All of Spain is Divided into Three Parts: Julius Caesar, Pomponius Mela and the Tripartite World

Greek and Roman geographers from Anaximander onward theoretically envisioned a tripartite world (Clarke 1999: 113). The Greek cartographic cosmos consisted of three land masses, the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa/Libya, divided by bodies of water and encircled by Ocean, an image adapted from Homer (see *Iliad* 18.607-608; *Odyssey* 11.13-19). Although Herodotus rejected theoretical geography in strong favor of empirical cartography and famously ridiculed such symmetrically contrived maps (4.36), the tripartite model endured.

The paradigm finds expression in Latin geographical writers including Julius Caesar, Pomponius Mela, and Pliny the Elder. Pomponius Mela, who recounts Claudius’s invasion of Britain (3.49-52), organizes his chorography of the Roman imperial world around Anaximander’s three provinces, despite the advances made by Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, and Poseidonius (Roller 2010: 19-20). Interestingly, the tripartite model is applied also to portions of the world. For example, Julius Caesar, who, as every student of Latin knows, proclaimed that Gaul is divided into three parts (*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*: *BG* 1.1.1). Mela echoes Caesar’s famous passage in his description of his native Spain where we read that *[Hispania] Tribus autem est distincta nominibus* (2.87). Mela proceeds to list the three provinces of Spain, Tarraconensis, Baetica, and Lusitania, and then he details their cartographic deployment. Mela’s Spanish provinces are bordered by water ways (*mari Nostro, oceano, fluvius Anas, Atlanticum*) as are Caesar’s Gallic provinces (*Rhodano*, *Garumna*, *Oceano*, *flumen Rhenum*). Neither Parroni, Silbermann, nor Romer, Mela’s recent commentators, have noted the parallel.

This paper will examine the passages from Caesar and Mela recounting Gallic and Spanish provincial geography. These passages will be interpreted within the context of Greco-Roman scientific geography. Mela’s structural and verbal debt to Caesar will be analyzed. It will be shown that Mela, who likely lacked direct experience of governance (cartography at Rome was a function of proconsular magistrates in the provincial field), imitated Caesar to heighten the authority of his own treatise as a Roman (and hence, political or equestrian) geography. Finally, Mela viewed Hispania as a microcosm of the entire *mundus*, which the author envisaged in his geographic overview as three land masses, separated by waterways, echoing geographers from Anaximander onward.

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