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STRABO’S PHILOSOPHY AND STOICISM

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The presence of philosophy in Strabo’s Geography is threefold: firstly, Strabo presents geography as a philosophical discipline, which endows it with prestige and a tradition of illustrious predecessors. Secondly, there are echoes of philosophical ideas in the Geography, which are not explicitly advertised as such, and yet frequently bear traces of Stoic influence. The third aspect of philosophy’s presence in the Geography is the historical one: Strabo is an invaluable source of information on the careers of philosophers in the first century BCE, including teacher-pupil relationships, professional rivalries and events of great cultural importance. An indicative example is provided by his remarks on philosophers from Tarsus:

The (famous) men who have hailed from Tarsus are the Stoics Antipater and Archedemus and Nestor, and moreover two men called Athenodoros, of whom the one that was called Cordylion lived with Marcus Cato and died at his house; on the other hand, the son of Sandon, whom they call Cananites after some village, was Caesar’s teacher and gained great honor, and when he returned to his native land, already an old man, he broke up the established government which was being abused by several people including Boethus, a bad poet and bad citizen, whose power came mainly from courting the mob. [ . . . ] So much for the Stoics; but my contemporary Nestor was an Academic, the one who taught Marcellus the son of Octavia, Caesar’s sister. He too was head of government having succeeded Athenodoros and he continued to be honored both by the leading men and in the city. (14.5.14) 1

The passage also demonstrates the importance Strabo placed on the Roman connections of these intellectuals and their political involvement. It also contains an example (“my contemporary”) of his frequent first-person references that, along with the pronounced emphasis on intellectuals from his native Asia Minor, create a sense of personal involvement with the cultural tradition that he reports on. 2

Geography as a philosophical discipline

These personal references and traces of self-identification are spread throughout the Geography but are significantly absent from its opening:
I believe that the study of geography, which I now propose to investigate, is part of the philosopher’s concerns as much as any other (study). The fact that my belief is not false is obvious from many considerations. For those who first ventured to touch upon this subject were philosophers of a kind, namely Homer and Anaximander of Miletus and Hecataeus his fellow-citizen, as Eratosthenes also points out; also Democritus, Eudoxus, Dicaearchus and many others, and moreover those who came after them, Eratosthenes and Polybius and Posidonius, all of whom were philosophers. (1.1.1) (emphasis added)

As Clarke has pointed out, the traditional self-introductory prologue giving the author’s name and city of origin is replaced by what Strabo considered as most representative of himself, namely the programmatic description and definition of his geographical project in terms of philosophy. Instead of introducing himself, Strabo introduces his project, and opens by expressing a judgement about its nature.

The practice of enhancing one’s own field of expertise by appeal to philosophy is paralleled in comparable strategies employed by other scientists. A striking text, which could be the proem of the second book of the Geographoumena of Artemidorus of Ephesus, is preserved in the “Artemidorus papyrus” (dated by a number of scholars to the early first century CE). The author pursues an elaborate analogy whereby the philosopher operates in the manner of a geographer, “spreading his soul” across all cognitive territory like the geographer surveys all known lands. Thus, geography can claim methodological affinity and comparable value with philosophy, which is called “most divine” in a Platonic echo (Phdr. 239b4). An alternative tactic is to treat philosophy as the necessary intellectual background to one’s own science, by claiming that the latter can only be properly mastered by those with philosophical training. Such a tactic is exemplified, for instance, by Vitruvius with respect to architecture (De arch. 1.1.3; 1.1.7–10) and by Galen with respect to medicine, in his work entitled The Best Doctor Is Also a Philosopher (Med. Phil. I 60–3 Kühn).

