

INTRODUCTION

This book comes in response to frequent requests from scholars who wish to consult and use the fragments of Posidonius, but are without knowledge of Greek and Latin and so unable to read my collection of fragments printed in their original languages in Volume I of this series, *The Fragments*. But in addition, even competent classical scholars, faced with a range of some sixty different reporters varying wildly in discipline, style, period and the intelligibility of their manuscript tradition, have asked for the convenience of an accompanying translation. The present volume attempts to assuage the needs of both categories.

But all volumes of translations, and perhaps especially translations of fragments, should come with a severe health warning. All the translations in this book are my own, but every translation is itself an interpretation, the culmination of all previous research in the attempt to understand the evidence. A translation inevitably is forced to a final decision without making clear the degree of vulnerability of that decision. The classically-equipped reader is therefore urged to use this volume of translations with the support of Vols. I and II, where *The Fragments* gives a full account of the details of the report, and *The Commentary* discusses the standing and interpretation of this evidence. For the category of reader who must rely principally on the translations, I have tried to give brief warning where translations are problematic, or an alternative important, and occasionally where further discussion is available.

But there is one further element, in my opinion crucial for the understanding of fragments, and that is context.¹

¹ See e.g. Vol. II (i) *The Commentary*, p. ix; I. G. Kidd, 'What is a Posidonian Fragment?' in *Collecting Fragments/Fragmente sammeln*, ed. G. Most (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1997) pp. 225–36.

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I paid particular attention to clarifying this in each case in *The Commentary*. For what seems to me a necessary convenience for the reader using this volume on its own, I have again prefaced fragments with a brief account of their context. This means some repetition for users of *The Commentary*, which I hope will be understood and forgiven. There are also some translations of mine printed on occasion in *The Commentary*, which, when I still approved of them, I have reproduced in this volume. I have also added notes explaining names or references which would be unfamiliar to this category of reader.

The translations, however, are complementary to the previous volumes, and thus as translations of *The Fragments*, follow exactly the principles, content, order, numbering, organisation and structure of Volume I. Accordingly, they are the translation of the named fragments of Posidonius. The reasons for confining the collection at this stage to the attested fragments were argued fully in the introduction to Vol. I, xvii–xxiii.² The earlier methodology of ‘discovering’ Posidonius throughout later literature in supposed parallels and inferred echoes derived from a conjectured common source of an ubiquitous Posidonius, was dangerously subjective, and indeed led to contradictory theories. A scientific study of the now lost works of Posidonius through the vagaries of the fickle fortunes of the transmission of texts, must start from and be solidly based on the evidence of passages declared as such by the authors who report them. And there is much here yet to be done, for example in the study of each reporter and his context, to assess the value of the report.³ It is from that foundation that the possible reverberation of further unacknowledged echoes may be judged or identified.

² And in ‘What is a Posidonian Fragment’, see above.

³ So again ‘What is a Posidonian Fragment’; and ‘Plutarch and his Stoic Contradictions’ in *Fragmentsammlungen philosophischer Texte der Antike*, ed. W. Burkert (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1998) pp. 288–302.

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But the attested fragments in themselves present enough evidence to attempt a new assessment of Posidonius. There are, after all, 293 fragments and 115 testimonia from a wide range of reporters, and they include extended passages of quotation and argumentation that reveal a larger picture of content, style and method of argument. It is true that the evidence of such disparate reporters as (to example a small but important clutch) Cicero, Strabo, Seneca, Cleomedes, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Athenaeus or Galen requires the most stringent analysis, but even on the most conservative view a canvas emerges from which the force and character of Posidonius' contribution to intellectual history glimmers. It may be appropriate to offer such an outline at this point.⁴

LIFE AND WORKS

In the first place, we know enough about Posidonius' life to realise that its international range and experience set a stamp on his thought, writing and society. He was born at Apamea on the river Orontes in Syria around 135 B.C. But Apamea had a strong Hellenic element of population, and there is no doubt that Posidonius was a Greek. As a young man he went to Athens for his higher education where, under the tutelage of Panaetius, the Head of the Stoic School of philosophy, he became himself a convinced adherent of that system. This was before 110 B.C., when Panaetius died. Posidonius never returned to Syria, although he retained a sharp interest in Middle Eastern affairs. He settled in Rhodes, where he was granted citizenship and taught philosophy. The choice of Rhodes was

⁴ The following account is an English version of the article 'Poseidonios' which I wrote for the German collection *Philosophen der Antike II*, ed. F. Ricken (W. Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart, 1996) pp. 61–82. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to use my English version here.

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interesting. Although Athens was still the major university centre, the Headship of the Stoic School there had passed to Mnesarchus, and Posidonius looked elsewhere. Rhodes was attractive, not only as an independent city, commercially prosperous, go-ahead and with easy links of movement in all directions, but because it was welcoming to intellectuals, for it already had a strong reputation particularly for scientific research from men like Hipparchus; and Posidonius from an early period had displayed strong interest in the sciences.

