

AUTOREFERATY

STUDIA EUROPAEA GNESNENSIA 5/2012

ISSN 2082-5951

Krzysztof Antczak

(Gniezno)

THE IMAGE OF SPAIN IN “NATURALIS HISTORIA” OF PLINY THE ELDER

Author's summary of the doctoral dissertation defended at the Faculty of Humanities, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, on June 13th, 2011; supervisor: Prof. Leszek Mrozewicz

The studies undertaken in the dissertation concern the account of Pliny the Elder on three Roman provinces on the Iberian Peninsula — the Nearer Hispania (*Hispania Citerior Tarraconensis*), Beticia (*Hispania Ulterior Baetica*) and Lusitania (*Hispania Ulterior Lusitania*). Their aim is to demonstrate Pliny's sources of knowledge and the degree of relevance of information contained in his account at the moment "Naturalis Historia" was being compiled. This rests on the methodological premise that the literary image is moulded by the person of the author, the nature of the work and the period in which the work was created. Therefore the starting point is the analysis of Pliny's life and work as well as an enquiry into the principal assumptions and the structure of his 37-volume encyclopaedic work — the "Naturalis Historia".

The first chapter concerns the person of Pliny the Elder from the point of view of his intellectual formation and his career as an official — the *cursus honorum*. Pliny the Elder came from an equestrian family, from *Comum Novum* within sight of the Alps. Most probably, he received his education in Rome. His public life (*vita publica*) may be divided into three periods — the principates of Claudius, Nero and Vespasian/Titus. In each of those, Pliny's work depended on the posts he held, while these in turn depended on the period — the political and social events. The Encyclopedist's *Cursus honorum* was filled with *militia equestres*, served in Germania during Claudius' principate, and *procurationes splendidissimae* under Vespasian. The gap between the principates of Claudius and Vespasian, coinciding with the reign of Nero, was devoted to literary studies. The concurrence of the public life — *negotia* — and the scholarly one — *otia* — indicates that Pliny the Elder combined the rich experience of a public person with literary work. It should be emphasized that the most creative period of his life overlapped with the times of profound transformations in the Imperium Romanum, i.e. with Vespasian's seizure of power. As Vespasian's close associate — *amicus principis* — he held four procuratorships during that time, including the one in the Nearer Hispania (*procurator Hispaniae Citerioris*), which is the most important for the dissertation. Thanks to Pliny the Younger we know that the post occupied an important place in the Encyclopedist's *cursus honorum*. During the rule of emperor Vespasian and his son Titus, Pliny the Elder published the two most comprehensive and simultaneously most important treatises: the 37-volume "Naturalis Historia" and the unpreserved historical treatise "A fine Aufidi Bassi", which presented the late reign of Nero, the civil war and the beginning of Vespasian's rule.

The second chapter of the first part concerns "Naturalis Historia". In every literary work the structure and the aim play a leading role. The former demon-

strates that "Naturalis Historia" is a thought-out and ordered treatise. It comprises three parts: the Preface (Praefatio), the Index (Index) and the content proper (XXXVI volumina). In "Praefatio", Pliny laid out the chief assumptions of his treatise. The task of the Index was to facilitate the perusal of the proper text of the encyclopaedia. It is a kind of list of contents and an inventory of authors (*nomina auctorum*), to whose works Pliny resorted. There, the Encyclopedist contained an overview of the contents of the remaining 37 volumes. The list of authors was divided by Pliny into *externi* and *auctores*. The classification is not incidental; Pliny thus indicated the value he attached to each of the groups. *Auctores* include chiefly Latin authors, leading names in a given discipline, who guaranteed high level of knowledge. The conducted research indicates that the author of "Naturalis Historia" was guided by a plan adopted beforehand. This is evident in well thought-out division into volumes, chapters and subchapters.

There is no doubt that one of the principal goals of "Naturalis Historia" was updating and arranging the then state of knowledge in order. This is important in the sense that we are dealing with an encyclopaedic treatise — a compendium of things deserving attention (*res dignae cura*). "Naturalis Historia" was supposed to be characterised by usefulness — *utilitas*. The knowledge amassed in 37 volumes was to become a property of the general public. The practicality of the work consists in the fact that it responds to the current needs, related to the restoration of the Roman Empire. Pliny the Elder addressed it to *humilis/e vulgus* — *studiorum otiosi* and the emperor (*imperator Caesar*). The Encyclopedist wanted scientific knowledge (*scientia*) to become widespread.

Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that "Naturalis Historia" — a strictly scientific work — is replete with political ideas. This is no coincidence that the Encyclopedist called emperor Vespasian *rector omnium gentium*. He showed him as a continuator of the policy of Augustus and Claudius. He praised the peace — *pax Romana* — which emperor Vespasian introduced after two years of civil war.

