

# THE HYDRONYM IBERIAN SEA IN THE SPANISH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE'S COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL MAPS

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## Abstract

For Classical writers, the word 'Iberian' was a toponym to name a land in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea. For that reason, people inhabiting Iberia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iron Age (VI<sup>th</sup> -I<sup>st</sup> centuries BC) were called Iberians. The cultural significance of the terms 'Iberia' and 'Iberians' has been under discussion, especially because of the sometimes difficult interpretation of ancient texts, as well as the difficulties to fit ethnonyms with archaeological evidences (Domínguez Monedero, 1983; González Ponce, 1993; Pérez Vilatela 1993; Cruz-Andreotti 2002; Blázquez Martínez 2005, among others).

This paper deals with one ancient Greek hydronym related to Iberia, the 'Iberian Sea', a portion of the Mediterranean Sea located along the Iberia's cost. In early modern maps (XVI<sup>th</sup>-XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries), the western extreme of the Mediterranean Sea (Southern cost of Andalusia, Spain) is often named as *Ibericum Mare*.

However, despite of the presence of the hydronym in pre-1900 cartography, and despite of the survival of the term Iberia and its derived words in the current language (Iberian Peninsula, Iberian Mountains, among other words), the term 'Iberian Sea' is not part of the popular culture anymore.

## 1. Iberia and the Iberian Sea

*Iberia* was the toponym used by ancient Greeks to name the Iberian Peninsula. Although the presence of the Greeks in Iberia referred to a few coastal colonies, their culture has impacted on our culture in many aspects (for example, in the way we call this piece of land (Guzmán Guerra *et al.* 2007:108). Strabo (*ca.* 64 BC – AD 24), Greek geographer born in current Turkey, commented (III, 4, 19) the success of Greek toponyms throughout the known World, in particular referred to peripheral territories - the most unknown ones-, since even Roman historians, when they ignored a location name, adapted the corresponding Greek term to Latin (Strabo III, 4, 19).

Strabo wrote *Geography*, a work in 17 volumes (volume III about Iberia and its settlers). Since he never visited the Iberian Peninsula, he probably documented his work

through the work of previous writers like Polybius, Posidonius and Artemidorus (Sánchez-Moreno, Gómez-Pantoja 2007:28).

Thanks to Strabo's *Geography* Book III, we have a better knowledge of Iberian peoples. Strabo wrote that Turdetani (one of the Iberian peoples) knew writing from long (Strabo III, 1, 6). In present times, although we know pronunciation of Iberian languages, we can not translate them. In consequence, we do not know if Iberian peoples knew their own land as Iberia (like Greeks used to).

The study of Iberian peoples has a great development in Spain. Since the discovery of *Dama de Elche* at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, many archaeological discoveries and successfully historical research have been done. Specific conferences, research centres and groups, Doctoral Thesis, publications, monographs, exhibitions among other events, have been carried out<sup>1</sup>.

In recent historical research, there has been some debate about the meaning of the term Iberia, since classical writers used also that term to name a region in the other side of their known world, in the current Republic of Georgia. The most accepted hypothesis among researchers is that the term *Iberia* was a name imported by Greeks from East Mediterranean, where there was a river called Iber which later on gave name to both land and people, being *Iberia* a geographical term rather than an ethnic one (Cruz Andreotti *et al.* 2007:403). One hypothesis is that the term Iberia was given to this western land because of the natural resources of Eastern Iberia, also founded in this western Peninsula (Domínguez Monedero 1983:208).

As Strabo referred, the meaning of coronyms (names for a defined area) changed over time (depending on the user, on the point of view of the writer, etc.), like they do in present times. In particular, the term Iberia was used to refer to a part of the land, and later on to refer to the entire Peninsula.

Although there is some confusion in classical texts, it seems that the first area called Iberia was the Southern area of the Peninsula (Domínguez Monedero 1983:211). At the beginning, it was probably a term to name the area around the Tinto River mouth, a river called Iberus, in an area between San Vicente cape (Portugal) and Gibraltar Straight since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half /last third of the VII century BC; afterward, it served to name the Spanish Mediterranean coastal area, and finally, the entire Peninsula (Domínguez Monedero 1983:221). Despite of difficulties in classical texts interpretation, it seems that the evolution in the meaning of the term was related to the knowledge of the territory by classical writers (Domínguez Monedero 1983:211 y ss.).

