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THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE EDGES OF THE WORLD IN STRABO'S WORK AS A RESULT OF ROMAN CONQUESTS: SOME REFLECTIONS BASED ON STR. 1.2.1 AND 2.5.12

Abstract

During the first century BC, the most remote regions of the *oikoumene* were directly known thanks to the Roman military expeditions. Strabo, who had the intention to describe the whole world following Augustus' ideology, received and accepted a lot of this recent information unknown to the previous historiographers, above all Polybius and Posidonius. I pay attention firstly to which improvement he brings to the previous knowledge in regions newly discovered, secondly which way he presents the inhabitants of these areas. In order to answer the questions, the focus is especially on Northern Europe, among the regions announced as new discoveries by the author at the beginning of his work.

Keywords: Military Expeditions, Augustus, Strabo, Britannia, Germania, Caucasus.

1. Introduction

It is well known that during the Augustan-Tiberian period, Strabo approaches geography differently from his most valued predecessors of the previous centuries¹; in fact, if before then Eratosthenes and most of the Alexandrians had preferred to focus mainly on scientific and mathematical aspects, he instead pays particular attention to people and the space they live in². Strabo thus follows the

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¹ With regard to the date of composition of the *Geography*, literature is now oriented towards the time range 17/18-23 AD. See for instance POTHECARY 2005b, 161 and DUECK 2017a, 1. Wide-ranging discussion on the topic and previous theories in DUECK 2000, 146-154.

² On Strabo's opinion about his Hellenistic predecessors, see among others DUECK 2000, 53-62; HORST ROSEMAN 2005; CORDANO - AMIOTTI 2013, 3-15. DUECK 2000, 56-58 specifies that

path traced by Polybius and Posidonius in their works, as shown in detail above all by Katherine Clark³. It is not by chance that both authors shared with Strabo the experience of Roman expansion, or imperialism using the definition of many scholars, and often appear as sources in the *Geography*, as will be illustrated in the next pages with reference to specific regions and the relevant passages. Indeed, although in the first two books of the *Geography* the author from Amasia explains the principles of mathematical and astronomical geography, in the following 15 books he deals with the description of all regions of the known world paying attention to many aspects, not only listing, as usual, elements of physical geography or cities, but providing details on the resources, economic activities and customs of the inhabitants of those regions⁴. In addition to that, in the sections devoted to the various regions the author introduces a significant amount of information on recent events mostly concerning the Roman conquest. In modern terms, we could say that he studies ethnography, human and economic geography. His work is conceived as the *summa* of the historical and geographic knowledge of that time and is also the mirror of a particular political moment, Augustan ecumenism, when geography was a crucial element for propaganda, as we can easily infer from the *Res Gestae*, where the importance of the issue of the edges of the inhabited world is self-evident⁵. With his geographical work, Strabo was in fact the first to answer

Eratosthenes is usually associated by scholars with scientific geography in light of his best-known studies, but Strabo also knew about his interest in descriptive geography.

³ On similarities and relations between the works of Polybius and Posidonius and that of Strabo see CLARKE 1999 esp. 72-76, 314-316, 329-341, then ENGELS 1999, 157-165, 192-201; DUECK 2000, 46-53, 60-61; CORDANO - AMIOTTI 2013, 15-18; lastly, SÁSETA NARANJO 2021, focused on the political and philosophical background of the authors. On this topic it is still worth quoting the words of DUBOIS 1891, 288: «Strabon a demandé à Polybe plus que ses matériaux [...] Il lui a demandé son souffle généralisateur». On the ethnographic approach used also by Polybius, Posidonius and other Hellenistic historians, see VAN DER VLIET 1984; MARCACCINI 2000.

⁴ In general, on the structure and aim of Strabo's work see among others AUJAC 1969, XXIV-XLVII; BIRASCHI 1996; CLARKE 1999, 193-336; ENGELS 1999, 90-114; DUECK 2000, 154-180; POTHECARY 2005a; MIGLIARIO 2017. Several other contributions in DUECK 2017b touch upon the topic, although none are devoted to this.

