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Excerpt

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*The Guide to the Geography*

## BOOK I

*Introduction and Predecessors*

Book I is Strabo's introduction to the discipline of geography. Much of it is a discussion of its history, beginning with Homer, whom Strabo and others considered the first geographer. In Hellenistic times there were repeated attempts to fit Homer's geographical knowledge into the wider world of that era, and this was a common theme of the *Geography*. Many other predecessors were also examined, but the primary emphasis was on the *Geography* of Eratosthenes, which is summarized in detail. There are also lengthy discussions about siltation, deposition, changes to the earth, and the nature of its surface.

**Part I: Introduction and Purpose of the Work**

**I.I.I.** Strabo began his treatise acknowledging his debt to his predecessors, using the term “geography” for the first time in extant Greek literature. The word was the invention of Eratosthenes (*Geography* F1), active in the second half of the third century BC, and the opening sentences are probably paraphrased or quoted from the beginning of his *Geography*. Strabo immediately established the importance of geography as a discipline, insisting that it was a legitimate genre of scholarship.

The first part of the list of predecessors is also from Eratosthenes, as they all predate him. Homer was probably less important geographically to Eratosthenes than to Strabo. Anaximandros (early sixth century BC) was involved in the early history of map-making (Eratosthenes, *Geography* F12) and was the first to theorize about the shape of the earth (Duane W. Roller, “Columns in Stone: Anaximandros’ Conception of the World,” *AntCl* 58 [1989] 185–9; Robert Hahn, *Anaximander and the Architects* [Albany, N.Y. 2001] 192–200). Hekataios of Miletos (c. 500 BC) was also connected with map-making and wrote the earliest known topographical treatise, the *Circuit of the Earth* (FGrHist #1), which survives in nearly 400 fragments. The contribution of Demokritos (fifth century BC) to geography is

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uncertain, yet the catalogue of his works includes the title *Geographia* (Diogenes Laertios 9.48), which in fact may be anachronistic. Eudoxos of Knidos (early fourth century BC) also wrote a *Circuit of the Earth* (Agathemeros 1.2; Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 6), in which he suggested that the inhabited part of the earth was rectangular in shape and also speculated about the size of the earth and the terrestrial climate zones. Dikaiarchos, at the end of the fourth century BC, wrote yet another *Circuit of the Earth*, made further comments about the size of the earth and the zones, and created the primary terrestrial parallel (Paul T. Keyser, “The Geographical Work of Dikaiarchos,” in *Dicaearchus of Messana, Text, Translation, and Discussion* [ed. William W. Fortenbaugh and Eckhart Schütrumpf, New Brunswick, N.J. 2001] 353–72). And Ephoros, active before 340 BC, was the first to include a section on world geography in an historical work, defining the extremities of the inhabited world by ethnic groups (*FGrHist* #70, F131–4). Thus Strabo’s (or Eratosthenes’) list is a careful record of those responsible for the major theoretical advances previous to Eratosthenes, culminating in the geographical account of Ephoros, the first instance of applying geography to history.

Strabo then provided the names of the major scholars between Eratosthenes and himself. This list is limited to the two most important: Polybios, of the second century BC, who explored widely, wrote on geography, and like Ephoros included a geographical section in his history (F. W. Walbank, “The Geography of Polybius,” *C&M* 9 [1947] 155–82), and Poseidonios, whom Strabo called “the most learned scholar of my time” (16.2.10), and whose contributions to geography were extensive, especially in the west of Europe. Thus the catalogue from Homer to Poseidonios creates an unbroken chain of scholarship from the person whom Strabo saw as the first geographer to his own era.

The last two sentences of the section stress the importance of geography as a serious discipline. Its usefulness to “commanders” (presumably Roman field officers) is also emphasized, as well as its general utility for one’s well being. Strabo had already introduced a major Stoic scholar, Poseidonios, and at the end of the section he wrote in terms reminiscent of Cicero’s “art of life” (“ars vitae,” *de finibus* 3.4), the first assertion of the Stoicism that pervades the treatise: the Stoic scholar Athenodoros of Tarsos was one of his teachers (16.4.21; Laurent Jérôme, “Strabon et la philosophie stoïcienne,” *ArchPhilos* 71 [2008] III–27).

