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The Roman Borders between Achaia and Macedonia[1]

G. W. Bowersock has convincingly argued that when the Emperor Nero granted Achaia its freedom and immunity from taxation in the fall of A. D. 67, he detached from that region the territories of Epirus, Acarnania and Thessaly.[2] Epirus and Acarnania became one procuratorial province, Thessaly merely the southern attachment of Macedonia. In so doing, Bowersock has answered two questions: why and when these provincial reorganizations occurred. This note however will attempt to answer a third, namely, where was the new provincial boundary between Achaia and Macedonia drawn.

We must begin with the »Geography« of the Alexandrian scholar Claudius Ptolemaeus, the value of which as an aid to the historical geographer has not always been appreciated. The opinion of Max Cary, who wrote that the information gleened from this work was »only of occasional value to the historical geographer,«[3] no doubt stems from the fact that Ptolemy, a theoretical astronomer/mathematican, was more concerned with the drawing of maps than cultural ethnology. Nevertheless, the »Geography« can be a rewarding source of topographical and historical information.

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All of the modern Greek toponyms and distance measurements were taken or calculated from the first edition (1953) Army Map Series M708, 1:50,000 scale topographical map, sheets 1818 I (Lamia) and 1918 IV (Stilis). All Ptolemaic coordinates and citations to his Geography follow the edition of C. Müller, Claudii Ptolemai Geographia, vol. 1 Paris 1883. K. Miller, Itineraria Romana, Stuttgart 1916; W. K. Pritchett, Studies in Ancient Greek Topography, Part III (Roads), Berkeley 1980; Part IV (Passes), Berkeley 1982; and Part V, Berkeley 1985, are abbreviated as Miller IR; and Pritchett III, IV and V, respectively.

[2] See G. W. Bowersock, Zur Geschichte des römischen Thessaliens, RhM 108, 1965, 277–289, esp.282–288.

[3] The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History, Oxford 1949, 314.

The »Geography«, completed sometime during the reign of Antoninus Pius and most likely his last effort, represents the capstone synthesis and culmination of Ptolemy's career. That his theoretical goal was to construct a world map on which the provincial boundaries of the empire and every major city of the empire were precisely fixed, by means of mathematically derived coordinates based on astronomic observation, was indeed ambitious. Not only was this theoretical ideal beyond the available technology of the period, but Ptolemy had in his possession far too few observations to do so. Consequently, maps, itineraries, and traveler's reports were consulted, estimates were made, and in the end the majority of the coordinates cited were derived not by astronomic observation and trigonometric calculation, but by dead reckoning.[4] Yet despite this lack of information, his derived latitudinal coordinates are remarkably accurate, for they were based upon the primary Rhodian latitudinal parallel of Eratosthenes, who correctly placed it at 36″ N. So far so good, but when Ptolemy calculated his longitudinal coordinates, he unfortunately abandoned Eratosthenes' more accurate calculation of the earth's circumference (250 000 stades) in favor of Posidonius' shortened estimate (180 000 stades).[5] Then he overestimated the true length of the Mediterranean basin, which despite his use of Posidonius' erroneous estimate, was still too long. The result was a serious cartographical distortion of the longitudinal coordinates. Consequently, only Ptolemy's latitudinal coordinates can be used with any hope of certainty in order to determine the *fines* between Achaia and Macedonia, which he drew as a line that extended from the Pindus mountains in the west, east through the middle of Mount Oite:[6]

> Ἡ Μακεδονία περιορίζεται ... ἀπὸ δὲ μεσημβρίας τῇι ἐντεῦθεν γραμμῆι
> παρὰ μὲν τὴν Ἤπειρον ἕως πέρατος, οὗ ἡ θέσις μθ′ λη′ L″
> ἐφ᾽ ἧς γραμμῆς διατείνει τὸ Πίνδου ὄρος, οὗ τὸ μέσον ἐπέχει
> μοίρας μζ′ γο″ λη′ L″ δ″
> παρὰ δὲ τὴν Ἀχαΐαν ἐξῆς μέχρι τοῦ Μαλιακοῦ κόλπου κατὰ πέρας, οὗ
> ἡ θέσις να′ λη′ γ″ ιβ″
> ἐφ᾽ ἧς γραμμῆς ἔστιν ἡ Οἴτη τὸ ὄρος, οὗ τὸ μέσον ἐπέχει μοίρας ν′ L″
> λη′ γ″ ιβ″.
> (Geog. 3.12.1–4 [Müller, pp. 491–494])

