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0521853060 - Strabo's Cultural Geography: The Making of a Kolossourgia

Edited by Daniela Dueck, Hugh Lindsay and Sarah Pothecary

Excerpt

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Introduction

We do not know much about Strabo of Amasia. In his extant voluminous *Geography*, he is reluctant to surrender details regarding his personal life, even basic information such as his full name and his residential abode as an adult. Nevertheless, there is a generally accepted outline of the man's profile.

Strabo was born in Amasia, Pontus, in about 64 BCE. He received a traditional Hellenistic education from the best Asian teachers at the time. As a young adult he accompanied Aelius Gallus, the Roman governor of Egypt, on his mission and later spent some years in Rome. During his earlier career Strabo composed a historiographical work now mostly lost, which was intended to survey world events as a sequel to Polybius' *History*. Later he concentrated on the massive endeavour of describing the entire *oikoumene*, producing the seventeen-book work we hold now as the *Geography*.¹ He died sometime after 23 CE.

Strabo refers to his *Geography* as a *kolossourgia*, a 'kolossos of a work' (1.1.23). A *kolossos* is a statue of huge proportions and the point of the comparison, as Strabo tells us, is scale. Just as a colossal statue produces in the mind of the observer an overall impression that does not depend on a detailed representation in all its parts, so Strabo intends his *Geography* to represent the world as a whole, rather than individual regions in microcosm.²

When and where was this *kolossourgia* composed? On these questions the contributors to this volume did not get over-exercised. The editors

¹ Throughout the volume, we use the translation of Strabo's *Geography* by H. L. Jones in the Loeb series, 1917–32. Translations of other classical authors are also from the Loeb series unless otherwise noted. The Greek text from the Loeb edition of the *Geography* (based on Meineke's critical edition of 1852–3), which covers all seventeen books of the text, is used. Reference to other editions is made where the readings or emendations in them are relevant to the discussion in hand. Citations of Strabo's text are by book, chapter and section (e.g. 14.1.48) and are not prefaced with the name of Strabo, except where comparison is being made between the geographer and other authors, such as Pausanias or Josephus.

² See Pothecary, '*Kolossourgia*. "A colossal statue of a work"', in this volume.

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themselves had to agree to disagree on this matter. Hugh Lindsay opts for continuous but not necessarily consistent composition over time; Daniela Dueck for Tiberian composition of a work that nevertheless reflects Strabo's experiences in Augustan Rome; Sarah Potheary suggests that Strabo's view of the present and the past is essentially a Tiberian one.³

How much of the *Geography* was written under Augustus, and how much of it was written under Tiberius, is indeed a complex issue. Situations pertaining under Tiberius were often a continuation of those pertaining under Augustus, and the words describing such situations could have been written under either emperor. Moreover, words written under Tiberius may easily have been the product of earlier notes and thought. The contributors make their own individual assumptions about the date of composition, but this is not the focus of their arguments. They focus instead on the *Geography* as evidence of a certain mindset which predisposed the author to include some material and omit other material.

Most contributors seek a connection between the criteria Strabo used for inclusion of material and his cultural and intellectual background. There is no doubt that Strabo straddled two worlds, the Greek and the Roman, and that he travelled and lived in both parts. Although totally Greek in his education and early background, Rome is also very important to his world because of his extensive residence there as well as in Alexandria.

This dual background emerges again and again in Strabo's work. Its relevance is apparent on three levels – the personal, the literary and the historical. On the personal level, Strabo represents a group of Greek intellectuals who had social relationships with Romans. His biography reflects inter-relationships between the two cultures in a world where politics presented new cultural horizons. In this volume, the personal Greek dimension is particularly dominant in the papers of Almagor, Trotta, Engels and Lindsay.