For once settled in Rhodes, he embarked, probably in the nineties, on a prolonged grand tour or tours of the Mediterranean world, in which through observation of people, customs, environment and phenomena he collected by autopsy and first-hand enquiry much material for his later works. He was certainly in southern Spain, where he probed tidal phenomena, natural resources and environmental ethnology. In southern Gaul he found out what he could of the Celts and northern peoples. Italy and Rome, of course, Sicily, Dalmatia and Greece, North Africa and the East all came under his searching eye in their physical, human and historical backgrounds.

After this he appears to have settled down in Rhodes to writing and teaching. But in accord with Stoic principles, he was no recluse or armchair philosopher. In spite of being a newcomer, he was even elected to high magisterial office, the Prytany, which combined presidential and executive functions; and he was chosen for at least one Rhodian embassy to Rome, in the dangerous year (87/86 B.C.) of Marius' last consulship and terminal illness.

In addition, he had become by his writing an international figure, visited not only by pupils and intellectuals, but by the powerful bully-boys of Rome, such as members of great families like the Metelli. General Pompey found time in 66 B.C., in his command against the pirates, to sit in on a lecture, and did so again in 62 B.C., when return-

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ing from his campaign in the East, dipping in respect his symbol of power before Posidonius' door, but in return severely treated to a lecture on the subject 'There is no good but moral good', which itself gave rise to a famous anecdote in Roman circles. For the old man was suffering severely from gout, and illustrated his theme by apostrophising his offending leg: 'It's no good, pain; bothersome you may be, but you will never persuade me that you are an evil.' Cicero in his late twenties attended a course of lectures, and later when embarking on his own philosophical works, sent for books of 'the Maestro', his Professor. He even paid him the supreme compliment of inviting him to write a monograph on his own much-cherished consulate, which Posidonius diplomatically refused. But this is sure evidence for the literary impact of Posidonius' style, which was vivid, forceful and ornate, and still shines fitfully but pungently through our surviving fragments. He died in his eighties, somewhere around 51 B.C., when Rhodes was reaffirming her treaty with Rome.

This sketched outline of his life shows not only his great reputation and influence during his life, but also that he was concerned with and very much a part of all aspects of his contemporary world. A main characteristic of that world was the attempted reduction of scattered turbulent elements to a whole, integrated Mediterranean world society through the domination of Rome. It may be fortuitous, but it is not unremarkable that the outstanding feature of Posidonius' philosophy is the attempt to integrate the complete field of the human intellect and the universe in which it finds itself into a rational system for the explanation of and canon for human behaviour.

RANGE OF INTEREST

Indeed, what strikes us immediately from the evidence that survives and is attested for us is the extraordinary range

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covered by his work. For not only did he write on all aspects of philosophy, but also on astronomy, meteorology, mathematics, mathematical geography, hydrology, seismology, zoology, botany, anthropology and history. These were not incidental observations, but major investigations in their subject. To take two examples from the thirty or so titles of his books to survive (presumably the most popular): *On Ocean* and the *History* were major works in geography and historiography. It is crucial for our understanding of Posidonius to decide whether these were simply part of an all-embracing curiosity and gargantuan encyclopedic interest, or in some way an integral part of his philosophical enquiry.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY,
SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

The first thing that is clear from Posidonius' classification of the arts and sciences preserved in Seneca (F9oEK)⁵ is that philosophy was without question for him the dominant controlling master art. In philosophy itself he followed the tripartition which had been generally adopted from the fourth century B.C. throughout the Hellenistic period into natural philosophy (including metaphysics and theology), logic and moral philosophy. But Posidonius wished to stress that although the parts were distinguishable enquiries, they were inseparable and organically interdependent. To this end he went out of his way to abandon the common Stoic simile for philosophy, where logic was said to be the wall around the orchard protecting the trees of natural philosophy which produced the fruit of ethics. He substituted

⁵ See I. G. Kidd, 'Philosophy and Science in Posidonius', *Antike und Abendland* 24 (1978), pp. 7–15.

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the image of philosophy as a living creature where natural philosophy was the blood and flesh, logic the bones and sinews, and ethics the soul (F88EK).

Now this view was particularly relevant to Stoic philosophy, for the Stoic cosmos which it studies was itself regarded as an organic unified being, a material continuum of which human beings are one of the organic parts. Therefore, the human philosophical end of moral behaviour is itself dependent on the enquiry into the whole, and so moral philosophy is organically related to natural philosophy. Furthermore, since this cosmic whole was nothing more than the material universe to whose operation we have access, the physical and behavioural sciences and arts would seem to be in some way relevant.