1.1.2. Strabo named another predecessor, Hipparchos, of the second century BC, whose *Against the Geography of Eratosthenes* he cited extensively (55 of the 63 known fragments). Hipparchos was a mathematician and

astronomer rather than a geographer, who believed that Eratosthenes' methodology was flawed because he did not make adequate use of those disciplines (D. R. Dicks, *The Geographical Fragments of Hipparchus* [London 1960] 31–7). His work is more a polemic than a geographical treatise, yet Strabo relied heavily on him. Hipparchos was also quoted as support for the idea that Homer was both the first geographer and also infallible in his accuracy, yet to assume such views on the part of Hipparchos is somewhat of an exaggeration, as he seems more nuanced (F2 = 1.2.3). Nevertheless it was essential for Strabo to establish the primacy of Homer at the beginning of his treatise, and to assert that Homer knew about the entire inhabited world (as opposed to the totality of the earth itself), for which Strabo used the term *oikoumene*, a concept perhaps developed by Aristotle (*Meteorologika* 2.5), and part of the geographical diction of Eratosthenes. Despite Strabo's insistence, there is no evidence that Homer had heard anything other than the vaguest rumors about the world west and north of Italy: attempts to prove otherwise (3.2.13, 3.4.3–4), especially regarding Spain, do not seem to predate the Roman period. Nevertheless, Strabo's interest in Homer was intense, to say the least: the poet was quoted over 700 times, and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are constant features in the fabric of the *Geography* (Lawrence Kim, "The Portrait of Homer in Strabo's Geography," *CP* 102 [2007] 363–88).

1.1.3. From here through Section 1.1.11, Strabo examined Homeric views about the extremities of the inhabited world. The material may have come from a separate Homeric commentary that Strabo wrote before he embarked on the *Geography*, vestiges of which appear sporadically in the treatise, especially in Books 8 and 13.

First, he asserted that Homer believed the inhabited world was encircled by the Ocean. Strabo's proof is Homer's mention of remote peoples (discussed more fully at 1.2.22, 31), as well as several other citations, all of which make the same point that celestial bodies rise from and sink into the Ocean. This does not actually prove Strabo's argument, and any scholarly consideration of an encircling Ocean probably does not predate Eratosthenes (*Geography* F30 = 2.5.5), or, at the earliest, Eudoxos of Knidos in the fourth century BC (Duane W. Roller, *Eratosthenes' Geography* [Princeton, N.J. 2010] 145).

1.1.4. Strabo was aware that Homer had little to say about the west, and thus used a passage in the *Odyssey* (4.563–8) – the prophecy given to Menelaos by Proteus about the Elysian Plain – to demonstrate that he knew about the wealth of Iberia and Herakles' voyage there. Yet there is no evidence as to where Homer placed the Elysian Plain beyond the

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suggestion that it was at “the limits of the earth” and somehow connected with the west wind. In fact, the Elysian Plain seems originally to have been located in the eastern Mediterranean (Pliny, *Natural History* 4.58) and moved west as knowledge increased. Any association of Herakles with the far west is post-Homeric, probably first outlined in Stesichoros’ *Geryoneis* (of the early sixth century BC), which Strabo knew (3.2.11; see also Sallust, *Jugurtha* 18). Strabo fell into the trap of trying to localize a mythical place.

1.1.5. The change from Elysian Plain to Blessed Islands shows a new source, and mention of Marousia (Mauretania) demonstrates that it is almost certainly Juba II, Strabo’s contemporary and king of the territory from 25 BC to AD 23. Juba discovered and examined the Canary Islands (Pliny, *Natural History* 6.201–5), which he believed were the Blessed Islands, and the location provided by Strabo corresponds to their situation. Juba published this information in his *Libyka* (F3; Duane W. Roller, *Scholarly Kings: the Writings of Juba II of Mauretania, Archelaos of Kappadokia, Herod the Great and the Emperor Claudius* [Chicago, Ill. 2004] 48–103), written between 25 and 2 BC, but Strabo’s failure to cite either author or title demonstrates that he probably received the information in a private communication. The several references to Juba in the *Geography* (6.4.2, 17.3.7, 12, 25) indicate that he and Strabo were probably in contact.

1.1.6. The Aithiopians had long been defined as the farthest of peoples, but their exact location was not specified in early times. Homer mentioned them frequently, and they were one of Ephoros’ four ethnic classifications of people at the extremities of the earth (F30a = 1.2.28). The ethnym was so generic that it had only a vague connection with the people of the Upper Nile (but must have originated there). Since it was used for all remote southern peoples, there was a tendency to speak of different groups of Aithiopians (a distinction already apparent in the text of Homer), something that Strabo deconstructed in great detail (2.3.7–8). The Aithiopians were believed to extend to the Atlantic, as noted in the Greek translation of the *Periplous* of Hanno (11; although it is unlikely that Hanno referred to them by that name), and they visited Carthaginian trading posts on the coast (Pseudo-Skylax 112). As late as the end of the second century BC the term was still used to describe all the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa (2.3.4), but it was becoming localized, referring to those living on the Upper Nile above the First Cataract, especially after the expedition of Ptolemy II around 275 BC (Agatharchides F20, Diodoros 1.37.5).