On the literary level, the *Geography* represents the geographical genre deriving from Greek origins in historiographical contexts. The fact that such an extensive and encyclopaedic work has survived to reach the present is invaluable, and the work itself preserves a tradition of ancient scholarly approaches and trends. In this volume, the literary aspects of Strabo's work, including the complex problem of sources, feature in the papers of Roseman, Biraschi, Dueck, Litinas, Panichi, Shahar and Safrai.

On the historical level, both Strabo and his work reflect the historical era of Augustan rule and the early Roman principate in general. The papers by

³ Lindsay (1997b); Dueck (1999); Potheary (1997 and 2002).

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McCoskey, Potheary ('The European provinces') and Braund contribute to the understanding of Strabo and his work as both products and exhibits of an historical period with a unique political atmosphere. Thus in the broader literary, cultural and political context Strabo is an essential author and his work of major importance.

The various approaches suggested in this volume may eventually also help to decide the questions of where, when and how the *Geography* was written. The discussion is best split into two. The first question (where) is interesting for the subsequent textual history of the *Geography*, namely, where did the finished manuscript of the *Geography* (or unfinished, if Strabo died while still at work on it) end up in the first decade of Tiberius' reign, after 23 CE? And, as a direct derivative of this question, where and to whom was the manuscript, or copies of it, available?⁴

The remaining questions (when and how) pivot on the extent to which it is possible to distinguish between the man and his work. Are the many years of education, travel and experience which characterise the author necessarily evidence for many years of composition, or are they consistent with a shorter period of composition at a more precisely dateable time and in a particular place?

The originality of Strabo has very much to do with this last question. There used to be a tendency to see Strabo as an uncritical copier of his sources and thus to devalue him as an author in his own right. More recently, scholars have tended to appreciate the author's individuality and to emphasise the author in his cultural context.⁵ The contributors to this volume have taken the view that Strabo operated as an intellectual, who weighed the sources at his disposal to the best of his ability. Strabo's extensive Hellenistic background explains not merely his use of Homer but his whole outlook on the world, which in turn determines his omission and selection of material. It is in the author himself that we find answers to questions such as why Strabo mentions some Greek colonies and not others (Trotta), why he lists ἄνδρες ἔνδοξοι from certain places and not others (Engels), and why he is more interested in some areas of the *oikoumene* than others (Braund), to take just a few examples.

Although there are many different ways of analysing Strabo, they fall broadly into two categories. One category includes approaches in which Strabo's work is examined regionally, since this is the way that he himself

⁴ See Litinas, 'Strabo's sources in the light of a tale' and Shahar, 'Josephus' hidden dialogue with Strabo', in this volume.

⁵ Clarke (1999a); Engels (1999a); Dueck (2000a); Biraschi and Salmeri (2000).

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deals with his narrative: after the introductory two books, each subsequent book or group of books is devoted to a particular region of the *oikoumene*. Another category consists of thematic analyses of Strabo's work, approaches that cross regional boundaries and consider the *Geography* as a whole.

The papers in this volume have been grouped according to these two categories. The first nine papers are thematic. We start with them precisely because they have the widest coverage. The tenth paper, by Maria Pretzler, acts as a fulcrum: although Pretzler deals with a particular area, she reminds us that Strabo's account of Greece can only be understood in terms of themes and preoccupations which characterise Strabo's work as a whole. It is thus a fitting point at which to turn to the remaining six papers, which fall into the regional category but where Strabo's own personality is never far away.

Although the papers have been broadly grouped in this way, there is nevertheless much interrelationship between them, reflecting the variety, scope and complexity of Strabo's work. Some contributors look at Strabo's text from a traditional philological viewpoint; some start from a particular interest in ethnology or narrative theory; some focus on Strabo in relation to later writers like Pausanias and Josephus; others look at those descriptions of Strabo which reveal his personal engagement with the areas described, while still others look at the value of his descriptions where no such personal experience is evident. Like a *kolossos*, Strabo's work can be viewed from many angles.