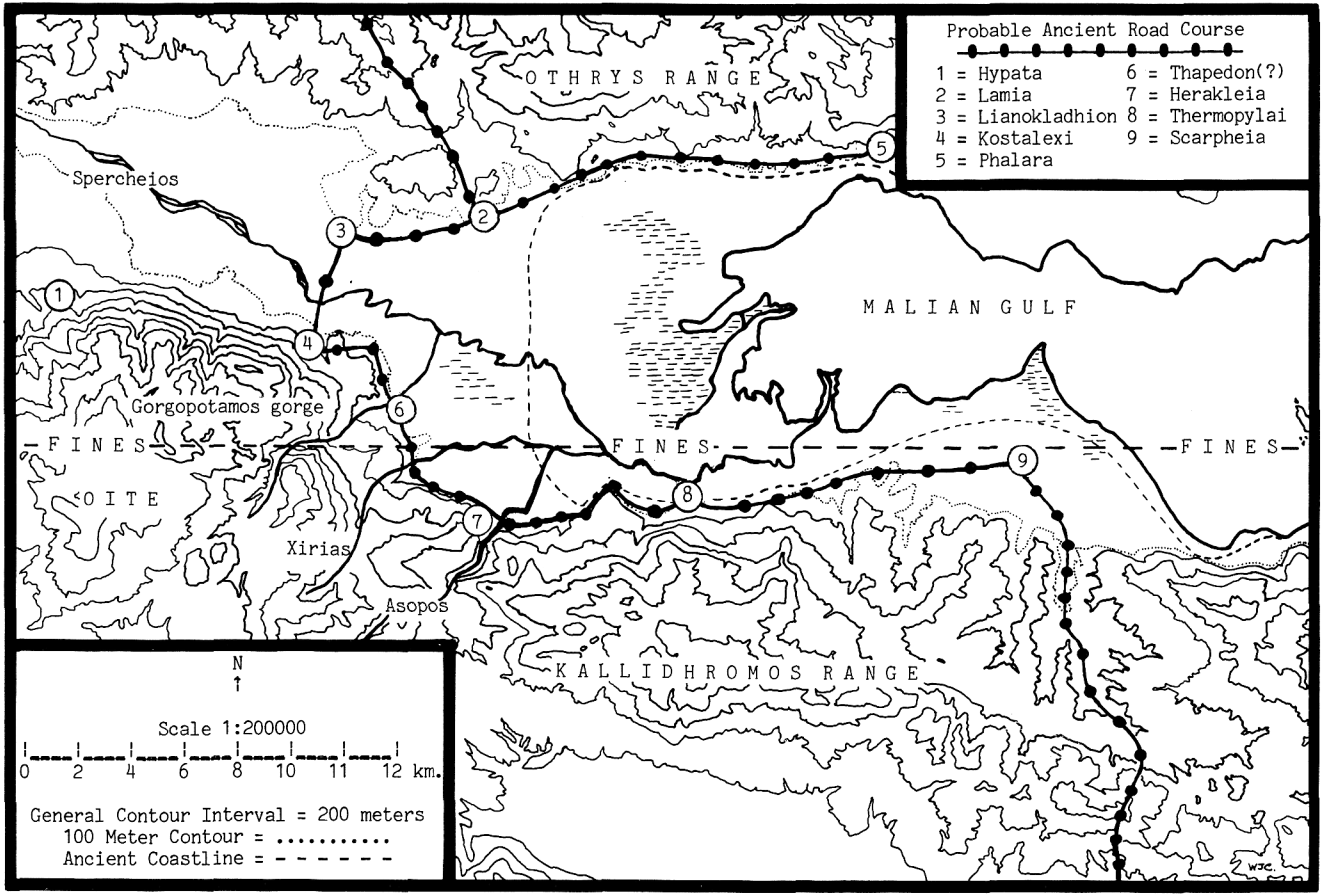
Naturally, one should not expect strict accuracy from Ptolemy's latitudinal coordinates, which even he freely admits,[7] and which Otto Cuntz has observed con-

[4] Which he himself admits as »rough reckoning«, Geog. 1.4.2. On his distinction between »rough reckoning« and »accurate information«, see Geog. 1.2.2.