⁵ Please note that here we are treating the *Geography*, but, as highlighted by AMBAGLIO 1990, 383-399 and ENGELS 1999, 310-313, it should be seen as complementary to his *Historical Commentaries*, even if their state of preservation prevents us from making more precise considerations. Very recently, SÁSETA NARANJO 2021, 70 writes even: «la Geografía, obra [...] cuya función originaria consistía en completar a modo de apéndice su magna ópera histórica». Remarkable is VELA TEJADA 2020, who sees the geographical work as the best one to fulfil the needs of Augustan propaganda, so that he defines it (p. 163) a second copy of the *Res Gestae*. Indeed, they (esp. *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 26-31) show noticeable similarities with Strabo's work, for which see NICOLET 1989, 3-17; ENGELS 1999, 353-358; DUECK 2000, 95-96, who thinks that Strabo read the inscription in Rome.

the Augustan call, as Claude Nicolet says⁶, giving scientific notoriety to new geographical discoveries, and the short notes I am going to present start exactly from Nicolet's chapter on trade and military expeditions in the Imperial age, focusing on the northern boundaries of the world from Britannia to the Caucasus because of their similar features when compared with Egypt, Libya and Arabia. My aim is to hereby verify what Strabo says about newly discovered lands and then investigate how he approaches them, whether with one or different methods. Attention will be given to the author's interests and his use of old and recent sources rather than to the image and concept of 'barbarians', studied also recently⁷.

2. The relation between empires and geographical knowledge from Polybius to Strabo

To communicate new knowledge about the regions at the edges of the world, Strabo needs data, which is as updated as possible, therefore he collects a great amount of information from the latest military campaigns and trade expeditions. Contrary to Polybius, he made few journeys and in no case we can consider them sources on the newly discovered lands at the edges of the *ecumene*⁸. As already pointed out by some scholars, by expressing a close relationship between empires and the increase in geographical knowledge, Strabo retrieves a *τόπος* of geographical literature, at least since Eratosthenes⁹. In his *Prolegomena*, our author states twice (1.2.1; 2.5.12)¹⁰ that he lives in a very favourable period for geographical research, because recent Roman expeditions, and the ones carried out by other great powers, have allowed him to greatly increase previous knowledge. Since Strabo refers first to the expansion of the Roman state, he belongs to a list of Greek historians, led by Polybius, who were able to write a wide-ranging work of *χωρογραφία*, based also on personal experience, thanks to the new roads opened by the Roman domination¹¹.

In fact, in a few passages by Polybius we find issues and even words which are very similar to those of the *Geography*, as we will see shortly. Indeed, he first

⁶ NICOLET 1989, 70.

⁷ THOLLARD 1987; DUECK 2000, 75-79; ALMAGOR 2005; ILYUSHECHKINA 2017 esp. on northern regions.

⁸ DUECK 2000, 15-30.

⁹ The *τόπος* is recently remarked in GEHRKE 2020, 238-241.

¹⁰ See texts below.

¹¹ On Polybius' geographic method and approach see among others, WALBANK 1948; PÉDECH 1956; BIANCHETTI 2008, 34-38 highlighting his political use of geographic data; PRONTERA 2005 highlighting the distance from the Alexandrian geographers.

realised «la differenza sostanziale rispetto alle precedenti situazioni ellenistiche, che consisteva nell'unicità dell'egemonia instauratasi nel mondo abitato a seguito della conquista romana»¹², so in the II c. BC he had already given an ecumenical dimension to his work with Rome in the centre, thus undoubtedly anticipating the Augustan age and Strabo's point of view¹³. Within this framework, for the scope of the present paper it is important to stress the geographic dimension on which Polybius often insists, especially in his *excursus* on the relation between history and geography in book III (3.57-59)¹⁴. Here, two points need to be highlighted:

1. It is completely unfair to criticize or accuse of negligence previous historians because of their mistakes τῶν περὶ τὰς ἐσχατίας τόπων τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένης (3.58.2); indeed, during the Greek age nobody could have done better, because an ecumenical approach was absent at the time. On the contrary, he thanks the Romans for allowing journeys to other parts of the world, just like Alexander the Great did in Asia. His following words ἐν δὲ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς τῶν μὲν κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν διὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου δυναστείαν τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν τόπων διὰ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ὑπεροχὴν σχεδὸν πάντων πλωτῶν καὶ πορευτῶν γεγονότων (3.59.3) are fundamental for the core of this paper.
2. Thanks to these favourable circumstances, while accompanying Scipio Aemilianus, Polybius had the opportunity to explore the Iberian Peninsula, Gaul and Africa, in other words οἱ λοιποὶ τόποι that had just become accessible by earth and sea (34.15.7; 34.16.2)¹⁵. We better understand the comparison established by him between Alexander the Great, who made the existence of Asia known, and the Romans, because his patron can be considered an example of *imitatio Alexandri* as Augustus will be at a later time¹⁶. As a consequence, he announces his intention to dedicate the entire book XXXIV to geography, of which, unfortunately, only few fragments remain¹⁷.