The chapters collected here are drawn mainly from papers presented at a conference, organised by the editors of this volume, at Bar Ilan University in Israel, 25–27 June 2001, under the title 'Strabo the Geographer – An International Perspective'. The editors commissioned two papers, those by Roseman and Braund, after the conference. The paper by Potheary entitled '*Kolossourgia*. "A colossal statue of a work"' was also added after the conference, to develop the theme of the volume as a whole, namely the interplay of culture and geography in Strabo's work.

We had great fun organising the conference at Bar Ilan and enjoyed meeting the participants and each other. We enjoyed, too, collecting and editing the papers to produce this volume. We particularly welcomed the opportunity to include papers by contributors who do not normally publish in English. We hope that this volume communicates something of our enthusiasm for our subject and that it bears witness to the variety, potential and relevance of Strabonian studies across many fields.

Daniela Dueck, Hugh Lindsay and Sarah Potheary, September 2004

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CHAPTER I

Kolossourgia. *'A colossal statue of a work'**Sarah Pothecary*

καθάπερ τε καὶ ἐν τοῖς κολοσσικοῖς ἔργοις οὐ τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον ἀκριβὲς ζητοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς καθόλου προσέχομεν μᾶλλον, εἰ καλῶς τὸ ὅλον οὕτως κἀν τούτοις δεῖ ποιεῖσθαι τὴν κρίσιν· κολοσσουργία γάρ τις καὶ αὐτή, τὰ μεγάλα φράζουσα πῶς ἔχει καὶ ὅλα, πλὴν εἴ τι κινεῖν δύναται καὶ τῶν μικρῶν τὸν φιλειδήμονα καὶ τὸν πραγματικόν. (I.1.23)

Just as, in colossal statues, we do not seek detail¹ in each individual part but rather pay attention to general aspects [in deciding] whether the whole is finely done, so we must apply the same criteria to these [works].² For it [= the *Geography*], too, is a sort of *kolossourgia*, portraying major themes and overall context, except where some matter, though small, stirs the man who desires knowledge and is inclined towards action.³

This paper deals with Strabo's description of his work as a colossal endeavour. In the quoted passage, which comes near the beginning of book one of the *Geography*, Strabo shifts from discussing colossal 'works' (in the sense of 'statues') to reflecting on his own colossal 'work' (in the sense of 'literary endeavour'). The statues, the literary work and, perhaps, the Roman world of which the literary work is a description, are all distinguished by their 'colossalness'.

The point of this paper is to draw out the full implications of this 'colossalness', which would have been rather different for Strabo and his original audience than they are for the reader of today. To the modern English speaker, the words 'colossus' and 'colossal' are associated primarily with immense size.⁴ One might easily assume, for example, that the giant

¹ The literal meaning of ἀκριβὲς is 'precise' or 'accurate'. When applied to representational art, it is best translated as 'detailed' or 'realistic'. See n. 59.

² Strabo has been discussing both the *History* and the *Geography* at this point.

³ Translations of Strabo are my own.

⁴ See, for example, Niall Ferguson's choice of title for his recent book: *Colossus. The Price of America's Empire* (2004).

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amphitheatre in Rome, known today as the 'Colosseum', received its name on account of its huge dimensions. The name of the amphitheatre turns out, however, to have more complicated origins, a point to which I shall return at the end of this paper. Similarly, Strabo's description of his work as a *kolossourgia* turns out to be more complex than at first appears. In this paper, I argue that *kolossourgia* needs to be translated as more than 'a colossal endeavour' if its full impact is to be retained. I suggest that 'a colossal statue of a work' is a more apt translation, if not a more mellifluous one.