This relationship of what we would call the arts and sciences to philosophy was in fact debated ground in earlier philosophy. Plato had regarded the sciences, or rather theoretical ones like pure mathematics, merely as a propaedeutic to philosophy. Epicurus, the Cynics and the Sceptics had dismissed them as useless. Aristotle, it is true, had engaged seriously in scientific research, and indeed some subsequent Peripatetics became more involved in separate scientifically-based pursuits than philosophical. And there was a continuing exchange of interest between philosophy and medicine, but often displayed more in paradigm, analogy and simile. The earlier Stoics were curiously ambivalent. Zeno had first rejected the sciences in his early Cynic days when writing his *Republic*, but later admitted some light to be gained from them. One of his pupils, Ariston of Chios, sneered at those studying them, while Chrysippus, the most famous and influential Stoic, granted that they rendered a service, but seems to have spent no time on them in his voluminous writing, and it is not clear what service he thought they rendered.

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To Posidonius the relationship between science and philosophy was a major issue. He was quite clear that the sciences and arts were not a *part* of philosophy (F90EK), even although their investigations might cover the same or similar ground. Thus both astronomy and natural philosophy studied celestial phenomena (F18EK), historiography and moral philosophy studied human behaviour. The crucial difference, as he saw it, lay in that only philosophy could give first and final causes and explanation, which he considered its key function. Indeed Posidonius pursued aetiology so relentlessly that he became known in antiquity as the Aetiologue. Not, of course, that science did not illustrate causes and offer explanations from observed factual evidence – indeed they could sometimes offer alternative possible explanations – but it was beyond their technological capacity to find ultimate causes or explanation. This was because their prime function was descriptive rather than explanatory, although such description and analysis could clarify immediate cause and effect. As such they are, in fact, for Posidonius the *tools* of philosophy (thus supplanting the earlier-held function of logic), and indeed necessary tools in working out the natural behaviour of phenomena (F90EK). So the relationship between philosophy and science is complementary, and the attempt to work this out on such a cosmic scale is the most remarkable contribution of Posidonius. It is infuriating that because of our fractured evidence, and more particularly because of the limited interest and understanding of men like Strabo, who used his more scientific works, but disapproved of his deeper aetiological interests, that we are now lacking demonstration of how Posidonius actually operated on the borderline where for him philosophy and science met, in the limbo-land of hypotheses and the differentiation between different kinds of causes and explanations.

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NATURAL PHILOSOPHY;
THE SCIENCES

Although Posidonius regarded the parts of philosophy as interlocked and interdependent, he recommended for teaching or exposition purposes to begin with natural philosophy. Stoics had different preferences here, Zeno and Chrysippus beginning with logic. But Posidonius' decision was particularly reasonable for Stoic materialism.

THE BASIC AXIOMS OF NATURAL
PHILOSOPHY

The Stoic philosophical system was one of great economy, since everything flows from the initial assumption of the operation of two principles, one active and one passive, throughout a material, defined, cosmic continuum. The active principle is the rational, divine, providential, enforming, individualising, governing cause; the passive is unqualified substance. They are diffused inseparably throughout the whole universe, but at different tensions or levels of power. There is no part without them. Some positions immediately follow:

- (a) The world is rationally organised, and so explicable and understandable. The pattern is complete throughout.
- (b) Within the organisation different elements and parts are dynamic and governing, others are passive in function.
- (c) The world is purposefully providential; so there is also a design as well as a pattern, and the good end is discoverable by the rational understanding of this.
- (d) The divine element is completely and only immanent.
- (e) As the system is an organic whole, the understanding of any part contributes to the understanding of the

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whole, and vice versa. Even the operation of any part is relevant to the operation of the whole.

- (f) The operational law of cause and effect runs right through the behaviour of phenomena and of living creatures.
- (g) The understanding and explanation of its operation lies within, and only within, itself.

Posidonius was completely orthodox in accepting the above fundamental scheme for Stoicism. It did, however, raise problems and criticism with which he became engaged. For example:

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What was their status in a wholly material world? Since they were defining and enforming forces and the causal operation of the world, in Stoic theory they had to be material, since only matter could act or be acted upon. On the other hand, they were distinguished from elements – fire, air, etc. – which were themselves formed and subject to change, destruction and regeneration. Therefore, the principles were said to be material but themselves without form or quality. But what could unformed matter be, a question already critically raised by Plato, *Tim.* 50–52, and by Aristotle in *Met.* Z 3, 1029a20ff? Hitherto, Stoic answers confined their search within a physical category, defined by limit, or affectability, or as a space filler characterised by resistance. Posidonius abandoned such physical explanations and defended on logical grounds: that the principles never ‘exist’ separately, but always co-exist in a particular form and matter. So they can only be distinguished as principles *conceptually*, although their function is material (F5EK). So again, substance (matter without quality or shape) differs from matter in thought only, being the same in reality (F29EK). In these new approaches Posidonius