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## Frontier Landscape Project

### The archaeology of Roman colonialism in the Fronteira area, ancient Lusitania (Northern Alentejo region, Portugal, 2018)

**Research project and training programme (Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Leiden University and Évora University), Tesse D. Stek, Jesús García Sánchez & André Carneiro (coordinators)**

The *Frontier Landscape Project* (FLP) is a new archaeological project funded by the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds and coordinated by Leiden University and Évora University. The aim of the project is to advance our knowledge of Roman colonialism in Western Iberia (modern Portugal), and its particular position within the wider Mediterranean world. Building on Dutch and Portuguese expertise, the FLP strives to create a sustainable collaboration between international scholars and students of archaeology.

The FLP follows up on the line of research on Roman expansionism of the *Landscapes of Early Roman Colonization* (LERC) project by Stek and others in Italy, and more directly on the research by Carneiro and his team in Fronteira.

The area of Fronteira was a frontier zone in antiquity. Located in the inlands far from the developing coastal towns, it remained scarcely settled even after the first phase of Roman involvement. However, since it happened to sit on the route connecting the new provincial capital Emerita Augusta (Mérida) and Olisippo (Lisbon), its connectivity to the wider region quickly changed. Many of the settlement dynamics of the area, such as the abandonment of hilltop sites and instability coinciding with Roman expansion in the area, are also key phenomena in other regions of the Mediterranean. The complementarity of Portuguese and Dutch approaches in this project helps clearing the path towards understanding these Mediterranean-wide phenomena, and their possible link to Roman incorporation.

The main field methods applied are pedestrian survey and remote sensing. For the study of the finds, we can build on the archaeological knowledge from the excavations of the *Horta da Torre villa* by Carneiro over the last years (see figure 1). In the collaborative FLP we complement the extensive site catalogue by Carneiro and calibrate it with a highly intensive field survey method, which is the same one the LERC surveys adopted in Italy. Teams of field walkers collect all finds they encounter ('off-site' collection, 20% sample), and where necessary additional diagnostic finds are picked up as well. In the relatively ideal landscape of Alto Alentejo, geophysical research has for now focused on GPR only, whereas the aerial archaeology component includes both the study of post WWII American flights and new drone imagery by the FLP. The first

campaign, between mid-January and mid-February 2018 with an international team of 32 students and staff, has already provided new, interesting data, including general sherd densities in the landscape and site characteristics. By collaborating towards a high-resolution case study from a far-flung area in the western reaches of the Roman Empire, we hope to contribute to newly developing hypotheses about Roman imperialism in the Mediterranean. Last but not least, students interested in joining one of our campaigns are encouraged to contact us by email (t.d.stek@arch.leidenuniv.nl).

*Tesse D. Stek* is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of World Archaeology of the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University. He coordinates archaeological projects and field schools.

*André Carneiro* is Assistant Professor at Évora University. He is interested in the rural landscape of Alentejo and recently published the archaeological gazetteer of Fronteira. He coordinates field schools including the excavations at the site of Horta da Torre.

*Jesús García Sánchez* is Researcher at the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University. He works on the transition of the Late Iron Age to the Imperial Roman period in the northern plateau of the Iberian Peninsula as well as on various projects in Italy.



**Figure 1.** Roman villa of Horta da Torre and the surrounding landscape with the hilltop site of Castelo de Mau Visinho and several other sites connected to the Emerita Augusta-Olisippo road (figure authors).