Strabo’s approach in his prologue contains elements from both of these tactics, but he seeks to present geography as a philosophical concern, presumably one of several, not as a separate field of analogous intellectual standing with philosophy, nor as a science for which philosophical training is a prerequisite. This amounts to a very broad conception of philosophy, indicated also by the first argument he offers in support of the view that geography should be treated as part of the philosopher’s business. This first argument is an appeal to tradition: earlier expounders of geographical themes, Strabo claims, are agreed to have been philosophers. They are divided into three groups: firstly, the ancient pioneers (Homer, Anaximander and Hecataeus) had been “philosophers of a kind”, and it was Eratosthenes who drew attention to this fact. Strabo is careful not to characterize outright the early predecessors as geographers either, but as men who “ventured to touch upon” geography. The second group, which includes representatives of a “middle” period, is broader and Strabo does not offer a full list, finishing with “and many others”. The last group is fixed in number and contains Strabo’s most respected forerunners, with the title “philosophers” closely attached to them. The more detailed elaboration of this first argument consists mainly of a lengthy vindication of Homer’s geographical expertise in order to justify his inclusion as the inventor of geography (1.1.2–10 cf. archêgetês, “founder”, at 1.1.2). The appeal to philosophy as a very broad educational ideal, capturing the privileged wisdom of scientists, historians and poets alike, is in the background on many occasions where Strabo makes explicit use of the word philosophia and its cognates. This wisdom includes educational and consultative functions that go far beyond the mainstream tradition of Greek philosophy: the Druids in Gaul are practising moral philosophy (4.4.4); Egyptian priests and Chaldaean astronomers are also philosophers (16.1.6; 17.1.5; 17.1.46), while different types of philosophers
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may be found among Indian wise men (15.1.70; cf. 15.1.59). It is interesting that the views of these groups are often reported as responses to Greek concerns (see for example 4.4.4 for the Druids’ opinion on the immortality of the soul).

These references can illuminate Strabo’s programmatic claim about geography’s status as a philosophical discipline, showing that it rests first and foremost upon a broad and inclusive conception of philosophy. This conception is fully compatible with his portrait of the geographer/philosopher as a “man who surveys the divine and the human” and “cares about the art of living and happiness”. Occasionally, however, the range of pursuits that fit under its banner can be a source of tension that drives a wedge between the geographer and the philosopher. This occurs when the stress is placed on geography’s requirement for political utility, while philosophical knowledge includes optional investigations that go beyond the geographer’s remit. For example, after listing certain types of detailed celestial observations he states:

But there are certain things that the reader should not concern himself with at all, unless for the sake of philosophical contemplation; and others that he should accept on trust, even if he does not see the cause. For this is a matter for the philosopher, whereas the statesman does not have enough free time for this sort of thing, or not always. (1.1.21; cf. 1.1.14)

This is followed by remarks on the basic astronomical knowledge that the reader does need to have (he must have observed a globe, the position of the tropics, etc.) in an attempt to strike a fine-tuned balance between practical and theoretical pursuits.

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We may now turn to examine in more detail the other two arguments through which Strabo introduces the common concerns of geography and philosophy, following the list of philosophical forerunners:

Moreover, wide learning, through which alone it is possible to undertake this work successfully, is the characteristic of no one other than the man who surveys the divine and the human; and philosophy, as they say, is the knowledge of these very things. At the same time, the benefit which is manifold and concerns, on the one hand, politics and the activities of commanders and, on the other, knowledge about the heavens and about animals, plants and fruits found in land and sea, and about other things which can be seen in each place, is indicative of the same sort of man, the one who cares about the art of living and happiness. (1.1.1, following directly from the section quoted above)

Strabo links geography and philosophy by virtue of the fact that they both involve wide learning, which characterizes those who display an active interest in all things divine and human. In this expression we may detect the first trace of Stoic influence in Strabo’s work, because it is repeated in the proem of Aëtius’ doxography10 (hence we can take the subject of “as they say” to be the Stoics):

The Stoics said that wisdom is scientific knowledge of the divine and the human, and that philosophy is the practice of a fitting expertise.11 Virtue singly and at its highest is what is fitting, and virtues, at their most generic, are three – the physical one, the ethical one, and the logical one. (Aët. I, Pr.2)12
Strabo ignored the distinction drawn by the Stoics between wisdom, which is a state of knowledge, and philosophy, which is an activity, the practice of a suitable/useful pursuit. He also introduced the additional idea of “wide learning”, which suits his purposes because it provides a useful link between wisdom and philosophy broadly conceived on the one hand (from which it follows), and geography on the other (for which it is a necessary prerequisite).

The Aëtius proem also speaks of the three branches of philosophy (physics, ethics, logic) as the three “most generic” virtues (or excellences, *aretai*), an idea that is taken up by Strabo in another context, where he makes a point about the chain sequence of sciences, whereby the geographer relies on the results of the geometers, who rely on astronomers, and they in turn on the physicists. Physics, however, is distinct in that it does not rely on any other science or expertise and in that sense it is a “virtue”: “Physics is a sort of virtue; and they say that virtues do not operate with hypotheses (*anhypothetous*) but depend upon themselves, having their principles within themselves, as well as the proofs thereof” (2.5.2). Strabo goes on to list some basic cosmological facts supplied by physics and relied upon, directly or indirectly, by the other sciences, such as the sphericity of the universe with the earth at its centre.