As stated in the first lines of this paper, the other main intellectual Strabo follows when approaching geography and Roman power is the polymath Posidonius of Apamea, who fits perfectly into the line going from Polybius to Strabo. Thanks to the Roman domination and the protection of some leading families, he

¹² MUSTI 1978, 97.

¹³ See above n. 3.

¹⁴ For these pages see among others WALBANK 1957, 393-395; PÉDECH 1964, 564-566.

¹⁵ On Polybius' travels, in addition to the literature of n. 11, see WALBANK 1957, 4-6 and now THORNTON 2020, 110-111.

¹⁶ On Scipio Aemilianus see for instance FERRARY 1998, 117-118; BIANCHETTI 2008, 34, 38. On Augustus see NICOLET 1999, 352; DUECK 2000, 104-105; TISÉ 2001.

¹⁷ 1.1.5; 1.2.7; 3.1.4.

travelled through Southern Gaul and Spain, where he collected a massive amount of information, crucial for following authors¹⁸. Although it is not contained in the remaining fragments, it is likely that he, as well as Polybius and Strabo, thanked the Romans for allowing him to travel and thus increase his geographical knowledge¹⁹. Many aspects of the way geography is treated by Polybius and Posidonius, especially in its relationship with the Roman domination, are of capital importance and have been deeply investigated; hereby, I would only like to stress their ethnographic and 'humanistic' approach to recently discovered territories, focusing on the way of life and economic activities of the populations involved.

After these necessary preliminary notes, let us move to the main topic of this paper. The starting point for my analysis consists in the two following passages from Strabo's *Prolegomena* we have quickly mentioned above.

Καὶ γὰρ δὴ πολὺ τι τοῖς νῦν ἢ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπικράτεια καὶ τῶν Παρθυαίων τῆς τοιαύτης ἐμπειρίας προσδέδωκε, καθάπερ τοῖς μετὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου στρατείαν, ὥς φησιν Ἑρατοσθένης. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ τῆς Ἀσίας πολλὴν ἀνεκάλυψεν ἡμῖν καὶ τῶν βορείων τῆς Εὐρώπης ἅπαντα μέχρι τοῦ Ἰστροῦ· οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι τὰ ἐσπέρια τῆς Εὐρώπης ἅπαντα μέχρι Ἀλβίου ποταμοῦ τὸν τὴν Γερμανίαν δίχα διαιροῦντος τὰ τε πέραν Ἰστροῦ τὰ μέχρι Τύρα ποταμοῦ· τὰ δὲ ἐπέκεινα μέχρι Μαιωτῶν καὶ τῆς εἰς Κόλχους τελευτώσης παραλίας Μιθριδάτης ὁ κληθεὶς Εὐπάτωρ ἐποίησε γνῶριμα καὶ οἱ ἐκείνου στρατηγοί· οἱ δὲ Παρθυαῖοι τὰ περὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ τὴν Βακτριανὴν καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ τούτων Σκύθας γνωριμωτέρους ἡμῖν ἐποίησαν, ἥττον γνωρίζομένους ὑπὸ τῶν πρότερον· ὥστε ἔχομεν ἂν τι λέγειν πλέον τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν²⁰.

Here we can see a similar position towards previous writers and almost the same scheme as Polybius', but Strabo also thanks the Parthian and Pontic Empire, in addition to the Roman Empire, for the recent discoveries of some regions at the edges of the world²¹. As for the territories conquered by the Romans, which are particularly interesting for this paper, he states that they allowed to make Western

¹⁸ Posidonius' writings also contain a significant amount of information about Spain and Gaul and in particular about the Celts and their customs, suggesting that he might have also written a monograph on this population: so NICOLET 1989, 58-59. See also DESIDERI 2001. With reference to this, I would like to quote the words by TREVES 1976, 60: «L'Occidente fu, e resta, una sua [*scil.* di Posidonio] rivoluzionaria scoperta [...] per la bramosia ed ansia insaziata del ricercatore, per la copia delle annotazioni e curiosità». Similarly, GABBA 1974, 640: «l'impero universale romano consentì, ad ogni modo, a Posidonio una maggior apertura etnografica e geografica specialmente sull'Occidente».

¹⁹ MOMIGLIANO 1980, 94.

²⁰ 1.2.1.