This enquiry into the phrase *kolossourgia* brings out the importance of Greek culture in Strabo's *Geography*, an observation which is made to a greater or lesser extent in all the other papers in this volume and, indeed, serves as a unifying theme for the volume as a whole. Moreover, the enquiry covers two senses in which culture can be said to influence Strabo. First, Strabo considers it part of his task to provide accounts of cultural behaviour and achievements, both Greek and otherwise. Secondly, Strabo is so enmeshed in the Greek culture of his day that he cannot struggle free of it: his way of looking at the world is subjectively determined by his immersion in the Greek culture of which he is so proud.

The two senses in which culture and geography intertwine in this enquiry are apparent in the two parts into which this paper is divided. The first part deals objectively with *kolossoi* ('colossal statues') as they are described by Strabo himself in the pages of the *Geography*. Their inclusion in a geographical work – not an immediately obvious place in which to find giant statues – reflects both Strabo's conceptualisation of them as symbols of Greek cultural achievement and his conceptualisation of geography as a science which embraces precisely such matters.

The second part of this paper reverts to a study of the specific term *kolossourgia* ('a colossal statue of a work'). Although the term itself merely equates the work with a statue, the context makes it clear that Strabo intends a more extended comparison, such that the criteria applied in judging the merit of colossal statues are the same criteria as applicable to the judgement of the *Geography*. In making this point, Strabo is not entirely original. Rather, he is picking up on an idea which was part of contemporary literary debate, and which centred on the legitimacy of judging literature by the same criteria as statuary. Even in describing his work as a *kolossourgia*, therefore, Strabo reveals his participation in the cultural context of his times.

This investigation into the connotations of the terms *kolossoi* and *kolossourgia* has a by-product which well illustrates how cultural forces exert themselves both objectively and subjectively on Strabo. For Strabo must

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have seen some of the colossal statues which he features in his *Geography*. Nevertheless, he never states that he has done so. Moreover, the liveliness and length of his descriptions seem to depend more on the extent to which the *kolossoi* have enjoyed literary celebration than on his own observations. Two caveats emerge from this, which are applicable to the *Geography* as a whole. First, an elaborate and vivid account by Strabo does not necessarily imply that Strabo has seen what he describes (although, of course, it does not preclude that possibility). Secondly and conversely, Strabo may well have seen the sights he describes, even where his accounts are cursory. We are forced to diagnose a case of 'cultural vision', with the result that Strabo's accounts need not be based on personal observation even where he has been present at the scene: and this is particularly the case where what he sees has been celebrated in Greek literature.

Before embarking on this two-fold enquiry into *kolossoi* and *kolossourgia*, it is worth looking in a little more detail at the precise point that Strabo is making in the passage quoted above (1.1.23). It is true that *kolossoi*, 'colossal statues', could be huge – 30, 40, 50 or even 100 feet high – but it straight away becomes obvious that it is not the size of the statues, or at least not primarily the size, that lies behind Strabo's analogy. Rather, it is what the size of the statues implies for the level of detail to be included by the statue-maker. This is very different from the level of detail that *could* be included, and recognition of this has important consequences for understanding the real point of Strabo's analogy. For *kolossoi* were large not only in absolute terms but also relative to what they depicted. They were representations of human figures (albeit human figures that in turn represented gods or goddesses) but were themselves much larger than the human figure, so that each individual part of the *kolossos* was larger than the body part it represented. The builder of a *kolossos* thus had ample space to provide exact detail. However, he was free, in Strabo's opinion at any rate, to disregard detail in favour of creating an overall impression.⁵

Two interesting points emerge from Strabo's analogy. First, it reveals an attitude towards scale which is completely the reverse of what we might expect. Strabo's comparison of his work to the visual arts leads us to think of geography, too, in visual terms, namely as cartography or map-making. For a cartographer, the greater the physical dimensions of a world map, the

⁵ Cf. the admiration which Strabo expresses later in the *Geography* for the 'extravagance' and 'size' of the colossal statues made by Phidias. In contrast, Strabo damns with faint praise the rival of Phidias, Polykletus, whose work he acknowledges for its 'technical merit' (8.6.10). For the grudging nature of the acknowledgement, see pp. 11 and 22.