It is also worth noting that the interdependence of sciences outlined by Strabo at 2.5.2 has a strong affinity with views expressed by Posidonius, who was the most prominent Stoic philosopher of the first century BCE and an important source for Strabo. Posidonius was mainly arguing for the priority of physics over mathematics and astronomy; he also emphasized the fact that physics does not rely on hypotheses (F 18 Edelstein-Kidd, unlike astronomy) and has a self-sufficient set of principles to rely on (F 90). Strabo builds on this hierarchical scale and forges a place for geography within the scheme, one step after geometry, which provides the initial measurement of the earth (cf. 2.5.4).

The third and final argument of Strabo’s proem concerns the “beneficial” and “useful” aspects of geography. Here Strabo sketches the double benefit to be had from his science: on the one hand, it is useful for rulers and politics, and on the other it provides knowledge on what can be briefly called “natural history” (animals, plants, crops, etc., reiterated at 1.1.16). The connection with philosophy this time is made through the fact that these same benefits characterize “the same” individual, one who cultivates the “art of living” and the achievement of individual happiness, who cannot be anyone other than the philosopher. The idea is that both geography and philosophy not only involve wide learning, but also have the same goal and respond to the needs and interests of the same sort of man.

Strabo’s more detailed analysis of his point on utility focuses primarily on the value of knowing the characteristics of the inhabited world (*oikoumenê*) because it is the theatre of (and thus may have an effect upon) political actions great and small, from hunting trips to military expeditions (1.1.16–18). The analysis contains a brief reference to ethical and political philosophy, which are relevant for the survey of different constitutions and types of rule. Geography is again linked with these branches of philosophy, as they “concern themselves mostly with rulers”, while geography deals with the needs of rulers, and as such carries an advantage with respect to political practice (1.1.18).

There are no further references in Strabo to the expression *technê peri ton bion* (“art/expertise concerning life”), and his elaboration of his third argument does not have more to say on the individual who pursues it along with happiness. The expression is another Stoic echo (like the “scientific knowledge of the divine and the human” and the “physical virtue”), and it has many parallels in the polemics of Sextus Empiricus (for example “the Stoics explicitly say that prudence, being knowledge of good and bad things and those which are neither, is an expertise...
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Concerning life, and only those who master it become beautiful, only they become rich, only they wise”, Math. 11.170; cf. Pyr. 3.239–41). The expression also occurs in the Stoic section of the doxography ascribed to Arius Didymus, as preserved by Stobaeus:

They thought that the doctrine on the wise man’s doing everything well follows from the fact that he does everything in accordance with right reason and in accordance with virtue, which is an expertise concerning the whole of life. By analogy, the bad man does everything he does badly and in accordance with all the vices. (Stob. Ed. 2.7.5).

In the passages cited from both Sextus and Didymus, the context refers to the wise man doing everything well thanks to his mastery of the “art of life”. We may compare with this conception of the art of life the idea expressed in the Aëtius proem (cited on p. 11), that virtue is to be found at the pinnacle of what is fitting/useful, accessed through philosophy, which is characterized as a skill to be practised. In fact, the two extracts from Aëtius and Didymus show that the Stoics treated virtue as a self-sufficient art of living, embracing the whole of philosophy. The conception of philosophy itself as “the art of life” easily follows from its close connection with virtue, and it proved useful for safeguarding and clarifying philosophy’s broad remit in the face of increasingly divided and specialized fields of knowledge from the Hellenistic period onwards. For instance, Plutarch used it to back up his view that philosophy is relevant everywhere, even at drinking parties (Quaest. conv. I.1, 613B). At the same time, it enabled authors such as Strabo to maintain philosophical claims, on the grounds that their field, too, contributes to the same “art of life”.