Strabo then examined the extreme north. Homer used both the names Bear and Chariot for the constellation (e.g. *Iliad* 18.487), but was unaware of the Little Bear, which was first identified by Thales of Miletos around

600 BC (Kallimachos, *Iambos* 1.52–5 [= F191]). Strabo made certain that the reader did not consider Homer's failure to mention the latter constellation a mark of ignorance, noting that constellations were still being named in recent times. He cited as evidence the astronomical poem of Aratos of Soloi, *Phainomena*, written in the early third century BC. There was also the Lock of Berenike (today the Coma Berenices), identified by the astronomer Konon to honor Berenike II, the wife of Ptolemy III: the queen had dedicated a lock of hair when her husband returned safely from the Third Syrian War in 246 BC. The circumstances were recorded by Kallimachos (F110), but are best known in Catullus' translation (Catullus 66: see further P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* [Oxford 1972] vol. 1, 239, 729–30).

Canopus (today  $\alpha$  Carinae), the second brightest star, lies far to the south (as viewed from northern latitudes), visible only south of 38° (the latitude of southern Italy, Delphi, and Sardis). It was named after Kanobos, the pilot of Menelaos, and has been important to navigators from ancient to modern times. Eudoxos of Knidos was the first known to have mentioned it (Poseidonios F204 = 2.5.14).

The assertion that Homer knew of the concept of the arctic circle is anachronistic. It was a circle on the sphere of the heavens that marked the limit of the stars which were always visible (thus it varied according to the viewer's latitude). Homer knew there were stars that were always visible, but the more sophisticated astronomical idea was probably developed by Eudoxos of Knidos in the fourth century BC (Aristotle, *Meteorologika* 2.5; see also Poseidonios F49 [= 2.2.2–3]; Dicks, *Hipparchus*, 165–6). As support for his assertion, Strabo cited Krates of Mallos and Herakleitos of Ephesos, although neither seems to be relevant. The former was a Homeric scholar of the first half of the second century BC and the first to construct a globe (see 2.5.10). He was the Pergamene envoy to Rome at the time of Attalos II and an early and important Greek scholar in that city (see also 1.2.24; Suetonius, *Grammarians* 2). Herakleitos was the inscrutable natural philosopher of around 500 BC, who probably had no idea of the concept of the celestial circles. Mention of Homer and Orion is also less than clear and not germane: the passage is typical of Strabo's tendency to wander off into somewhat irrelevant areas, especially in support of Homer.

At the end of the section Strabo returned to his discussion of Homeric concepts of the far north, yet Homer nowhere used the word “nomads” (the earliest citation is probably Herodotos 1.15). For the Mare Milkers and the others, see 7.3.2–10.

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1.1.7. Strabo continued his discussion of the Ocean, insisting that Homer was aware of the tides. As proof of this he used Homer's knowledge of the currents through the strait between Sicily and Italy (the modern Strait of Messina), basing his arguments on Poseidonios, who was less certain about the matter than was Strabo. Yet Strabo objected to Poseidonios' assertion that the tides were implied in Homer's concept of the Ocean as a river (e.g. *Iliad* 14.245), preferring Krates' idea that Homer was speaking more generally, and that parts of the Ocean flowed like a river. Krates' concept of a great oceanic estuary reaching from the winter tropic (Tropic of Capricorn) to the south probably reflects the uncertainty in his day (and even in the time of Strabo) of the relationship of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean (Maria Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo: i frammenti* [La Spezia 2001] 223–4). Strabo further discussed the flow through the Strait of Messina at 1.2.15–16.