The conducted research demonstrated that Pliny's image of Spain is utterly dependent on the adopted assumptions and the structure of the work. The pieces of information on Spain, scattered throughout the treatise, comply with the topics discussed in specific chapters or subchapters. Only in the geographical section (volumes III–VI) is the narration concerning Spain continuous, which is in accordance with the principle of the section — to describe the entire inhabited world (*orbis terrarum universus*) using bare proper names (*locorum nuda nomina*). The Encyclopedist provided a raw inventory of geographical

locations indicated in the title of books III, IV, and VI (*situs, gentes, maria, oppida, portus, montes, flumina, mensurae, populi qui sunt aut fuerunt*). Spain was incorporated into the structure of description of Europe and thus divided between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic *periplus*. The fundamental criteria for the description of the central part of the Iberian Peninsula were administrative units (*provinciae*). Other criteria applied when describing the internal parts of each Spanish provinces. In the case of Bettica these included geographical and administrative criteria (the river *periplus* and *conventus iuridici*), in the case of the Nearer Spain — administrative ones (division into *conventus iuridici*), while in Lusitania's — geographical ones.

In the remaining thirty volumes the information on Spain either complements or illustrates the essence of the disquisition; these are the so-called *exempla Hispanica*. The individual pieces of information which make up the image of Spain are provided contingent on the chief subject under discussion. The number of *res Hispanicae* and their cohesion with the assumptions and the structure of the work is astonishing. The image of Spain remains utterly subordinated to the dry facts (*sterilis materia*) of the physical world.

The research on the sources which yielded the image of Spain is presented in the third chapter of the dissertation. It sets out from the assumptions of the Encyclopedist himself, who designed to update the state of knowledge, introduce hitherto unknown studies into popular circulation and elucidate on those which remained incomprehensible. The source base had a fundamental influence on the fulfilment of the above declarations. Pliny the Elder was compelled to go beyond antiquarian studies. He derived the knowledge about Spain from three types of sources: literary ones, the *monumenta* and his own experience. The Encyclopedist treats literary sources in a two ways: by referring to a specific author or pointing to a collective author, an anonymous one as a rule: *Graeci, nostri, alli, aliqui, tradunt*.

The division of authors into *auctores* and *externi* adopted by Pliny demonstrates that the former were his main source of information. *Externi* denotes Greek authors who wrote in the times when the Iberian Peninsula was becoming a subject of political interest and scholarly investigations. He refers to them most often while deliberating on terminology. The Encyclopedist made use of the views of authors, Greek historians of the Hellenic era, Greek geographers from the turn of the 2nd and 1st cent. BC in general and toponymic deliberations, concerning the dimensions and sizes of the *orbis terrarum*. *Auctores* are exclusively Roman authors. In the majority of cases these are authors more contemporary to Pliny, thanks to whom the Encyclopedist attempted to update

knowledge. Not infrequently he quotes their experience, the posts they held or their place of origin. This stems from the fact that he revered authors whose life was associated with public activity. In all likelihood, this is no coincidence that the authors he held in the highest esteem originated from the equestrian order. (NH IX 10).

A significant place among the *fontes Pliniana*e is occupied by *monumenta*, including state documents, that is, the descriptions of individual provinces (*formulae provinciarum*), lists of towns and epigraphic sources, e.g. the inscription from a trophy of Pompey the Great, erected to commemorate the victory over Sertorius. It should be emphasized that drawing on these particular sources, Pliny the Elder rendered the administrative vision of the geography of Hispania. The crowning element is the author's own experience he had gained during the stay in Spain. Carrying out the tenets laid out in the *Praefatio*, the Encyclopedist wove his own observations into the narrative. It is yet another proof for the efforts to update the information about Spain.

The second part concerns information related to physical geography, administration, urban development (including municipalisation) and Spain's natural resources. The encyclopaedic work of Pliny's demonstrates the literary aspirations of the Flavian era and the contemporary state of knowledge. The conducted analysis of discourses concerning Spain offers an answer to the question on the relevance of provided information and their political significance.

The starting point in the analysis of the geographical description of the Iberian Peninsula and the adjoining isles is demonstrating the relationship between the notions of *orbis terrarum* and *orbis Romanus*. Undoubtedly, the relationship results from the domination of the Roman Empire over the world. In Pliny's eyes, Rome is the centre of the world, while *terrarum orbis universus* is 'our', that is to say Roman part of the lands (*pars nostra terrarum*). Hispania is situated between the Ocean that Pliny calls *Mare Externum* and *Mare Nostrum*, i.e. the Mediterranean Sea. The territory of Spain is a part of Europe (*victrix omnium gentium*), which dominates Africa and Asia. The analysis of individual geographical units was carried out against the background of the antique geographical literature — the works of such writers as Strabo or Pomponius Mela. This detailed breakdown revealed the innovativeness of Pliny's approach, demonstrated that the geographical description of Spain differs from the accounts of other parts of the *orbis terrarum*. Physical geography was subordinated to the administrative and political vision, with much more space taken up by the description of institutions created by Rome, i.e. the provinces (*provinciae*), con-

ventus iuridici, or towns (*civitates*). The Encyclopedist's language in this respect is fully administrative in nature — the individual geographical units were used to delineate frontiers between three Roman provinces on the Iberian Peninsula. The rivers also served as a tool to present the urban network, which from the Roman standpoint was so crucial.