It is therefore clear that Strabo’s proem displays Stoic influence, in the form of echoes of Stoic pronouncements on the nature of virtue and philosophy. We should also note, however, that Strabo does not seem preoccupied by the full doctrinal import of these ideas as we find them in Stoic texts, but feels free to adjust them for his purposes. We have seen already how he equates philosophy rather than wisdom with the “knowledge of the divine and the human”; he also assigns his own suitably geographical contents to these areas of knowledge, whereby the “divine” corresponds to celestial observations (heavenly bodies and eclipses), and the “human” to the earth, its size, position and habitation (1.1.12–15, in the analysis of his concept of “wide learning”, polumatheia). A more effective assessment of Strabo’s commitment to Stoicism will require evidence beyond these verbal echoes, because they can be put down to the general influence and intellectual dominance of Stoic ideas in Strabo’s time.21

First of all, it must be noted that Strabo explicitly identifies himself as a Stoic. This self-identification consists of two references to “my people” or “our people” (hoi hemeteroi), meaning the Stoics, and two more to Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, as “my Zeno” or “our Zeno” (Zenon ho hemeteros). Moreover, Strabo provides a critical review of the geographical work of Eratosthenes (1.2.2), a polymath who was librarian at Alexandria in the third century BCE. Strabo attributes his predecessor’s alleged weaknesses partly to his failure to devote himself consistently and wholeheartedly to philosophy, a weakness that was also made apparent by his lack of allegiance to the founder of Stoicism and his choice of unsatisfactory role models:

In these very pronouncements Eratosthenes makes the weakness of his opinion sufficiently clear. This (weakness) was the reason that, having been on familiar terms with Zeno in Athens he does not mention any one of his successors, but claims that the people who quarreled with Zeno and did not leave behind any surviving philosophical succession were the ones flourishing at that time. (1.2.2)
Further to these partisan references, a central concept that plays an important role in Strabo’s engagement with Stoicism is that of pronoia (this is the Greek word for “divine providence”, but “providence” is not always the best translation, as we shall see). It is, therefore, important to re-examine Strabo’s references to the term in order to gain a clear understanding of its workings in the Geography.

Belief in divine providence was one of the basic doctrines of Stoic theology, and it placed the Stoics at odds with the Epicureans in particular among their contemporaries, for whom the structure of the universe was the product of purely accidental collisions and cohesions between atoms of varying shapes and sizes. Stoic providence is a manifestation of divine reason, which permeates and governs the whole world (Diog. Laert. 7.138). The Stoics advanced several arguments for the existence and providential nature of the gods, which are available to us mainly through the speech of the Stoic spokesman Balbus in the second book of Cicero’s On the Nature of the Gods. At Nat. D. 2.75 the providential governing by the gods is supported by an Argument from Design, citing the utmost splendour and beauty of the world as the result of a benevolent divine plan. In the same passage there is a supporting reference to a “sentient nature”, also credited with the administration of the world – it is therefore legitimate to suppose that the Stoics treated divine providence and nature as the same thing, essentially the controlling rational power that sets all things into motion and is responsible for the order, beauty and awesome grandeur of the universe. There are in fact explicit Stoic articulations of this identity of God (representing divine providence), Nature and Fate: these occur most often in debates about fate and determinism, especially around Strabo’s time at the turn of the millennium.25 Fate and providence are connected, because if this power controls the whole universe, it follows that it also controls the outcome of our lives, but Strabo does not touch upon the fate implications at all.26 An example of the traditional formulation for the identity of fate, nature and pronoia is attributed to Zeno, the founder of Stoicism:

Zeno the Stoic in his work On Nature [says that fate is] a force that causes matter to change in the same respects and in the same way, and it makes no difference if it is called providence and nature. (Aët. I 27.5 = SVF I 176)27

Returning to Strabo, it becomes quickly and strikingly apparent that a quite different conception of pronoia is at work. First and foremost, in nine out of the fourteen cases where Strabo employs the word pronoia, he uses it to denote human forethought and initiative (2.5.26; 5.3.8; 17.1.6, al.). This human pronoia is systematically juxtaposed with nature (phasis), drawing the distinction between natural and man-made environment. At 5.3.8 (cf. 12.3.11; 12.3.39) it is particularly interesting that the agents of human forethought are the Romans, in clear distinction from the Greeks, who were successful at hitting targets and making decisions and selections, but without actively shaping their own luck in the same way:

The nature of the land, then, offers these advantages to the city, but the Romans added the (works) of forethought (kai ta ek tês pronoias). For while the Greeks are thought to have been successful in the foundation of cities because they paid attention to the beauty and strength of their sites, their proximity to some port, and the fineness of the country, the Romans took great care of things that the Greeks neglected, such as road paving and aqueducts and sewers. (5.3.8)