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larger the scale (in the sense of the ratio of map distance to actual distance); and the larger this ratio or scale, the greater the amount of detail and number of small features which can be included. Strabo himself, in an excursus later in the *Geography* where he explicitly deals with making a map of the inhabited world, suggests that the map should be not less than seven feet (without specifying whether this figure applies to the length or to the height of the map) (2.5.10). The implication is that a map of this size can include more features. The sort of features given by Strabo as appropriate are: gulfs, seas, straits, isthmi, promontories, rivers, mountains, continents, nations, cities and other features, such as islands (2.5.17).

It is instructive at this point to look ahead to the later and more cartographically inclined geographer, Ptolemy, to see what he says about the scale of world maps. Ptolemy tells us that drawing a map of the world involves 'gulfs, great cities, the more notable peoples and rivers and the more noteworthy things of each kind',⁶ in other words, much the same features as stipulated by Strabo. Ptolemy draws on the visual arts to provide an analogy for what he says about world maps. He likens making a map of the world to drawing a portrait of the whole head. The point is explicitly made that a portrait involves fitting individual features, like the eyes and the ears, into the representation of the whole. By analogy, then, the 'features' included in a map of the world (the gulfs, cities, notable peoples and rivers, etc.) are the cartographic equivalent of the 'features' in a portrait (the ears and eyes) which are seen as details in relation to the overall head. The size of the map, by implication, should be such that these features can be seen by a viewer in their relationship to the map as a whole.⁷

Thus, Ptolemy draws on the visual arts, namely portraiture, in order to illustrate what he says about making a map of the world. Strabo, in stark contrast, uses his analogy with the visual arts to make a point, not about map-making, but about geography as a literary endeavour.⁸ The visibility of detail to a viewer is not therefore relevant. Instead, the level of detail depends on the selectivity of the writer. Strabo is quite clear about his criteria. A literary geography aims at overall impact, 'portraying major themes and overall context except where some matter, though small, stirs the man who desires knowledge and is inclined towards action' (1.1.23).

⁶ Ptol. *Geog.* 1.1. Tr. Berggren and Jones (2000).

⁷ Ptolemy believes that, in order to show an even greater level of detail, such as harbours, branches of rivers, etc., a map has to be limited to a specific region (*Geog.* 1.1). The implication is that the amount of physical space required, in order to render these extra details clearly visible, precludes these details from being shown on a map encompassing the inhabited world as a whole.

⁸ Berggren and Jones (2000) 57 n. 1 make the point that, for Strabo, this is what constitutes geography.

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Paradoxically, Strabo's description of his work as a *kolossourgia*, despite the fact that it calls on a comparison with the visual arts, illustrates just how 'uncartographic' Strabo's intentions are. We should not take his work as the narrative equivalent of a map.

The second interesting point to emerge from Strabo's comparison of his work with a 'colossal statue', sacrificing detail for overall impression, is that the analogy does not seem quite in keeping with what actually transpires in the *Geography*, which to the modern reader seems full to overflowing with detail. Despite the abundance of material in the *Geography*, Strabo at I.I.23 appears to be anticipating and pre-empting criticism from his contemporary audience that his work was too selective, that he had left out too much detail. The fact that Strabo feels compelled to make a 'pre-emptive strike', defending his omission of material serves as a reminder, to the modern reader, of the vast wealth of material, which Strabo had at his disposal. It is an indication that the material which Strabo does present, though copious, is only a sampling of the work available to him.⁹

The reminder by Strabo, that he has to exercise selectivity, is salutary. It is curious how often, even today, despite the extraordinary length of Strabo's work, he is accused by some scholars of leaving out material that he 'should' have included. Strabo's defence, that he has had to exercise selectivity based on 'major themes and overall context', serves as well against modern criticism as against ancient.