1.1.8. The encircling Ocean was implicit in the geography of Homer, although details were lacking. Strabo catalogued the evidence for it, using (but not citing) the report of Patrokles (F4b = 11.11.6) from the early third century BC about the possibility of sailing from the Caspian Sea to India (thus presuming a Caspian Sea connected to the External Ocean), and those of Eudoxos of Kyzikos and others (2.3.4) for circumnavigating Africa. Therefore it was believed that it was also possible to sail from the Caspian counterclockwise to the Atlantic coast of Europe. The extent of this northern portion of the coast, from Europe to the Caspian, Strabo rather ingenuously claimed was “not so great.” In his day there already was the idea that the Atlantic (which in theory stretched west from the Pillars of Herakles to India) might be interrupted by another continent, something that Krates (F37 = 1.2.24, 2.3.7) had suggested, but which Strabo rejected. Evidently some who had attempted to circumnavigate Africa had said that there was another continent, perhaps as an excuse for the failure of their cruise: among these were the Persian Sataspes (Herodotos 4.43) and Euthymenes of Massalia, both active around 500 BC. The former said that his ship had become stuck and the latter seems to have encountered plant matter or mud (Duane W. Roller, *Through the Pillars of Herakles: Greco-Roman Exploration of the Atlantic* [London 2006] 20–1).

1.1.9. Tidal phenomena were a difficult problem for the Greeks, and are still not totally understood. Hipparchos objected to the idea that the tides were regular, a view based on his own observations (F8 = 1.3.11) and, more importantly, those of Seleukos of Seleukeia, of the second century BC, who wrote the first treatise on the topic (see also 3.5.7–9; Duane W. Roller, “Seleukos of Seleukeia,” *AntCl* 74 [2005] 111–18). He is also remembered

for being the last known proponent of the heliocentric system of Aristarchos of Samos, allegedly proving his hypothesis (Plutarch, *Platonic Questions* 8.1). Tidal theory seems to have originated with Pytheas of Massalia in the fourth century BC, who connected the tides to lunar activity (Aetios 3.17.2; see also Pliny, *Natural History* 2.217), but they remained little understood and were often confused with currents and even river outflows into the ocean. Poseidonios and Athenodoros of Tarsos were Strabo's most recent authorities on tides: Athenodoros, whom Strabo knew personally (16.4.21), was famous as the teacher of Octavian and may have been Poseidonios' pupil. Little is known about his writings on the tides beyond Strabo's general comments (see also 1.3.12). The final note about moisture is probably from Poseidonios (I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius 2: The Commentary* [Cambridge 1988] 762).

1.1.10. Having established Homer's knowledge of the External Ocean, Strabo then examined the inhabited world proper, making a circuit beginning at the Pillars of Herakles and identifying places and peoples mentioned by him. The route is along the southern and eastern coast of the Mediterranean and southern Anatolia, and up to the Troad. Then it moves through the Propontis and into the Euxeinos (Black Sea), and counter-clockwise around that sea to Kolchis, the Kimmerian Bosphoros, and the Istros (Danube) River. Leaving the Euxeinos, the route then passes through the Greek peninsula, Italy, Sicily, and back to Iberia, thus creating a "Periplous of Homer" (for the genre, see 1.1.21). Whether this itinerary was Strabo's invention or from a previous source is unknown, but it is essentially an artificial construct. Despite Strabo's protestations that the places mentioned were cited by Homer, some significant ones were not: the Pillars of Herakles (first mentioned by Herodotos 2.33), Kolchis (first by Aischylos, *Prometheus Bound* 415), and the Istros River (first in Hesiod, *Theogony* 339), which in fact are the most remote localities cited. Yet Strabo firmly believed that these regions were familiar to Homer, based on the same methodology that he had used in presuming knowledge about Iberia (1.1.4). Homer's awareness, however vague, of the voyage of Jason (*Iliad* 7.468; *Odyssey* 12.72) meant that he knew about Kolchis. Knowledge of the Mysians (*Iliad* 2.858 etc.) presumed the Istros, since the Mysians were said to live along the river. Homer mentioned the Kimmerians (*Odyssey* 11.14), so to Strabo he knew about the Kimmerian Bosphoros on the north side of the Black Sea. This view was strengthened by the synchronism between Homer and the Kimmerian invasions of Anatolia (1.3.21; Herodotos 1.6), something perhaps obtained from Eratosthenes' *Chronographiai* (FGrHist #241, F1–3), the first work on universal chronology. Strabo's techniques



may be questionable to modern scholars, but provide an insight into the methodology of Homeric scholarship in the Hellenistic period.

Strabo disliked Eratosthenes' statement that poets entertain rather than teach, a view of Homer that had developed as early as Xenophanes of Kolophon in the sixth century BC (F11–12, 14–16), who was the first to object to much of the tone of the poetry of Homer. See further 1.2.3 and Roller, *Eratosthenes* 112–14.