There are also passages where Strabo refers to divine providence; one of them seems straightforward, citing divine providence to account for an apparent miracle (13.4.14); the other speaks
specifically of Athena’s providence and particular course of action in the context of a myth (13.1.69), which is closer to the idea of forethought than to a cosmic benevolent programme. On the other hand, there are also passages where we can see that Strabo finds himself at odds with attested Stoic views. At 2.3.7, he situates himself and Posidonius on opposite sides of the “accident v.s design” debate: he criticizes Posidonius’ take on the division of continents and its effects by claiming that differences in animals, plants and climate are not the work of providence but are due to chance and accident. As a parallel in support of this, he suggests that practice and habituation rather than nature is the reason behind particular human and animal characteristics. There does not appear to be anything strange here about the conception of pronoia that is in play. However, the appeal to chance and accident is a very un-Stoic tactic, and yet Strabo does not hesitate to make this move in order to criticize Posidonius. It would seem that geographical facts take precedence here over Stoic commitments.

The most puzzling and most interesting passage pertaining to Strabo’s treatment of providence occurs in the final book of his work, where Strabo discusses Egypt, and needs to explain that certain parts of the country, such as the temple of Amun at the Siwa oasis and the area of lake Moeris, were once sea. He claims that such exchanges between land and sea are part of a normal process of constant change that is necessary in order to regulate the world. But, in order to introduce the setup that makes these massive changes possible, he tells a cosmological story that assigns different roles and tasks (erga) to nature (phusis) and pronoia respectively. This is peculiar because, as we have seen, in Stoicism nature and providence are one and the same, and when Strabo distinguished nature from pronoia, the latter referred to human initiative intervening upon the raw natural environment.

Now I must comment briefly on the work of both nature and providence, bringing them together. On the one hand (to men) the work of nature is as follows: of all the things that converge to one point, the center of the universe, and form a sphere around it, earth is the densest and most central, and water is less dense and comes next in order. Each one is a sphere, the former solid, the latter hollow, having the earth inside it. On the other hand (to de) the work of providence is the following: given that she is a sort of decorator and creator of countless works, she too has wished among her foremost works to beget animals as something far superior to everything else, and as the most excellent among them gods and men, for the sake of whom the rest is formed [. . .] But since water encompasses the earth, and man is not an aquatic, but a land-animal, living in the air, and requiring much light, providence formed many eminences and cavities in the earth, so that these cavities should receive the whole or a great part of the water covering the land beneath it; and at the eminences the earth should rise and conceal the water beneath it, except so much as was necessary for the use of the human race and the animals and plants around it. (17.1.36)

Here we have two cosmic forces that are not in conflict with each other, and there is emphasis on “bringing them together” and highlighting the result of their mutual operation. Nevertheless, the assignment of separate roles is distinctly un-Stoic, with nature’s responsibility restricted merely to the centripetal force drawing everything towards the centre of the universe and resulting in the two central spheres of earth and water, the densest and next most dense elements. Providence as “a sort of decorator” has furnished all elaborations and variations found in the world, and is solely responsible for the fact that humans and the animals and plants created for their sake have a place to live. This anthropocentric emphasis is characteristic of Stoic
accounts of providence, and the special affinity with and privileged treatment of gods and men is attributed to the fact that these two kinds of animate beings share in reason, which is, as we have seen, an all-important aspect of providence (Cic. Nat. D. 2.133). However, despite this Stoic echo, the problem of the distinction between nature and providence persists.

How and why did Strabo come up with this odd, from a Stoic point of view, division of labour? It is possible to point towards some philosophical debates and developments that could have influenced Strabo’s thinking, as well as with a rationale that is more internal to the Geography itself. Firstly, there is a very close Stoic parallel for this description of the world in terms of layered spheres, although of course there is no hint that this is the work of nature as opposed to providence (Diog. Laert. 7.155). Given that nature and providence in this passage are both clearly active forces, what we are looking for in terms of a background or precedent to Strabo’s distinction is some sort of subdivision of the Stoic active principle (which is canonically God, juxtaposed with matter). There are some traces of such a view in Posidonius, who, as we have seen, was an important source for Strabo in other respects. Posidonius’ pronouncement was that: “fate is third from Zeus; for first there is Zeus, second nature and third fate” (Aët. I 28.5 = Posidonius F 103 Edelstein-Kidd). This type of account has been interpreted as a Platonist influence, but even this is not as radical as the clear articulation of different roles for nature and providence that we found in Strabo, and we can only speculate as to whether any other Stoic between the early first century BCE and the Augustan period had gone that far. One consideration that could have influenced the thinking behind Strabo’s distinction is that he understood the account of the concentric spheres of the elements very literally, and of course such an uninhabitable world could hardly be the work of providence. One more consideration that could have influenced Strabo’s decision to distinguish phusis and pronoia is the rationale behind the platonist critique voiced by Plutarch in this On the Face in the Moon (which is of course later than Strabo himself). The idea is that nature cannot have ordered everything by herself, otherwise providence would be redundant:

If not a single one of the parts of the cosmos ever got into an “unnatural” condition but each one is “naturally” situated, requiring no transposition or rearrangement and having required none in the beginning either, I cannot make out what use there is of providence or of what Zeus, the “master-craftsman” is maker and father-creator. (Plutarch, De fac. 927 A–B)

The search for parallels and comparanda for Strabo’s unorthodox move on providence has thus far yielded results with limited similarities, as Strabo is not interested in fate as Posidonius is, nor does he posit a state of unnatural disorder as the counterpart to providential arrangement as Plutarch’s source does. We should consider the possibility that Strabo’s sui generis approach arises not so much out of philosophical considerations as out of the priorities of Strabo’s geographical project. It is worth pointing out, for example, that in the account at 17.1.36, the role ascribed to providence is geared towards an explanation of large-scale cosmic changes, which will in turn support his point that certain lands in Egypt were previously covered by sea, and lead to the correct explanation of change in land and water masses. It is perhaps also worth returning to his other distinction of phusis and pronoia, the one involving human forethought in 5.3.8: there we saw that human pronoia intervenes and improves an already well-ordered natural environment, which can be compared to what cosmic providence does in 17.1.36. The fact that the Romans were the prime agents of forethought in the earlier passage could lead us to connect the beneficial role of divine providence with the
controlling care exercised upon the inhabited world by the Roman empire, since they both are seen to improve upon nature.

It appears, therefore, that Strabo was not so committed to Stoicism as to let that override the requirements of geographical explanation. Moreover, as Laurent has shown, most of the distinctive and representative Stoic views that were at the heart of philosophical debates in Strabo’s time are absent from the *Geography*. Where Stoicism appears to have been most influential without, however, much explicit acknowledgement, is in Strabo’s political outlook, where nature and human society (including Roman supremacy) are inextricably linked in a cosmic unity across the *oikoumenê*.

**Strabo and the Peripatos**

Strabo’s engagement with the philosophical schools of his time does not exhaust itself with Stoicism. In fact, as many scholars have noted, his explicit references to his own philosophical education all point in the direction of the Peripatos, not the Stoa: as a young man he studied with Aristodemus of Nysa, who taught both rhetoric and grammar (14.1.48); his other grammarian teacher was Tyrannion of Amisus (12.3.16), whose Peripatetic connection was a role in the restoration of the antique copies of Aristotelian works that Sulla brought to Rome (13.1.54, where Strabo calls him a “lover of Aristotle”). The two Peripatetic philosophers with whom he studied were Xenarchus of Seleucia (14.5.14) and Boethus of Sidon (16.2.24). They were both at the cutting edge of developments in Aristotelian studies in the first century BCE, as Peripatetics began to focus on the detailed interpretation of Aristotle’s texts. Strabo offers the most emphatic description of this development, so emphatic in fact that it has been heavily criticized by scholars as an exaggeration or even a fabrication:

> It was the case that the old Peripatetics who came after Theophrastus, not having access to the books at all, apart from a few and mainly the exoteric ones, were not able to produce any real philosophy, but were declaiming commonplaces. The later Peripatetics, however, after these books came to light, philosophized better and were closer to Aristotle’s thought, but were forced to speak mainly in conjectures because of the large number of errors.

We cannot deny that Strabo is exceedingly harsh on the Hellenistic Peripatos, and it is reasonable to suppose that the polemical reaction echoes the attitude of his contemporary Peripatetic teachers. Hahm argues that the exaggerated expression “declaiming commonplaces” targets the practice of defending one’s philosophical views in public lectures and oral debates with rival philosophers, which flourished when Critolaus was head of the Peripatetic school in the second century BCE. Such practices need not presuppose the complete loss and unavailability of Aristotelian texts, because lack of interest and different philosophical priorities could have the same effect. Regardless of their interim availability, the study and systematic interpretation of Aristotelian texts was the catalyst for the transformation of the Peripatos close to Strabo’s own time.

