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POSIDONIUS
VOLUME II
THE COMMENTARY

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Frontmatter

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POSIDONIUS
II. THE COMMENTARY:
(i) Testimonia and Fragments 1–149

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For my wife Sheila

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PREFACE

The purpose of this Commentary is primarily to explicate and understand the attested fragments as listed in volume I.

At the outset, I asked myself what were the major problems confronting a Posidonian commentator, and two of these in particular have affected my procedure, organisation and presentation. The first is obvious: that we are dealing with a reported fragmentary tradition. Study of the fragments has confirmed my view that ancient authors are not, any more than modern writers, mere reporters or tape-records of predecessors to whom they refer. Authors such as Cicero, Strabo, Seneca and Galen use Posidonius for their own purposes. Therefore the general context of a 'fragment' is important, and I have always tried to make this clear in the Commentary. But the matter is more complicated, for the actual argument or method of presentation in which the report is embedded raises problems, not only of the extent of a fragment, but also to what degree it has been coloured, reinterpreted or distorted. This applies not only to highly individual discursive writers such as Cicero and Plutarch, but to the doxographies as well; the presentations of Diogenes Laertius and Arius Didymus, for example, are quite different. For these reasons, I am sceptical of the value of the purely horizontal collocation of supposedly parallel passages on their own as a basis for Posidonius, although they must always be examined. The reporter is as important as the report. In order to understand one Posidonian 'fragment' in Seneca, one should have read the whole of Seneca, to equip oneself for the interpretation of Posidonius through his spectacles. Since there are some sixty reporters who actually name Posidonius, apart from those who used him without acknowledgement, this is no easy matter, and much more work is required on individual authors; there is, for example, still no detailed

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examination of Diodorus and Posidonius from this point of view. I can only claim to have wrestled with the problem as best I could, to bring it continually to the attention of the reader. For I am convinced that this is a fundamental principle of some importance for the future of Posidonian studies.

The second problem which I would briefly mention concerns the vast range of Posidonius' writing over the philosophies, sciences and historiography, the formative background of which a commentator must take into account. This affects comment both in general and in detail: in general, because Posidonius regarded all these different disciplines as an interrelated organic whole in his intellectual enquiries. Thus in examining the historical fragments one may not forget that they are the account of a philosopher historian, a factor which becomes a key for the understanding of the notoriously lavish presentation of the tyranny of Athenion (F253). So too his work *On Ocean* requires some knowledge of his posited relationship between natural philosophy and a whole range of sciences to explain the behaviour of natural phenomena and human anthropology.

But also the problem at issue frequently depends on detailed knowledge, not only of the history of philosophy, but of ancient theories of sciences such as mathematics, mathematical geography, astronomy, meteorology, hydrology, seismology, mineralogy, and indeed of the history and geography of the whole Graeco-Roman world of the period. Thus the reader will hardly be aware of the significance of Posidonius' definition of parallel lines (F197) without being apprised of the mathematical debate on Euclid's notorious fifth postulate. The realignment of the mapping of India (F212) cannot be appreciated without knowledge of the common disorientation of the continent. Explanation of the adventures of Eudoxus of Cyzicus (F49) depends to some extent on the history of the monsoon trade routes. Zonal theory cannot be understood without astronomical background, nor Posido-

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nius' measurement of the earth without an examination of the methods available to him. The details of Athenion's coup demand knowledge of the situation at Athens in 88 B.C.; and so on. Such a range puts considerable strain on a single commentator's competence, and I am very conscious that there will be readers much more expert than I in the various specialised disciplines involved. But it is surely true that we cannot begin to assess the importance and relevance of Posidonius' contribution without confronting such additional evidence, so I have always tried to raise this larger contextual problem in the hope that it may be investigated further.

These two principles have tended to make my commentary discursive rather than descriptive. They have also strengthened my belief that I must concentrate for the discovery of Posidonius first on the attested fragments, in which much is still uncertain, and I have examined possible unattested material mainly in relation to them. In those respects above all readers will note that my approach is different from that of Theiler. I have merely attempted to supply a tool with which future scholars may let in more light and gain more enlightenment in this fascinating and important area.

It will now be obvious that my obligation to other scholars in a work of this scale is enormous, and this I hope is acknowledged in my references and bibliography. I have been privileged to consult Edelstein's notes, and although these were inchoate, fragmentary and by now out of date, I have always learned from them. In the exact sciences I owe a special debt to Dr Otto Neugebauer, who with kind and patient forbearance in the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton stretched a helping hand to a callow amateur. For the historical fragments much was gained from the learned and meticulous work of Dr Jürgen Malitz. More friends than I can mention, and in particular my long-suffering colleagues at St Andrews, have responded generously to importunate requests. But, as in the first volume, I wish most of all to

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record my gratitude to Professor Harold Cherniss who initiated this project and, with more confidence than seemed justified, sustained it with continual encouragement; and to Professor C. O. Brink and Professor F. H. Sandbach who spent many hours over the typescript attempting to cleanse it with pertinent criticism. To the scholarship of these three friends I owe more than I can adequately express. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to thank my own university, St Andrews, an alma mater indeed, for study leave, and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton for supplying an ideal haven for its pursuit. Again Cambridge University Press have prepared the book with courteous efficiency and unfailing skill. To my wife, who in quite different and no less important maieutic ways fostered my gestation, this volume is dedicated.

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September 1986