

Review of: "The spread of the cult of Asclepius in the context of the Roman army benefited from the presence of physicians: A spatial proximity analysis"

Josef Eitler

Potential competing interests: The author(s) declared that no potential competing interests exist.

At the end of this article, the author points out that the combination of established methodology of historiography with formal approaches can be very fruitful and holds great potential for a further understanding of developments and processes in antiquity. Especially since such studies are always dependent on historical basic data, which unfortunately are often incomplete in most contexts, statistical results cannot be interpreted as scientific evidence, but as strong arguments of highly probable trends. This is precisely what the article shows excellently in the case of the spread of the cult of Asclepius.

The article presents a spatial proximity analysis concerning the spread of the cult of Asclepius in the context of the Roman army and in particular the presence of physicians on a GIS based approach. The underlying study is based on several levels of data collection and analysis. Due to the high density of Roman military on the northern borders of the Empire, the area of interest is well chosen and the provinces concerned provide a solid stock of basic material regarding the variables of the study.

The methodology chosen for the analysis is well structured and highly sophisticated. GIS data obtained are implemented into to ancient transportation network, which consists of the Roman roads in the selected areas. Existing high-quality digital maps were used and adapted in detail. While the long-term locations of the Roman legions are clearly identified, the analysis used the rich inventory of Latin inscriptions from the provinces of interest for the special dissemination of the cult of Asclepius and the presence of military personnel, in particular, physicians.

Appropriate statistical methods haven been chosen for the further evaluation of distances and the complexity of this process needs to be emphasized. In order to improve the quality of the proximity values, the distance measurements were carried out on the basis of each of the variable groups. In addition, these results were compared to those of civil Roman settlements, instead of the locations of the Roman legions and military personal from the inscriptions. For purpose of further comparison, the cults of Apollo, Minerva and Jupiter were analyzed the same way. As expected, there was a very wide distribution in the cult of Jupiter, while Apollo and Minerva were not as pronounced, but provided results that were quite comparable to Asclepius. Therefore, the results are not only of highest interest for the spread of the cult of Asclepius,

but also of great significance for further research in the cults of Apollo and Minerva in the provinces dealt with in this study.

Problems that involve a purely statistical consideration were also addressed, such as the lack of inscriptions from the province of Raetia that mention Asclepius. Here, conclusive reference is made to Grannus, who had a similar function in cult. In addition, it should perhaps be noted that Grannus was also worshiped in other provinces to a certain extent. However, this is only a detail and is not relevant to the study in general. It is more interesting, as the author points out, that there are almost no physicians attested in the inscriptions from Noricum and Dacia, which is why the statistical significance for these provinces is reduced.

Although the results were to be expected to some extent and the study does not provide absolute proof, the analysis obviously shows the spread of the cult of Asclepius in the context of the Roman army and in particular of physicians. Due to the chosen approach, the analysis differs from case studies in many ways. In any case, it clearly indicates the possibilities of broad-based, supra-regional research and illustrates the high value of information than can be gained through additional data-based approaches.