Even so, Strabo may have ended up including more detail in the body of his work than he intended when he was writing the introductory books and, in particular, when he penned his programmatic statement at I.I.23. Perhaps Strabo found that, once he was into writing the bulk of his work, much of the material at his disposal seemed more relevant than he had imagined. Perhaps he discovered more details which 'though small, stirred the man who desires knowledge' and found that, in practice, his scope for exclusion and discrimination was less than he had supposed. Such a view entails that Strabo wrote his work in 'real time', to use current jargon. In other words, he started with book one, wrote the remaining books in order and did not go back and make subsequent changes. This is consistent with other features in the *Geography*,¹⁰ despite the traditionally held view that the work was much revised. Strabo's work may have ended up as more

⁹ For the large amount of material available to Strabo, from which he makes selection, see Engels, "Ἄνδρες ἐνδοξοί", Pretzler, 'Comparing Strabo with Pausanias' and Trotta, 'The foundation of Greek colonies', all in this volume.

¹⁰ See Dueck (1999), esp. 469–75, and Potheary (2002), esp. 392–5; both authors also deal extensively with the scholarship for the opposing view.

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'colossal' in the modern sense than he had intended; and less 'colossal' in terms of the elimination of unnecessary detail.

KOLOSSOI

None of the colossal statues of antiquity have survived to the present day. Of those that Strabo mentions, we have no evidence for the survival of any beyond the beginning of the thirteenth century.¹¹ Our impressions of these giant statues are derived largely from literary references, such as those of Strabo himself.¹² For this reason alone it is important to understand the context in which such references are made. Conversely, a closer look at the way in which Strabo handles material relating to *kolossoi* is revealing of his larger approach to Greek culture in general and helps us to understand the overall context of his references.

The *kolossoi* which feature in Strabo's work are introduced in connection with the Greek cities for which they were produced. Strabo tells us that the city of Taras in Italy has a *kolossos* of Zeus in the market-place, second only in size to the *kolossos* in Rhodes;¹³ and that the city once had a *kolossos* of Heracles on its acropolis (6.3.1). Apollonia, an island city in the Black Sea, had once boasted a *kolossos* of Apollo (7.6.1).¹⁴ In mainland Greece, one *kolossos* gets mentioned twice: this is a *kolossos* of Zeus, mentioned first in connection with the temple at Olympia, where it stands in Strabo's day (8.3.30); and mentioned a second time in connection with Corinth, whose tyrant Cypselus gave it as an offering to Olympia (8.6.20). Another, larger, *kolossos* of Zeus stands (more appropriately, sits) in the same temple:¹⁵ this is the *kolossos* of Zeus by Phidias (8.3.30),¹⁶ which features in the frontispiece to this volume.

Continuing through his narrative, Strabo mentions the statues produced by Polyclitus, located in the temple of Hera, between Argos and Mycenae (8.6.10). Strabo chooses this moment to comment on the general superiority, in terms of 'extravagance and size', of Phidias' works (including, as

¹¹ The *kolossos* of Heracles, originally from Taras in Italy, lasted until 1204 CE: see n. 19.

¹² Our impressions are also derived from the smaller Roman copies of the Greek originals; from depictions on coins; and, in the case for example of the *Zeus* from Olympia, from the remains of the base on which the *kolossos* stood.

¹³ Pliny gives a height of 40 cubits (60 ft) for the *Zeus* at Taras (*HN* 34.17.40). A cubit contains 1.5 ft, whatever the exact value (in modern terms) of the foot.

¹⁴ Pliny gives a height of 30 cubits (45 ft) for the *Apollo* from Apollonia (*HN* 34.17.39).

¹⁵ Strabo does not use the word *kolossoi* for the two statues at Olympia but does refer (8.3.30; 8.6.20) to their enormous size.

¹⁶ For the size of Phidias' *Zeus* at Olympia, see p. 15; cf. Paus. 5.11.1–9 for general impressions of its size.