Strabo marks the transformation from “empty” debating to “better” philosophizing with a special term that is exclusive to him, translated above as “being closer to Aristotle’s thought”. It is the verb *aristotelizein*, to “aristotelize” which is presumably meant to distinguish “true” Aristotelians from “mere” Peripatetics. The only other passage where this term occurs is 2.3.8, where Posidonius is found to be “aristotelizing”:
So much will do in reply to Posidonius as well; much of it will meet with suitable treatment under particular sections, that is, all that related to geography; but anything that falls more under natural philosophy I must examine elsewhere, or not even bother to mention it. For there is much enquiry into causes in him, that is, “aristotelizing”, a thing which our school sheers off from because of the concealment of causes. (2.3.8, transl. Kidd)

The passage follows Strabo’s long review of Posidonius’ *On Ocean* (2.2.1–2.3.8), where the latter work was found to stray often into the realm of natural philosophy, which involved large amounts of inquiry into causes – this is what “aristotelizing” amounts to, according to Strabo. Strikingly, Strabo claims that “our school” (the Stoics) avoid similar investigations, which seems to fly in the face of much substantial Stoic theorizing on causation. Perhaps Strabo had sensed a difference between the Aristotelian notion of cause, with emphasis on explanation, and the Stoic one, whose emphasis on responsibility makes it less relevant in a scientific context. Or indeed this might be a criticism of Posidonius (and implicitly of Aristotle and the Aristotelians too) for insisting on identifying a cause even when this is “hidden” and better left to mythographers and the like: for instance, both Aristotle and Posidonius “have supplied the cause” for the abundance and shape of the stones at the Stony Plain of la Crau, but neither succeeded in resolving the difficult (*dusapologeton*) problem that lies beyond the scope of geography (4.1.7).

**Conclusion**

At this point, we may summarize the results of our survey so far. It is hardly disputed that Strabo expressed allegiance to Stoicism, but there are question marks over the nature of this allegiance. In addition to very few explicit references to the school and its founder, we have noted unacknowledged echoes of Stoic ideas, many of which could be attributed to the prominence of Stoicism in the intellectual scene of the first century BCE. Strabo’s treatment of a particular philosophical concept strongly associated with his selected school, namely *pronoia*, is indicative of how he avails himself of recent developments within the school, and does not hesitate to take them further, in the service of what is in his view the correct explanation of change in land and water masses, and of his overall geographical project. Therefore, Strabo’s account of providence is not so much an instance of Stoic dogma impacting on how he conducts his geographical project, as an example of how the priorities of his geographical project reflect on his interpretation of Stoicism.

For all the emphasis on Stoicism, we should not neglect the important insights that Strabo offers into developments in the Peripatetic school, with the renewed interest in Aristotle’s original writings and the emphasis on the investigation of causes. In this respect Posidonius, one of Strabo’s main sources throughout the *Geography*, emerges as a liminal figure between Stoicism and Aristotelianism.

Finally, Strabo’s programmatic assertions about the philosophical nature of geography serve to secure legitimacy and academic respectability for his project, and an intellectual and ideological identity for himself. At the same time, the programmatic claims about geography’s philosophical credentials are an important nod to Strabo’s intended reader, who is expected to possess a broad education, as well as practical interests and a stake in the affairs of state. All these preoccupations are presented by Strabo as elements of the philosopher’s agenda, which is crucially shown to include geography too.
Notes