²¹ I would underline the prestigious position recognized by Strabo to the Parthians, mentioned at the beginning of the sentence at the same level as the Romans. This can be related to the role accorded to them even in the Augustan period, as the empire who dominated the world along with Rome, see NICOLET 1999, 362-363 with reference to Str. 17.3.24; DUECK 2000, 112-114. As for

Europe known as far as the Elbe River, the ancient *Albis*, and Central-Eastern Europe between the Danube and the Dneestr, the ancient *Tyras*. The structure of the phrase emphasizes the comparison between Alexander and the Romans, who appear to carry on his discoveries; this is especially evident for the second region, where the Danube divides two areas, explored one by the Macedonians and the other one by the Romans.

In the next passage, Strabo no longer quotes Alexander and is more precise regarding the regions he can describe better than before and his sources.

Μάλιστα δ' οἱ νῦν ἄμεινον ἔχοιεν ἂν τι λέγειν περὶ τῶν κατὰ Βρεττανοὺς καὶ Γερμανοὺς καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἰστρον τοὺς τε ἐντὸς καὶ τοὺς ἐκτὸς Γέτας τε καὶ Τυρεγέτας καὶ Βαστάρνας, ἔτι δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Καύκασον, οἷον Ἀλβανοὺς καὶ Ἰβηρας. Ἀπὸ γὰρ λέγεται δ' ἡμῖν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν τὰ Παρθικὰ συγγραψάντων, τῶν περὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον τὸν Ἀρτεμιτηνόν, ὃ πολλῶν ἐκεῖνοι μᾶλλον ἀφώρισαν, τὰ περὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ τὴν Βακτριανήν²².

Thanks to this passage we can narrow down the above-mentioned definition τὰ ἐσπέρια τῆς Εὐρώπης ἅπαντα μέχρι Ἀλβιος ποταμοῦ of the first book; it is undoubtedly correct to state that Roman expeditions led Western and Central Europe to be known, but these words help us to distinguish two phases of the expansion, also reflected in Strabo's work. This paper focuses on the lands at the edge of the world recently discovered by the Romans. However, Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula could no longer be considered as newly discovered under Augustus. On the contrary, populations and places listed in the second passage perfectly suit my purpose, because they became better known thanks to the Romans under Caesar or Augustus and, as far we know, Strabo was the first to deal with them from a geographic point of view after the new expeditions. We will then analyse some relevant passages from the descriptions of North-Western, Central-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus following the order suggested by the author himself.

3. *The geographic contexts*

Firstly, the British islands are treated in book IV, devoted to Gaul, only in chapter 5, after examining the three Gauls, not following the Augustan administrative organization, but the canonical division introduced by Posidonius, who is the main source for the entire area, although his work was not updated and would have needed to be completed with recent information²³. Concerning Great Britain,

the Pontic kingdom, it is noticeable that Strabo had family ties with the dynasty, on which see for instance once again DUECK 2000, 5-8.

²² 2.5.12.

²³ As for the composition and sources of book IV see once again LASSERRE 1966, 101-118 with

the description focuses firstly on its position in the scheme drafted by the author for his readers at the beginning of the book²⁴, then on measurements and physical elements, as expected in every geography work; economy, climate, communication routes and way of life are dealt with later, widely and in detail. Moreover, specific attention is given to the island's contemporary history and its relations with Rome starting from Caesar's age. Indeed, there is a reference to a visit of some Britons to Rome, the friendship treaty between some island kings and Augustus, and there is also an accurate description of why it was more advantageous to the Romans not to conquer the land directly, but to control it indirectly by collecting taxes. To fulfil the purpose of this paper, I would like to verify how much information Strabo owes to recent Roman expeditions according to his introduction. I think it is appropriate to mention some lines regarding Ierna, i.e. Ireland, about which Strabo writes: καὶ ταῦτα δ' οὕτω λέγομεν ὥς οὐκ ἔχοντες ἀξιοπίστους μάρτυρας (4.5.4). These words clarify that in this case he uses a different source from the one used for his previous pages about Britannia, for which he has no doubts regarding reliability. Therefore, we can deduce that he either needs a recent source to confirm all basic information provided by Posidonius or, more probably, that for Ierna Posidonius openly depended only on information from Pytheas, whom Strabo openly distrusts²⁵. In general, as for the basic data on physical and human geography, it is assumed that he followed Posidonius, who in turn for the northern regions used at times Pytheas and at times Arthemidorus²⁶.