The chapter dedicated to Roman administration in the Iberian Peninsula discusses higher order units — the provinces (*provinciae*), then judicial districts (*conventus iuridici*). Thanks to epigraphic sources it was possible to demonstrate that the Encyclopedist introduced administrative terminology into a literary text. At the same time, there is no doubt that the Encyclopedist, when describing the administrative structure, attempted to show the 'Romanness' of that area as well as the instrument through which Rome efficiently ruled the *orbis terrarum*, namely the administration. Thus the Encyclopedist pointed to the occurring process of political and administrative integration of Spain. The surviving archaeological sources enabled a thorough analysis of the course of provincial borders. A confrontation of Pliny's account with the *edictum de Bembibre* — an edict of emperor Augustus from 15 BC, discovered in Spain in 1999, seems to confirm that Pliny the Elder was the first to present, in such detail, the final administrative division of the Iberian Peninsula from the times of Augustus, which remained valid under Vespasian.

The painstaking detail of the administrative description of Spain in the NH was a *novitas* both in Roman and in Greek literature devoted to geography and history. Pliny the Elder is the only author who would go so deep into the internal division of a province. Admittedly, his description is not balanced. When describing *Bettica*, the lower order units are incorporated into the structure of description of this province, i.e. in the periplus of the coast and the periplus of the rivers, which runs along the Guadalquivir river. In the case of the Nearer Spain, the description of the *conventus iuridici* is the most systematic and orderly one. In turn, in *Lusitania* the Encyclopedist indicated merely the division into judicial districts (*conventus iuridici*). The causes of this discrepancy are to be looked for in the source base.

The political significance of the image of Spain may be clearly seen from the perspective of municipalisation conducted by Vespasian. At the end of the description of the Peninsula, Pliny the Elder informs the reader about the municipalisation of the Iberian territories carried out by the emperor: *Universae Hispaniae Vespasianus Imperator Augustus iactatus procellis rei publicae Latium tribuit* (NH III 30). This one-sentence statement, which has no equivalent in other sources, was an object of studies by other philologists and historian. The

essential difference is in the reading of *iactatus/iactatum*. Neither the one nor the other changes the historical context. After all, one knows that this denotes granting *ius Latium* as a result of the internal upheavals of the Roman state, that is to say the civil war of 68–69 AD. Based on the inscriptions erected in honour of Vespasian and Titus in Spain as well as legal sources — the *leges municipales* — it may be proved that the reform took place in the early 70s of the 1st century AD, before the censorship of Vespasian and Titus in 73/74. By virtue of an imperial edict, the Latin law was conferred on all Spain, because as Javier Andreu Pintado demonstrated, *municipia Flavia* can be found in all three Spanish provinces. The edict contained a general regulation of the basic municipal institutions. In Pliny's statement on the municipalisation of Spain, the only one that the sources offer, two fundamental issues emerge: first, it follows from it that it was emperor Vespasian, the continuator of Augustus' urban development policy, who created a uniform urban structure throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Secondly, in this way Pliny showed the degree to which the Iberian Peninsula had been integrated and Romanized.

The final chapter contains an analysis of the information about Spain's natural resources. Here, the starting point is the "Praise of Spain" (*laus Hispaniae*), contained in the 37th book of the "Naturalis Historia". This is not the only praise of Spain of this kind — we also know the *laudes* by Pompeius Trogus and Pomponius Mela. It is no coincidence that the "Praise of Spain" of Pliny the Elder's is found in the final part of the "Naturalis Historia", which rounds off the entire work. The author emphasizes that Spain occupies the second place *in toto orbe*, immediately after Italy. It predominates over other provinces thanks to its natural resources and the products obtained from them, which were important for the Roman economy, i.e. agriculture, husbandry and mineral mining (NH XXXVII 203). Compared to earlier *laudes Hispaniae*, the declaration is a *novitas*, since Pliny the Elder — an experienced Roman official — highlights the significance of regions outside Italy, namely the provinces.

The Encyclopedist devoted most space to the resources which constituted the chief branches of the Roman economy, i.e. agriculture, husbandry and procurement of minerals. As regards produce, Pliny first discussed grain, olive oil and vine. Archaeological sources confirmed the account of Pliny the Elder. He is also validated by the material originating from Italy: in this case the Monte Testaccio in Rome, built from broken amphorae of Spanish provenance. This attests to a massive export of Spanish products to Italy.

The analysis of information about Spanish natural resources proved that Pliny the Elder presented Spain as an *Eldorado of antiquity*. He acquired the

knowledge about it through personal experience and the perusal of works by various authors and archival documents.

Pliny's image of Spain is a mosaic of information, which is an aggregate outcome of the personal interests of the author — and excellent scholar and state official in one. However, the selection of the information and the manner in which it is presented are also due to the nature of the work which had been assumed in advance — namely that of an encyclopaedia, whose task it is to describe reality in a dispassionate manner. The times when the work was written are not without significance either. At the time, Spain constituted an integral part of the Imperium Romanum. Using Spain as an example, the Encyclopedist, *amicus principis*, showed Vespasian as a reformer and disseminator of the Roman civilisation.