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliography about ancient inhabitants of Iberia is huge. For a review of works until 1998 see *Revista de estudios Ibéricos*, nº 2 and nº 3. For the period 1999-2009, an important reference is the celebration of monographic courses of the Centro Andaluz de Arqueología Ibérica, University of Jaén (<http://www.ujaen.es/centros/caai>).

Polybius (ca. 200-118 BC) wrote *Histories*, one of the main documentary sources about ancient Spain (Latin name *Hispania*) that has survived. He was the first ancient author who wrote about the Iberian Peninsula and also visited it (Moret 2006:68). His work has an important role in the discussion about the terms Iberia and Iberes, since some contradictions in the definitions of these words have been found in Polybius's work. In particular, there are four different semantic fields as follows (Moret 2003:280):

1. *Iberia*, as a name for the mediterranean area of the peninsula.
2. *Iberia*, as translation of the Latin word *Hispania*, name given by romans to the land south of Pyrenees (the whole Peninsula).
3. *Íberes*, mediterranean peoples, according to Polybius, different from northern and western peoples.
4. *Íberes*, a more restricted people-name coming from a Carthaginian document (Cape Lacinium inscription).

To explain why Polybius used the same toponym (*Iberia*) in different ways, several hypotheses have been proposed:

1. An evolution of the term inside the Polibio's work: his knowledge of the territory was improved as he visited it (Schulten 1955, from Moret 2003:279).
2. *Iberia* and *íber* understood as polysemic terms: due in one hand to the heterogeneous sources used by the author and in the other hand to some lack of interest for locations (and peoples) with secondary role in the work (Moret 2003).

Despite of the extensive discussion about the significance of the term *Iberia* (and Iberian peoples), its maritime equivalent has attracted little attention (natural thing, since archaeological remains are mainly inland). But the lack of toponymic precision affects also to Sea names. The term Iberian Sea appears in classical texts for the first time when the Mediterranean area was under Roman control; the Northern part of the maritime area west of Sardinia was called Gallic or Ligurian Sea, and Iberian Sea was the name for the Southern part (Cruz Andreotti *et al.* 2007:420, see 'Mar nuestro').

Also Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) mentioned the Iberian sea several times in his work *Naturalis Historia*. He identified this Sea in the Mediterranean coast of Spain, and he indicated that it was also known as Hispanic Sea and as Balearic Sea (*NH*, III 2, 6; III 10, 74 and IV, 34, 110).

Ptolemy (AD 100-170), Greek mathematician, astronomer and geographer, was the author of the work *Geography*, where more than 8000 georeferenced toponyms (600 for *Hispania*) were recorded (Sánchez-Moreno, Gómez-Pantoja 2007:31). In book number II of *Geography*, Ptolemy mentioned that the Iberian sea washed the southern coast of Baetica province in the area of the Inland sea (the Mediterranean) (Ptolemy II, 4, 3 in Bejarano 1987:183).

## 2. The Iberian Sea in the Spanish National Geographic Institute's Collection of Historical Maps

Classical Antiquity was re-discovered after medieval times. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *Geography* of Ptolemy was translated to Latin by Jacobo Angelus de Scarperia (Romero, Benavides 1998:20, Manso 2006). This fact caused the rediscovery of Ptolemy in the western world. Although there is no yet completely satisfactory map version of the Ptolemy's list of coordinates (Sánchez-Moreno, Gómez-Pantoja 2007:31), the work *Geographia* was far-reaching for modern cartography. The re-discovery of this work probably influenced the location of the hydronym *Ibericum Mare* in the southern coast of Andalusia. Nevertheless, Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* was a model and a source for late-antiquity and medieval encyclopedists (Cantó 2007:28 in Cantó *et al.* 2007), which makes sense with the location of the hydronym along the Spanish Mediterranean coast, in the surroundings of the Balearic Islands.

The Spanish National Geographic Institute has a wide collection of maps from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Institute's webpage includes a 'Virtual Museum', where a part of this collection of maps can be accessed on-line ([http://www.ign.es/ign/es/IGN/Museo\\_Virtual.jsp](http://www.ign.es/ign/es/IGN/Museo_Virtual.jsp)). Also, these maps were previously published in a catalogue (IGN, 2000) (an update of this book in press).

