennines rise most and is close to the coast; one including once again the entire southern section and to rejoin in the Ionian arc with the Tiber and completing in this way the circumnavigation.

There is also the XI, the only region which does not look over the sea, within the Western Alpine circle, to the right and the left of the Ticino (Bonora Mazzoli and Dolci, 2008).

Geographical-political joint, ultimately, of the Roman Italy at the peak of the process of territorialization activated by the expansion of Rome and by the dialectic agreement of the populations and Italic civilizations towards their romanization.

Therefore, not a geographical description in its most elementary meaning, but an actual production of geographic sense in its most rich and complex meaning, that using a modern term we would refer to as regionalization. (Turco, 1984).

A regional layout of Italy, which survived Augustus, for the whole duration of the Empire, founded by himself, even when the Peninsula was reduced to Province and even beyond the end of the Roman world, during the Late antique age and the High and Low Middle Ages, up to Modernity.

The territorial plot is evident, with stubborn determination, in the Middle Ages, in the ancient one, although the expansion and/or the felting consequent to the overcoming of a determiner rather than another one, in the context of the Medieval universalism, no matter the inconsistency imposed by history events.

Territorial plot which re-emerges in Modern Age with the birth of the regional states, which proposes again the territorial profile principle and enhances the geographical-urban and geographical-cultural component, determining the spatial basis of the Italian Renaissance.

Therefore, how is it possible that the Augustan regions have been interpreted as a mere practice of descriptive arrangement of Italy as a “State”, without a real role in the operation and in its government, neither central nor decentralized, considering that after their institution, on the basis of available sources, no intermediate magistrature imposed itself between the government of the municipalities and colonies and Rome’s last motion?

How is it possible that the territorial organization of the Augustan Italy on regional base remained an empty practice while the territorial organization of the city itself, formally and nominally so similar, produced on the other hand a concrete renovation on a decentralized basis of the government of the urban space? (Levi, 1994). We know, in fact, always through the available sources, that the regions of Rome provided for several administrative functions and that they relied on specific curule magistrates (Nicolet, 1989; Jacques and Scheid, 2005).

As a matter of fact, the new territorial entities represented by the “Italian” regions couldn’t have, logically, political and/ or administrative procedure tasks, since the local, urban or rural communities, according to the law that regulated them, as already mentioned, when not autocephalous, referred directly to Rome. Likewise the regions, for the same reason, couldn’t have tasks related to the administration of justice, practice of tax system, recruitment or compulsory stimulus (Bonora Mazzoli and Dolci, 2008).

A set of functions, that if, at any level, they had been attributed, they would have contradicted the prince’s will of renovation of the good republican procedures and so rather than determining it, they would have jeopardized the restoration of prerogatives of the sovereignty of the *populus romanus*, by now distributed more considerably *extra muros urbis* than *infra*.

Yet, the Augustan territorial reform had to coincide with the necessities of expansion of the peninsula territories of the practice of power or at least of one part of it or at least of the administrative authority. It could be hypothesized that beyond an operation with the aim of obtaining approvals in Italy, an exclusively apparent operation, hypothesis that, as mentioned before, has been also moved forward (Cardinali, 1938), the reform thought by the emperor, for reasons that have to be defined better, has never found a concrete application since there have been second thoughts, or an indictment *sine die*, since they need to be excluded, for obvious reasons, really strong oppositions, that prevented the realization<sup>7</sup> for the prevail of the forces that have always prevented the identification of a real Roman Italy (Giardina, 1997; Cicala and Ferorelli, 2010).

However, it can be imagined that, in line with the restitution of space of real political conformity to standards to the *populus romanus* spread in the peninsula, the regions were “electoral districts”: territorial entities within which collate the votes needed in Rome in occasion of the recurring elections of the magistratures.

The hypothesis, that has an indirect comparison in the sources, is not in contrast with the predominant thesis that the Augustan regions were actually statistical districts and that at this function were limited as shown in the few sources that they refer to (Bonora Mazzoli and Dolci, 2008). Not only, actually, a consolidation for a better interpretation of the census data, population and property data, source of a “accounting and public archive management”, which is able to give evidence and recognisability to the territories through the topographic context and, therefore, in the final analysis, a political identity (Nicolet, 1989).

Therefore, a regionalization, of early stage that could have moved forward along the itinerary of an effective decentralization or even of a sort of autonomy, in the forms compatible with the political context widely established of the republic become empire. A regionalization that, even if delimited by delineated characters highlighted by more parts, supported in the meantime and especially, the space of immediate reference besides of major ideal and rational structuring, the growing attention for the territory, emerging dimension of the organization of the “Roman state”, until that moment rather optional, to reference to the systematization of the geographical knowledges that have been mentioned (Nicolet, 1989).

An event of Augustan regions which refers very closely to what has been tested in the regional event of contemporary Italy, if you take into account the situation that the original regional mosaic (districts and after regions from 1912), still a faithful Augustan successor, was called, by Pietro Maestri and Cesare

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<sup>7</sup> A suggestive comparison with the event of the introduction of the regional organization established by the Constitution of the Italian Republic in 1948 and kept in stand by until 1970 For the mutual diffidences among the political members that wrote the constitutional text or for the clear aversion of one part of these.

Correnti, in the aftermath of the National Unit, for “mere” statistic purposes, in other words to gather and give a geographic sense to the data provided by the survey services of the Kingdom just founded.<sup>8</sup> We know how this mosaic has been undertaken by the Constituent as a grid for the fulfillment of the regional organization on the basis of the Sturzo’s ideas merged in the program of the catholics who got back in politics. We also know which critiques have been developed on the misunderstanding between the statistic compartmentation of the Italian space and constitutional regions (Gambi, 1963). We know, as mentioned before, that it took a quarter of century for the practical fulfillment of the constitutional dictation and of the tough rejection attempted by the liberals and nationalists to the parliamentary procedure of approval of the implementation law.

We know how, after another quarter of century, the new regional geographies, conjured by opposite groups rather than propositional, set in motion a process of revision resulted in constitutional reform of extension of the competences and assignment of the constitutional regions. As now is proposed a new, additional fase of afterthought that regards not only the assignment of subjects of regional proficiency, but also their redelimitation according to a project that almost imposes the Augustan one. Therefore, a new chapter of a bimillennial history.

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<sup>8</sup> For a complete and acute close examination of the regionalization of the Italian national space from the Unity to the Republic and of the contribution of analysis related you can refer to Lando (2011).

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