1 All translations from the Greek are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
2 On Strabo’s self-referential temporal indicators such as “my contemporary”, “in my time”, etc., for the lives and activities of contemporary or roughly contemporary intellectuals, contrasted with his use of more impersonal expressions such as “now” or “recently” for political events, see Clarke 1999, 290–293 and 1997, 102–108. For the Roman connections see also Engels 2005, especially at 142–143.
3 Clarke 1997, 93–96.
4 On philosophy in the Artemidorus papyrus see Sedley 2009.
5 See also Engels 1999, 42.
6 At 1.1.2 he announces: “but let us go back and consider each of the points made in greater detail”.
7 Kim 2007, 363–388, shows how this vindication is centered on the implicit claim that Homer embodies the ideals of “benefit” and “wide learning” highlighted in Strabo’s second and third arguments (on which see below).
8 On the strong links between philosophy and poetry see also 1.1.10; 1.2.3.
9 On this anthropological aspect see French 1994, 126–130; Engels 1999, 42.
10 This doxography (a collection of philosophical opinions from different schools and thinkers arranged by theme) was reconstructed by Diels in his Doxographi Graeci (1879) on the basis of parallel passages in Stobaeus’ Anthology and Ps-Plutarch’s Epitome of the Opinions of the Philosophers. For a detailed discussion see Mansfeld and Runia 1996.
11 For an alternative construal of the Greek, giving the translation “expertise in utility”, see Long and Sedley 1987 vol. 2, 163.
12 Compare Cic. Off. 1.153; 2.5; Tusc. 4.57; Sen. Ep. 89.5.
13 Presumably this is a reference to the Stoics again.
14 Other Stoic sources for physics as a virtue (e.g. Cic. Fin. 3.72–73) place more emphasis on its contribution towards the good life, which is life in accordance with nature (see also Diog. Laert. 7.87). This aspect is developed in detail in Menn 1997, where he shows how knowledge of the workings of the world can amount to practical knowledge that motivates action.
15 Cf. 1.1.16: “for they will deal with each situation in a better way if they know the land, its size and disposition, and what peculiarities it has, both in what surrounds it and in itself”.
16 On this text see Fortenbaugh 1983; Hahm 1990.
17 Long and Sedley 1987 vol. 1, 383.
18 On this development see Dihe 1986, 185–198.
19 See also Cic. Fin. 3.4: “for philosophy is the art of life” (ars est enim philosophia vitae).
20 For a survey of the range of this further evidence see Dueck 2000, 62–69.
21 This dominance was the result of the systematic and rigorous nature of Stoic dogma, as well as of its impact on the Roman elite (including Augustus, see the passage cited on p. 9).
22 This is picked up by the lexicographer Stephanus of Byzantium, who refers to “Strabo the Stoic philosopher” (not the geographer) in his entry on Strabo’s home town of Amasia (α 261 Billerbeck)
23 Cf. Dueck 2000, 63.
24 A few lines earlier Strabo has mentioned Eratosthenes’ admiration for the Academic Arcesilaus and the renegade Stoic Aristo of Chios.
25 Bobzien 1998, 13. She points out that for earlier Stoics there was not so much emphasis on providence as such, but the debate centred around the question how human experience of the world squares with the tenet that the world is organized by God or Nature so that it is the best one possible.
26 There is, however, one reference to books on this issue, “in the books on providence and fate” (4.1.7), so clearly he was familiar with these debates, as that whole passage shows.
27 See also Plut. St. Rep. 1049F = SVF II 937; Sen. Ben. 4.7 = SVF II 1024; Cic. Nat. D. 2.57–8
28 This leads Engels (1999, 43) to claim that their functions are identical.
29 See also Cic. Div.1.125. For modern interpretations and the Platonist background see Kidd 1988, 415–417; Dragona-Monachou 1994, 4434–4436; Reydams-Schilfs 1997. See also Bénatouil 2009 for the different attributes attributed to divine agency (Zeus) by the Stoics.
30 Laurent 2008. He notes the absence of any trace of the cataleptic impression (the hallmark of Stoic empiricism) and Stoic syllogistic, discusses a number of parallels from Stoic physics, and correctly points out that Strabo’s reverence for Homer need not be a Stoic influence. At 2.5.26, Strabo’s remarks on the self-sufficiency of Europe in terms of fruits and other “necessities of life” (as opposed
to spices and precious stones) could be interpreted as suggesting that the former are indeed necessary for the happy life. This would run counter to the celebrated Stoic tenet that virtue is sufficient for happiness.

31 Cf. Dueck 2000, 69. We should note that it was with the success of the Roman Empire that Stoic ideas about the community of all men, united through their common rationality and nature-based morality, gained additional traction, well beyond what could have been envisaged by Zeno and Chrysippus.

32 Dueck 2000, 8–9, 65; Laurent 2008, 112; Roseman 2005, 27–29 rightly draws attention to Strabo’s Peripatetic background alongside the technical/scientific one.

33 In the case of Boethus Strabo uses the term sumphilosophein, “to philosophize together”, which may mean that he and Boethus were fellow students.

34 On Xenarchus see Falcon 2011; on Boethus see Rashed 2013.

35 This is the translation proposed by the LSJ for theseis lekuthizein.

36 Hahn 2007, 49–55.

37 For more on the fate of Aristotle’s books as described by Strabo see Hatzimichali 2013, 11–18.


Works cited