The collection of maps of the Iberian Peninsula includes General and Detail Maps of the peninsula, Maps of the Autonomous Communities, Ceuta and Gibraltar. There are topographic maps, as well as thematic cartography of different topics (nautical charts, population maps, public works, irrigation land, telegraphs, railroads, etc., among many other themes).

The hydronym Iberian Sea is mentioned in more than twenty of these maps, and in different languages (mostly Latin). These maps are mainly general maps of the peninsula and of Andalusia.

The most ancient of these maps dates back to the year 1570, under the reign of Phillip II of Spain. It is a representation of the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and Balearic Islands. It is part of the book *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, by Aegidius Coppenius Diestch, work dedicated to Phillip II (of whom Diestch was royal cartographer). In this map the hydronym (written in Latin) appears in the south coast of Andalusia (Figure 1)<sup>2</sup>.

*Ibericum Mare* is mentioned in pre-1900 maps in both ancient descriptions of Hispania (Figures 3 and 5) and new descriptions (Figures 1, 2 and 4). It is interesting to note the

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<sup>2</sup> Source of map images and descriptions included in this paper:

- *Fondos cartográficos del Instituto Geográfico Nacional. Siglos XVI-XIX* (IGN, 2000).
- Digital database of the IGN Map Library.
- Virtual Museum of the IGN Map Library: [http://www.ign.es/ign/es/IGN/Museo\\_Virtual.jsp](http://www.ign.es/ign/es/IGN/Museo_Virtual.jsp).

frequent identification between Iberia, Hispania and Spain, since there are some titles which say ‘Mare Ibericum vulgo Hispanicum’ (Figure 4), and some others Iberian Sea *vulgo* Sea of Spain.

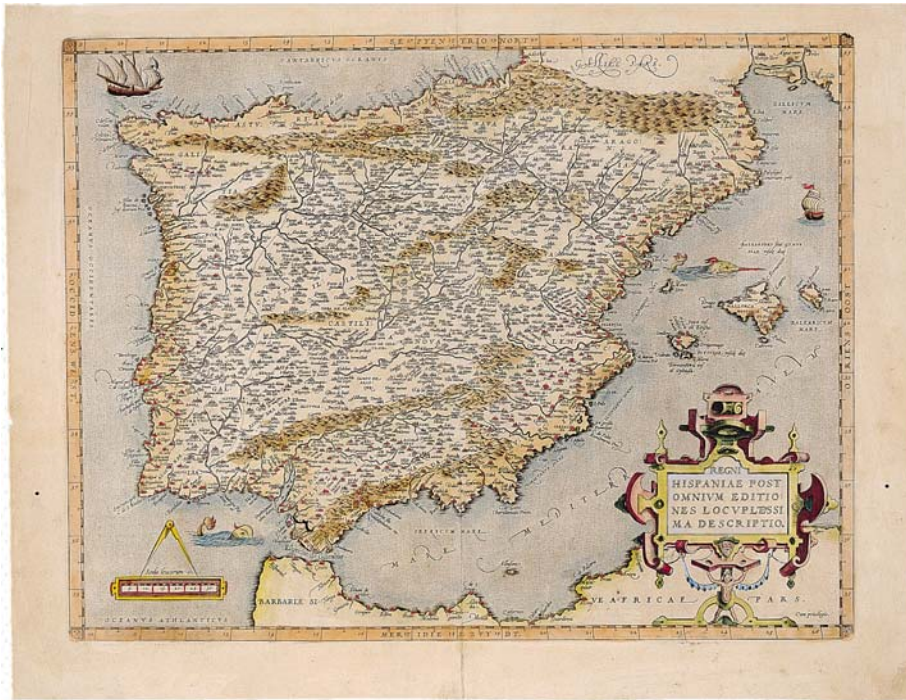


Figure 1. Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. Amberes, ca. 1570. Signatura IGNC 11-F-12.

© Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Map Library) (Spain).