[5] J. O. Thomson, History of Ancient Geography, London 1948, 334.

[6] So W. Kubitschek, Studien zur Geographie des Ptolemaeus. I. Die Ländergrenzen, Abh. Akad. Wiss. Wien, Phil.-hist. Kl. 215, 1934, 67, 150 with a helpful map.

[7] Geog. 2.1.2.


Probable Ancient Road Course
1 = Hypata
2 = Lamia
3 = Lianokladhion
4 = Kostalexi
5 = Phalara
6 = Thapedon(?)
7 = Herakleia
8 = Thermopylai
9 = Scarpheia
OTHRYS RANGE
Spercheios
MALIAN GULF
Gorgopotamos gorge
FINES
FINES
FINES
OITE
Xirias
Asopos
KALLIDHROMOS RANGE
N
Scale 1:200000
0 2 4 6 8 10 11 12 km.
General Contour Interval = 200 meters
100 Meter Contour = ...
Ancient Coastline = - - - - - -

tained an average error of approximately 15 minutes.[8] In the sample below, a somewhat poorer average was achieved.

	Ptol. Geog., ed. MÜLLER	Actual	Error
Othrys mountains	38″ 40′ N (3.12.16, p.505)	38″ 58′ N	−18′ N
Lamia	38″ 35′ N (3.12.42, p.524)	38″ 54′ N	−19′ N
Hypata	38″ 50′ N (3.12.42, p.523)	38″ 51′ N	−01′ N
Spercheios delta	38″ 30′ N (3.12.14, p.503)		
fines	38″ 25′ N (3.12.4, p.495)	38″ 48′ N	
Scarpheia	38″ 25′ N (3.14.10, p.538)	38″ 48′ N	−23′ N
Kallidhromos mountains	38″ 15′ N (3.14.10, p.538)	38″ 45′ N	−30′ N
		Average Error	−18.2′

Three observations can be immediately made concerning this group of latitudinal coordinates: first, that Ptolemy most likely had in his possession a good latitudinal fix on Hypata from which he probably reckoned the rest of the region, because his latitudinal error steadily increases from his point; second, the important fact, and one that will be returned to, that Scarpheia is placed on the same latitude as the *fines* of Achaia and Macedonia; and third, that despite the latitudinal error, there is none in the geographical relationships presented (see map). For located north of the *fines* were the Othrys mountains, the Thessalian cities of Hypata and Lamia, and the second century delta of the Spercheios river, no doubt located considerably northwest of its present modern position. On the same latitude as the *fines,* Ptolemy cited Scarpheia as the northern-most city of Achaia and then placed the Kallidhromos mountain range south of it also, so clearly indicating that it too was Achaian. Thus, at some topographical point south of the Spercheios river delta and north of the Kallidhromos range, designated by Ptolemy at the latitude 38″ 25′ N, a topographically stable and unambiguous reference point should be present that would have been suitable as a provincial frontier boundary.

The topography of the Malian basin through which this boundary passed is a U-shaped region that is much like a horseshoe that opens to the east towards the Aegean sea (see map).[9] Ringed on its three sides by the Othrys, Oite and Kallidhromos mountains, the alluvial plain formed within the Malian ›horseshoe‹ by the continuous fluvial infilling of the Malian graben, principally by the Spercheios and secondarily by the Gorgopotamos, Xirias and Asopos, presented the Roman provincial administration with an unstable and marshy landscape and the problem of where to establish a permanent boundary. Since the Spercheios river was designated as Thessalian, and since the Xirias and Asopos are mountain torrents of the Kallidhromos range located in Achaia, the eastern slopes of Mt. Oite must then

[8] O. CUNTZ, Die Geographie des Ptolemaeus, Berlin 1923, 96–97.

[9] First so described by C. BURSIAN, Geographie von Griechenland, Leipzig 1862, I 90.

provide an obvious and immutable topographical feature that the practical Romans would have recognized as suitable for a boundary.

