

COMMENTS ON THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF THE ROMAN BORDER

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The border is first and foremost a barrier. It separates states, their armies, their peoples and the economic and monetary systems they create from each other. This is usually a serious obstacle to the movement of people, to the transport of goods and to trade and cultural exchanges. Years later, even people close to each other may have different customs, beliefs, dialects, or sets of objects of everyday use. If we want to understand the Romans and their problems it is good to look at similar phenomena in the modern world. This can be seen in the differences in mentality between Germans from the east (former DDR) and west of Germany.

Also in Poland, to this day in the mentality of Poles and their customs one can notice the old division of their country between the tsarist Russia, imperial Prussia and Austria. Differences creep into linguistics and are noticeable in the form of different names or borrowings from different cultural spheres. In the case of countries with clearly different economic potential, the border may become an opportunity for efficient traders. In today's world, this is clearly visible, for example, in the case of borders between the EU and poorer countries, where markets and places where travellers can visit their borders are being set up, but also in the case of smuggling and social pathologies. Any irregularities become particularly visible in the moments of weakening of state organisms or mass migration. This was the case in the 3-rd and 4-th centuries A.D. and it is the case nowadays. Undoubtedly, in ancient times there was a great difference in economic potential between the Roman Empire and its neighbours. This created interesting opportunities for the whole group of producers and traders. *Limes* were not only fortifications, but also barracks. Military units were stationed on the border. The army was regularly supplied with soldiers and from time to time with *donativa*. Soldiers, and about 5,000 of them were stationed in each legionnaire camp, were the largest social group in the country, which had a regular, stable income. They generated local markets because every legionnaire had to buy food, weapons and a whole range of everyday items for himself. For the reign of Septimius Sever, the soldiers were not allowed to establish official families, which did not prevent them from establishing informal unions¹. Families of soldiers and later veterans were also an important market. Civil settlements were established with military units. The infrastructure, such as commercial markets, market places, inns and shops, developed there. The soldier went there to play the dice, drink wine, eat something, have fun, meet women, do shopping. According to research from the Danube area, merchants from distant areas came to the camp and offered goods brought from far away. These were weapons from Noricum, wine and oil from the Mediterranean region, noble ceramics from

¹ Jaczynowska/Musiał/Stepień 1999, p. 577.

Galia and fish sauces imported from the area of today's Spain². Garden payments for soldiers could also attract merchants travelling abroad. There you could buy a slave, animals for gladiatorial games, amber, fashionable blonde wigs and furs. Perhaps the same merchants, travelling across the borders of the Empire, transported products from the provinces like *terra sigillata* dishes, bronze vessels, wine, oil, olives, jewellery, glassware. There were also market places on the border where sellers from the Barbaricum area were regularly admitted. One such market is the one discovered and carefully researched in the border region of Porolissum³.

The sellers, who knew the Roman money, could offer agricultural products, handicrafts or even slaves. In the other direction, behind the limes, apart from Roman coins, they probably also took products from Roman workshops. They reached far from the borders of the Empire. It is no accident that in the border province of Dacia, local fine ceramics – the so-called TSP in Porolissum – were produced⁴. Similarly, Tibiscum made products using beads. There are elements of jewellery and sets of horse-riding. Many of them were made with the tastes of people living outside the borders of the empire in mind⁵. Different social groups grew rich on trade. Apart from merchants and craftsmen, we also meet customs officers near the borders. Their standard of living during the period considered was far from average. Jesus' exhortations to the customs officers, as well as his material testimonies, can bear witness to this⁶. Bones of calves eaten at the customs station in Porolissum show that the customs officers working there earned extraordinary incomes or forced high taxes on merchants⁷. Another group that could have become extremely rich were Roman officers.

According to Tadeusz Sarnowski, inscriptions on the bases of some statues commemorating Jupiter may indicate significant additional earnings of some officers⁸. In addition to extortion and bribes from their subordinates, they were also able to profit from brokerage activities. The soldier could not buy a random weapon made by a local blacksmith. He bought weapons from a well-known, tried and tested factory. It was there that weapons were manufactured, the quality of which was already known. You had to pay well for the good quality of the sword, which did not crack or break during the fight. Swords, helmets or shields had to not only look nice, but above all prove themselves in combat conditions. The officer had knowledge and acquaintances. He could have acted as an agent in the purchase, making additional profits from it. At that time, it became the next link between the buyer and the producer. Such additional income may explain why some officers used to raise funds for monumental foundations, including the erection of votive statues.

The border and its prohibitions also generated smuggling. Everything that is missing on the other side is washed away. They are both prohibited for the official transport of goods and those which would be subject to a high duty. Prohibitions on arms exports to Barbaricum may have encouraged attempts to smuggle or bribe customs officers. The border is also an opportunity for people who are forced to emigrate. People whose lives are at risk or who have broken the law may try to hide abroad. Just as in the 20-th century American gangsters fled to Mexico, and Italian mafias to villages in Poland, so probably thieves or bandits from the empire could try to disappear far from Roman patrols.