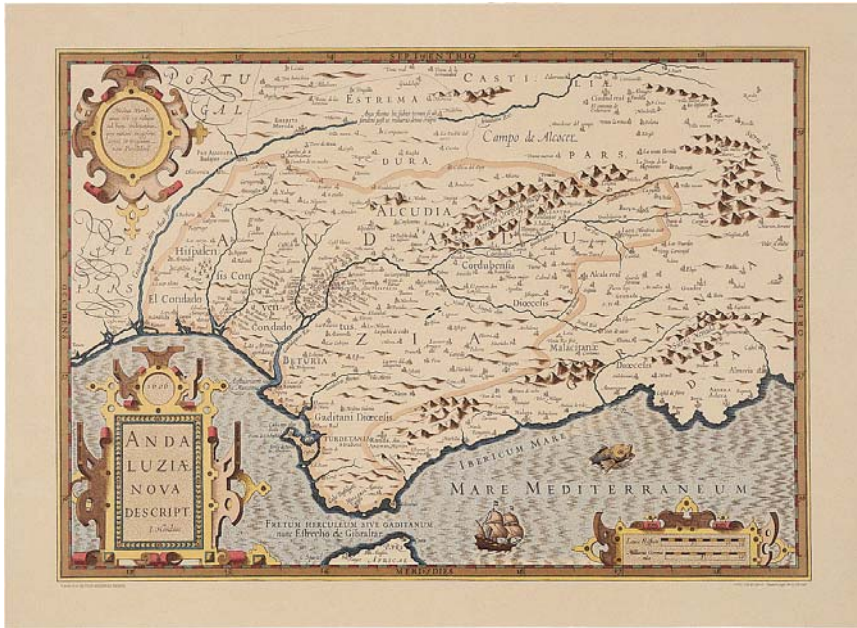


Figure 2. “Andaluziae Nova Descriptio”, Jodocus Hondius, *Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura* de Gerard Mercator. Amsterdam, 1606. Signatura IGNC 41-M-1.  
 © Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Map Library) (Spain).



Figure 3. “Hispaniae Antiquae Tabulae”, 1641. Signatura IGNC 11-F-14.

© Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Map Library) (Spain).



Figure 4. “Hispaniae et Portugaliae Regna”, Johann Cristoph Weigel. Nuremberg, 1740-60. Signatura IGNC 11-F-21. © Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Map Library) (Spain).



Figure 5. “Espagne Ancienne”, *Atlas de Géographie ancienne*, Delamarche, Paris, 1838.

© Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Map Library) (Spain).

### 3. The Iberian Sea in current toponymy

The Spanish National Geographic Institute works (in collaboration with other organisms) in the elaboration of several official *Nomenclator* (more information in <http://www.ign.es>).

In parallel with this official nomenclators, G. López de Lemos, Head of the Nomenclator Service, elaborates the NOMGEO, a database of georeferenced toponyms and geographical names of the Spanish territory. This database contains a wide amount of toponyms from many different sources (even colloquial names), and it is frequently updated. The 28.08 version is the last one, and it contains more than 500.000 entries. The NOMGEO can be accessed on-line through the webpage of the Spanish Spatial Data Infrastructure (<http://www.idee.es>).

This database is a curious collection of toponyms of great cultural value, since many place-names have been collected from historical cartography and popular culture (however, original sources of toponyms are not indicated). The hydronym ‘Iberian sea’ is mentioned in this database as a historical name for the Sea of Alborán.

The Sea of Alborán locates in the South coast of Andalusia. Its name is due to the island of Alborán, located in the centre of the maritime area. This island belongs to Spain since the year 1540, and it was allocated to the province of Almeria in 1884 by the Spanish king Alfonso XII (Gutiérrez Castillo 2003).

The origin of both names (Iberian Sea and Alborán Sea) is not related; the current name does not seem to continue the former one. It looks like there have been two separated toponymic lines.

Although the NOMGEO database does not include yet other historical locations for the Iberian Sea (it is a work in progress), like that one indicated in map of figure 3, NOMGEO is helping to keep ancient toponyms alive, among other aspects.

### 4. Conclusions

1. One of the main objectives of this work has been to relate different fields of study (Cartography, History, classical (Greek and Roman) writers, and Archaeology), in order



to keep attention to the benefits and interest of working together, as well as to show possible lines for joint research.

2. An approach to the history and evolution of the term 'Iberian Sea' (*Ibericum Mare*, an almost unknown hydronym of great scientific interest and cultural value) has been done. Also, the paper has contributed to attract attention to the significance of ancient terms related to Iberian peoples in modern cartography. Despite of their historical value, they can fall into disuse. Their presence in the post-XVIth century cartography of Spain has been highlighted as well. Discussion from a geographical point of view about Iberian culture has been briefly shown.

3. The paper kept also attention to the historical map collection of the National Geographic Institute of Spain, an interesting collection for the History of Cartography. The cultural interest of NOMGEO Database has been mentioned too.

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