Such an obvious and immutable marker was the Gorgopotamos gorge that coincidentally is sited precisely along the same latitude north as ancient Scarpheia.[10] This impressive geological scar that dominates the eastern slopes of Mt. Oite offered the Roman administration precisely what it needed: a landmark easily discernible by both land and sea. Such permanence was vital for the ever-changing landscape of the fertile Malian plain represented a potentially continuous source of territorial grievance and agricultural dispute within the region, and just such an instance is recorded in a Hadrianic inscription from the year 125 between Hypata and Lamia.[11]

Possibly of equal importance was the ancient highway that coursed through the Malian basin (see map),[12] for the precise assessment of provincial and civic responsibilities for the maintenance of this highway, not to mention its bridges and subsidiary road-side structures, had to be clearly defined and only a topographically unalterable and obvious boundary could provide such an insurance. Part of the course and remains of this highway were first reported by A. R. Burn on the observation of Jean Michaud as being located »near the road and rail bridges over the Gorgopotamos,«[13] which personal autopsy has since confirmed.[14]

In addition to ready visual confirmation and highway assessments were also the sensitive issues of taxation, specifically the inter-provincial customs tax, and the placement of its collection points or toll stations, itself a matter of no small economic consequence,[15] which were typically set up along roads that crossed over the provincial frontiers. A likely candidate for a toll station in the Malian basin is Thapedon, an obscure road-station that appears in the ancient itineraries, which

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[10] I have tentatively located ancient Scarpheia on the same latitude (38″ 48′ N) as that of modern Molos and Scarfia. On Scarpheia, see Pritchett III 222–232; IV 166–167; V 176–177.

[11] ILS 5947a.

[12] Miller IR cols. 576–577. This edition by Miller and its 1929 reprint must be used with extreme care and only in conjunction with the severe review of it by W. Kubitschek, GGA 179,1–2,1917, who devoted no less than 117 pages to it. See especially page 47 on this itinerary. This highway and its passage through the Malian basin has been recently discussed by Pritchett III 197–237, although he seems unaware of the many weaknesses of Miller's edition.

[13] Thermopylai Revisited and Some Topographical Notes on Marathon and Plataiai, in K. H. Kinzl, ed., Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory: Studies Presented to Fritz Schachermeyr at the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, Berlin 1977, 98.

[14] A full description of these remains and their course will appear shortly by E. W. Kase.

[15] Toll taxes were levied on goods crossing the internal provincial frontiers of the empire. From the first through fourth centuries these tolls seldom exceeded more than 2 to 2.5% of the value of the items transported, so A. H. M. Jones, The Later Roman Empire, Norman 1964, II 825, III 271, note 4.

was located somewhere along the highway of the region between Thessalian Phalara, the port of Lamia, and Achaian Thermopylai.

Ravenna Geog. 4.10.15–20[16]	Guido. Geog. 110[17]	Tab. Peutinger. MILLER IR 576–577
Granona	Grannona	Grannona
Palfari	Phalaris	[-------]
Farsalos	Pharsalium	Falera
Tapidon	Tapedon	Thapedon
Thermopile	Thermopila	Thermopylas
S(c)artia	Scarpia	Scarpias
Helatia	Elacia	Elatia

As can be seen in these three itineraries, Thapedon was an integral part of the principal north-south highway that skirted along the coastline of the Malian basin enroute to Elateia. Significant is the fact that Thapedon was retained in these itineraries, although it clearly was neither a major urban center like Hypata or Lamia, nor a harbor like Phalara to justify its inclusion. Instead, it deserved continued mention because this road-station most likely was also the region's toll-station as one crossed over the frontier between Macedonia and Achaia.

The only other clue as to the location of Thapedon is from the mileage distances themselves given in the Tabula Peutingeriana, which state that it was situated equidistant between Phalara and Thermopylai: at a distance of XXVII Roman miles, or approximately 40 kilometers in either direction.[18] Admittedly, the estimated location of a toponym on the basis of mileage distances quoted from a much-copied ancient itinerary is risky, especially when one considers the ever-shifting topographical conditions of the Malian plain and our general ignorance of the precise course of most of the roadbeds involved, not to mention the distinct possibility of scribal error and manuscript corruption. Still, MILLER was quite correct to point out that the distances quoted in the Tabula Peutingeriana were too large for the Malian region and that indeed an emendation was required in order to make some sense out of this section of the itinerary. His solution was that Thapedon was located near ancient Herakleia, which would therefore require an emendation that would reduce the mileage of the stretch between Thapedon and Thermopylai from XXVII Roman miles to VII.[19] This identification is implausible, because it is

[16] ed. J. SCHNETZ, Itineraria Romana, Leipzig 1940, 52. Order reversed for comparison.