Nevertheless, most data must be related to Caesar's campaigns and reports regarding them, in consideration of the large amount of information on wars. With reference to this, it is important to highlight that before writing the *Geography*, Strabo wrote a universal history from 145 to 27 BC, as a continuation of Polybius' work²⁷. Therefore, Caesar's deeds were certainly included in it and it is logical to assume that the author gained information from the historical work

a traditional *Quellenforschung* approach; similarly, TROTTA 1996, 19-31; THOLLARD 2009, 9-16 is more cautious. Anyway, they agree on Posidonius as a main source for the book. In addition to them, see for instance ENGELS 1999, 195-197; BIANCHETTI 2008, 46, who believes he also reported and adapted previous theories; ILYUSHECHKINA 2017, 63-64; MORET 2017a, 188. When I quote Posidonius, I mean both the *Histories* and the treaty *About the Ocean*, following LASSERRE 1966, 5 n. 2 and BALADIÉ 1989, 15 n. 23.

²⁴ On these 'mental maps' see among others MORET 2017b, 254-296; GEHRKE 2020.

²⁵ On Strabo's negative opinion of Pytheas, see among others HORST ROSEMAN 2005, who stresses the need for verification by recent and reliable observers; BIANCHETTI 2008, 28-34. On the case of Ierna, see the literature of n. 31.

²⁶ LASSERRE 1966, 109-114; TROTTA 1996, 27. After HORST ROSEMAN 2005, 33-35 the description of British islands in general comes from Pytheas' work.

²⁷ On Strabo's historical work, see AMBAGLIO 1990 and MAGNELLI 2012 with the edition of the fragments.

he considered useful for the geography one; we have evidence of such repetition in the few preserved fragments of the *Hypomnemata*²⁸. The origin of the news related to Caesar's expeditions should be the same in both cases and has been identified with the writings of Asinius Pollio, who was mentioned by Strabo in both works and was the author of a monograph on the civil wars from 60 to 31 BC.²⁹ Other scholars believe it is directly the *de bello Gallico*³⁰, but this is not crucial here, unless we think that the works of Asinius Pollio or Caesar were used by Strabo to confirm older information referred mainly by Posidonius: however, there is no evidence for such a hypothesis. On the contrary, the description of Ierna shows that Strabo did not do this: he accepts its incorrect position north of the main island, certainly deriving from Pytheas, whereas Caesar correctly places it to the west³¹.

Concerning later facts up to the Tiberian age, he might have been an eyewitness in Rome, as suggested by his remarks on the physical appearance of the people described, or he might have spoken to some eyewitnesses. Anyhow, we have to suppose the sources he had at his disposal for contemporary history were many and varied, both official and unofficial. For instance, the mission of the Briton kings is mentioned also in the *Res Gestae* and was undoubtedly a relevant element of the Augustan propaganda, to the point that Patrick Thollard considers the official speech by Augustus as a source³². The consideration about the absence of advantages in a direct conquest of the island might have the same origin, but it is also likely to derive from unofficial sources of the imperial entourage or in general of the Roman political environment³³.

The Germans are treated at the beginning of book VII, dedicated to the rest of Europe, from the Rhine to the Don and the Sea of Azov north of the Danube and from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea on the south. Apart from Greece and its neighbouring lands, the author deals here with the less known part of Europe at

²⁸ LASSERRE 1984, 11-17; AMBAGLIO 1990, 410; SÁSETA NARANJO 2021. Cautious, VELA TEJADA 2020, 148-150; *contra* NICOLAI 2001, 121 based on *FGrH* 91 F 1 (= Str. 11.9.3).

²⁹ For the identification of Asinius Pollio as a source of the book IV and his use LASSERRE 1966, 109-110; doubtful, TROTTA 1996, 28-31.

³⁰ DUECK 2000, 93-94; HORST ROSEMAN 2005, 34; lastly ILYUSHECHKINA 2017, 63.

³¹ *Caes. Gal.* 5.13.2. In this case, the Pytheas' information is supposed to have reached Strabo through Eratosthenes, after LASSERRE 1966, 217; lastly MAGNANI 2002, 154, 168-169 hypothesizes Posidonius and indirect information collected by Pytheas without visiting that island.

³² The mission of the Briton kings is mentioned in the *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 32.1, but Strabo could have been in Rome in 7 BC, according to the remarks made about the physical appearance of this population. For the whole fragment about their visit to Rome and the treaty (4.5.3), THOLLARD 1987, 54-56 considers Augustus' official speech as a source. Differently LASSERRE 1966, 110-111 hypothesized a eulogy writer as a source for all the facts after Caesar.