² Bjelajac 1996, p. 122.

³ Opreanu, Lazarescu 2015, p. 63–71.

⁴ Gudea 1989, p. 453–472.

⁵ Benea 2004, p. 141.

⁶ Gospel of St. Lukas 19, 1–10

⁷ Lisovschi-Cheleşanu/Gudea 1996, pp. 371–383.

⁸ Oral information by courtesy prof. Tadeusz Sarnowski

The border is also a transport route⁹. In the case of the Danube limes, it was both a land road along the Danube and a much more important waterway than it. The river supplied bulk goods such as amphorae with oil or wine¹⁰, dishes¹¹, oil lamps¹², building materials, wood, salt or grain¹³. Thanks to water transport, heavy marble from Asia Minor and Greece reached the interior of the province of Dacia¹⁴. Heavy marble sculptures and sarcophaguses did not reach the town several dozen kilometres from the river route. Land transport was much more expensive and difficult than water transport, which resulted in the flourishing of riverside towns and market places. Some of the fluids were transferred to the beetles there, and large loads could be divided into more handy ones. What could not be easily transported inland had to be obtained on site. This is very evident in the marble distribution in Noricum. There, villages far from trade routes were supplied almost exclusively with local marble.

In the light of the sources available, it can be seen that the Roman border was not only a barrier, but also generated economic growth in a whole range of towns. It was accompanied by workshops aimed at serving the army and the accompanying civilians. The production was also accompanied by local fairs, which attracted merchants from the interior of the province as well as from distant regions. Production and trade went beyond the borders of the Empire. This is clearly visible in the horizon of Roman imports in Barbicum, which follows the Marcomanic wars. This is not the horizon of war slates, but of products that were bought some time after the wars. This fashion was fuelled by trade between the empire and its neighbours. The inflow of Roman imports to Barbaricum (area of the today's Germany and Poland) is characterised by a number of phases or waves, which indicate changes in tastes and increased demand for selected goods. In Germany, there are individual examples of producers moving from the Empire to Barbaricum. They made their products there in Roman fashion, but for sale to the German population. Along with the producers, some warriors probably also moved, who after years of working in the Roman army spent their retirement in their homeland. They brought with them their long-term savings and settled down. Perhaps they were starting up a business. The trace of such moves may be finding a home in Lower Silesia in the village of Domaniów, whose walls were most probably decorated with paintings according to the rules governing Pompeian painting¹⁵. This finding indicates that the borders of the Empire were not as closed as they might have been.

The situation is slightly different when we look at the monetary market. The evacuation of the Roman provinces from the Danube results in a clear reduction in the money market in the abandoned area¹⁶. The end of mining operations in Dacia forced the Romans to increase production in the regions of today's Serbia¹⁷. So individual interests are one thing, and systemic solutions are another. It is clear here that the state and the army needed metals, and the evacuation of Dacia meant that the border was closed to the Romans this time.

In conclusion, the border of the Roman state, apart from the dam in front of its enemies, also played an important role in the economy of the Empire and its neighbouring tribes, the so-called Barbicum. Along the borders there were military units which created the cities. Important transport routes, such as the Danube and its surrounding roads, ran along the borders. The

⁹ Żmudziński 2001, p. 191–197.

¹⁰ Ardeţ 2006.

¹¹ Dimitrova-Milčeva 1987, 108–152.

¹² Čičikova 1987, p. 153–177.

¹³ Żmudziński 1999, p. 101–132.

¹⁴ Müller/Schwaighofer/Piso/Benea 2012. P. 16.

¹⁵ Oral information by courtesy prof. Grzegorz Domański.

¹⁶ Găzdac 2002, p. 90–92.

¹⁷ Dumitru 2005, p. 118–127.

presence of the border has generated a flowering of interests of all kinds. Although living at the border may have been less safe, it may have provided an opportunity for a decent income. It is no coincidence that the border provinces, including the Dalmatian provinces, were particularly dynamically developing and offered good prospects for economic advancement to their inhabitants. What was a barrier for some was an opportunity for others.

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COMMENTS ON THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF THE ROMAN BORDER (Abstract)

The article shows that the former borders of the Roman Empire, as well as in the modern world, played an important role in the economy. Rivers were not only a barrier, but also water transport routes. The army was stationed at the borders. Soldiers received regular tribute, spending it on purchases and services. Merchants came to the soldiers. Workshops and towns were created near the units, and over time these were also produced for the Barbaricum. Borders also generated smuggling and various social pathologies. People who were energetic took advantage of the opportunities were getting rich.