

SECTION 2

GADES, BEGINNING AND END OF THE KNOWN WORLD

The Vicarello Cups, an exceptional discovery

Silver replicas, produced by the Royal Academy of History in Madrid, of the four silver vessels preserved in the Museo Nazionale Romano. Found in the mid-19th century in a thermal area north of Rome from which they take their name (Aquae Apollinares, on the shores of Lake Bracciano), they are remarkable for bearing engravings of the different stops along the Via Augusta between Cádiz and Rome, separated by Roman miles.

They are shaped like milestones, the stone markers that indicated distances along roads, and they may have been votive offerings deliberately cast into this healing thermal sanctuary by a pilgrim, although some scholars believe they could be part of a concealment.

They are traditionally dated to the early 1st century AD, although other researchers argue for later dates (2nd, or even 3rd or 4th centuries). It is important to recall their link to Cádiz at the time of their engraving, since the Via Augusta began in Cádiz and led to Rome (*Itinerarium A Gades Romam*)—not the other way around (a “Gaditanocentric” perspective).



Did you know that in Antiquity maritime transport was infinitely more efficient?

A sea voyage from Gades to Rome would take around 16 days, compared to 37 days by fast cart overland, or 83 days on foot. But how much cargo could you carry in each case?...

Europe's First "Highways"

Communications were a fundamental factor in the cohesion of the Roman Empire. From the Antonine period onward, its territory was comparable in size to today's European Union. Using ancient paths and thanks to the army, Rome connected all its domains through roads, some paved (with *summae crustae*) and others simple dirt tracks (*viae terrariae*).

The Via Augusta, linking Gades with Rome, was one of the main overland routes, stretching more than 2,500 km, though many others existed, which we know of thanks to so-called "itinerary sources" (*Itinerarium Antoninum*, *Tabula Peutingeriana*, etc.).