[17] ed. SCHNETZ, 136.

[18] MILLER IR col.576. 1 Roman mile = 1478.5 meters, so W. KUBITSCHEK, RE 10,1919, 2139.

[19] MILLER, IR col.576, argued for a scribal error that reproduced ›XXVII‹ Roman miles for both stretches from Phalara to Thapedon and from Thapedon to Thermopylai. His emendation of ›XXVII‹ to ›VII‹ Roman miles is however incorrect, for it is ca. 9 kilometers

highly unlikely that Herakleia was ever completely abandoned and then superseded by a road-station named Thapedon.[20] As for PRITCHETT's belief that Thapedon »must have been [located] near the mouth of the Spercheios,«[21] it must be buried under several meters of fluvial alluvium. Yet, the mere survival of Thapedon in the ancient itineraries argues that Thapedon and the highway that it served had to be situated away from any such fluvial alteration, preferably at a low elevation, (ca. 100 m.) that would skirt above the Malian plain itself. If the preserved mileage distances between the road-stations of Phalara, Thapedon and Thermopylai are indeed corrupt, then traces of the Thapedon road-station should be found at a low elevation somewhere along the eastern foothills of Mt. Oite. At an elevation of approximately 80 meters, over 200 surface sherds of lamps and larger vessels of probable Late Roman date were collected just south of the Gorgopotamos gorge in a freshly plowed field and in close association with the above mentioned road remains.[22] I believe that these are the remains or refuse of an ancient road-side station, which I would tentatively identify as Thapedon. Given its location, the following emendation of the Tabula Peutingeriana results:

	Tab. Peutinger. (MILLER IR 576)	Actual[23]
Phalara – Thapedon	XXVII	XXI
Thapedon – Thermopylai	XXVII	XI

With little imagination, one can immediately see where a visual error, or better a series of them, could have easily confused or conflated the actual mileage readings into what is now preserved in the Tabula Peutingeriana.

(9000 m.: 1478.5 m.) = 6.08 Roman miles between Herakleia and Thermopylai. His emendation should have been ›VI‹.

[20] As PRITCHETT III 220–221 has suggested on the basis of Procopius' narrative in the rhetorical and panegyrical work, De aed. 4.2.21–22, which should not be accepted at face value. See AV. CAMERON, Procopius, Berkeley 1985, 84–112. Further Cicero Epist. Brut. 1.6 attests to the city's existence in 43 B.C.; and Ptolemy Geog. 3.12.43 in Antonine times. Its strategic qualities were no doubt appreciated by the frontier troops of the late fourth century, Zos. 5.5.3–6; and again in the mid-fifth, Marc. comes 447,4 (MGH,AA XI: 82).

[21] PRITCHETT III 221.

[22] Loyola University of Chicago, ADelt Meros B' Chronika 33,1978,163–164.

[23] Assumed in these mileage calculations are the following: that modern Stilis is ancient Phalara (PRITCHETT III 219); that just south of the exit of the Gorgopotamos gorge at approximately the 80 m. contour is ancient Thapedon; that modern Loutra Thermopylon was the ancient road-station at Thermopylai; that the course of the ancient highway remained at or near the 100 m. contour throughout; and that when crossing the Spercheios river and its flood plain, a combination of bridge and elevated roadbed were used between the railroad station of Lianokladhion to the north and Kostalexi to the south. Stilis (Phalara) – Gorgopotamos (Thapedon): ca. 31 kilometers (31 000 m.: 1478.5 m.) = 20.96 Roman miles. Gorgopotamos (Thapedon) – Loutra Thermopylon (Thermopylai): ca. 16 kilometers (16 000 m.: 1478.5 m.) = 10.82 Roman miles.

In conclusion, this paper has argued for the establishment of the Roman provincial boundary between Achaia and Macedonia at the Gorgopotamos gorge and the tentative identification of the road-station Thapedon just south of it. Due to the continuous topographical alteration of the Malian basin, the Roman provincial administration needed an immutable boundary and the eastern slopes of Mt. Oite provided a suitable one, which was easily discernible by both land and sea. Ptolemy, in his »Geography« (3.12.4), seems to have been in accord with this practical wisdom.

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