This section has the first of dozens of references to the Euxeinos (Black Sea), a region that pervades the work, whose history and geography were explored in detail by Strabo. His intimate connection with the world of Mithridates VI of Pontos made this possible (see 1.2.1), and he is the primary source on the topic (David C. Braund, "Greek Geography and Roman Empire: the Transformation of Tradition in Strabo's Euxine," in *Strabo's Cultural Geography: The Making of a Kolossourgia* [ed. Daniela Dueck et al., Cambridge 2006] 216–34).

1.1.11. Continuing to follow Eratosthenes, Strabo moved to the two successors of Homer in terms of geography, Anaximandros and Hekataios of Miletos. Yet there is no discussion of either: in fact Anaximandros, despite his stated contributions (see 1.1.1), was not mentioned again except in a list of notable Milesians (14.1.7). Hekataios, on the other hand, was cited several times as a source. There was also an ongoing controversy regarding the legitimacy of his *Circuit of the Earth*, since Kallimachos had attributed part of it to an otherwise-unknown Nesiotos (Athenaios 2.70b).

1.1.12. Strabo was probably paraphrasing Hipparchos' preface, which set forth his view that mathematics and astronomy were essential for geographical scholarship, since only through those disciplines could anyone determine accurately the latitude and longitude of places. In this Hipparchos set himself in opposition to Eratosthenes, who used overland or sailing measurements (Eratosthenes, *Geography* F52, 131), a technique that Hipparchos found dangerously flawed. Yet Hipparchos actually made few astronomical calculations himself (Ptolemy, *Geographical Guide* 1.4), and there certainly was no process available for recording and coordinating such observations throughout the known world. Hipparchos seems to have been the first to suggest that longitudes could be determined through lunar eclipses (Dicks, *Hipparchus* 121–2).

"Alexandria next to Egypt" is the proper designation of that famous city, although rarely used: its location west of the Kanobic Mouth of the Nile meant that it was outside the Delta and thus technically outside Egypt. Since Strabo only used the term in his first two books (see also 1.3.17, 2.5.40), he may have taken it from Hipparchos.

**1.1.13.** Although still paraphrasing Hipparchos, using the astronomical term *apostema* (“intervals”; Strabo, ed. Radt, vol. 5, p. 61), Strabo moved beyond the limited definitions of the earlier scholars. The analogy with architecture is remindful of Vitruvius’ statements about what an architect needed to know, especially his 1.1.10, where the zones, climate, and astronomy are mentioned as professional necessities. It is difficult to determine who was quoting whom, as they were contemporaries and lived in Rome at the same time, but Strabo’s statement seems forced and thus may suggest that the original phrase was by Vitruvius.

Strabo’s argument that the expanse of the inhabited world could create large errors in measurement reflects some of Eratosthenes’ difficulties (Eratosthenes, *Geography* F62 = 2.1.36), which in turn were emphasized by Hipparchos. The use of the term *antipodes* (“opposites”) reflects a theory that there was an opposite to the inhabited earth. It came to be applied to the unknown portions south of the equator, seen to be the “opposite” of what was known (Plato, *Timaios* 63a; Diogenes Laertios 8.26), and survived in this sense until the discovery of Antarctica in the nineteenth century.

**1.1.14.** Perhaps continuing to paraphrase Hipparchos, Strabo emphasized that one’s view of the cosmos varied from place to place, and that the heavenly bodies tended toward the center of the universe, an Aristotelian concept (*On the Heavens* 2.14).

**1.1.15.** A distinction was made between the inhabited world (*oikoumene*) and the entire earth (*ge*). The former was thought to be roughly rectangular, with dimensions of 70,000 by 30,000 stadia, figures proposed by Eratosthenes (*Geography* F30 = 2.5.6) and a refinement of suggestions going back to Demokritos (Agathemeros 1.2). But this was only a small portion of the entire earth, whose circumference was 252,000 stadia (Eratosthenes, *Measurement of the Earth* F1–9). The person who could comprehend the cosmos but not the entire earth is not identified, but may be a comment by Hipparchos about Eratosthenes. Strabo continued to stress the interdisciplinary nature of the field of geography, a point of view that probably derived from Eratosthenes.

**1.1.16.** Strabo made a plea for broad education – a Stoic tenet – arguing that in addition to the obvious need to become proficient in geographical scholarship, one must have understanding about everything that is produced on the surface of the earth. Moreover, wisdom was equated with extensive travel (a number of mythological travelers were noted), which allowed Strabo to connect the wisdom of the Homeric heroes with modern political needs, since the greatest contemporary leaders were those who understood geography (an expansion of 1.1.1). Indirectly he commended