³³ BALADIÉ 1989, 35-38; DUECK 2000, 88-96; DUECK 2017c.

that time, and it is no coincidence that this book is the one mainly referred to in the preliminary passage of 2.5.12. Actually, «plus que bien d'autres livres, celui-ci a bénéficié d'explorations et de reconnaissances réalisées à la faveur de guerres récentes»³⁴ and the analysis of the section on the Germans entirely confirms it³⁵. As already in 2.5.12, this enormous space is sketched by the author's words: it is divided into two parts by the Danube, which flows from west eastwards and was chosen by the author as a reference axis for orientation in unknown territories.

Regarding the German people, firstly, we find the description of their ethnic identity – to use a modern concept – and Strabo provides a new piece of information compared with former historiographical tradition, in particular Posidonius, who is the source of numerous basic data also in this book³⁶. Indeed, the latter considered the Germans as a Celtic tribe among many others located on the right bank of the Rhine. On the contrary, a specific distinction is stressed here, as far as we know first made by Caesar, and some common elements are pointed out, such as their more primitive attitude and a greater tendency to nomadism rather than agriculture. We then find the description of their land, mainly between the Rhine and the Elbe, and he enumerates a certain number of Germanic tribes. The latter river is especially relevant because it was neither a human nor a natural boundary, but it is quoted by Strabo already in the first preliminary passage as dividing Germany and as the limit of the land discovered by the Romans³⁷. Behind the author's choice, we can identify the Roman political project of setting the Elbe as the eastern border of the new province of *Germania*. How much Strabo depended on news coming from Roman military expeditions is evident in this context³⁸: for all lands lying east of that river he only provides a few ethnonyms (7.1.3). In addition to this geographic and ethnographic information, as usual, Strabo refers many war facts involving the Roman army, up to the defeat of Varus and Germanicus' triumph of 17 AD (7.1.4). At the end of the chapter dedicated to the Germans, Strabo focuses in particular on the southern part, the Ercinian Forest with its flora, the nearby Lake Constance and the inhabitants of the region (7.1.5). Regarding sources, in this last part the author refers to the discovery of the springs of the Istros by Tiberius during his expedition against Alpine populations in 15 BC, while previously the course of this river had been a mystery for many years,

³⁴ BALADIÉ 1989, 13.

³⁵ For the section on the Germans, see now GEHRKE 2020 with previous literature. *Contra* ILYUSHECHKINA 2017 highlights the stereotype of the barbarians.

³⁶ BALADIÉ 1989, 15.

³⁷ GEHRKE 2020, 225-228.

³⁸ Explicitly in 7.2.4. After NICOLET 1999, 354-355 it is remarkable that Strabo mentions neither the naval expedition reaching the Jutland peninsula at the time of Augustus nor the Vistola river known by Agrippa. See also BALADIÉ 1989, 187 n. 3.

located in many places and divided by mistake into several branches³⁹. Here there is a clear reference to the usefulness of military campaigns for geography and in fact such accurate and updated information about Germany leads us to suppose that the author's sources for the entire chapter were actually official or unofficial campaign reports, written by members of the imperial entourage and for some pieces of information, such as names of tribes, we can identify the different expeditions, e.g. by Drusus, Germanicus, etc., they are based on. The description of the Germanic triumph and the reference to the need to be cautious with the Germans is supposed to indicate Strabo's presence in Rome, as he wrote what he saw or at least heard from official propaganda and high-ranked figures⁴⁰.

Carrying on my analysis according to the two preliminary texts, we should move east along the river Danube and deal with the populations living along it, the axis of this book, and on the Northern Black Sea coast: in 1.2.1, Strabo only mentions the region north of the river, while in 2.5.12 he adds all the populations living along its course, referring to the Getae, Tyregetae and Bastarni⁴¹. The third chapter of book VII is actually focused on this area and after his usual criticism of previous, unreliable geographers, starting from Pytheas (7.3.1), Strabo dedicates it to populations from Thracia, among which he includes the Getae and Mysians, and to other populations north of the Black Sea, but reporting literary *querelles* started by Homer and recounting some traditional legends about their religion and attitude, whose sources are probably ancient (7.3.2-10)⁴². When the author describes the Getae more in detail, he first examines their recent history and their encounter with Roman power, when their king Burebistas was defeated (7.3.11-12), he then depicts the physical region mentioning the river Marisos, the so-called desert of the Getae with the description of the estuaries of the Istros in Bastarnian territory (7.3.13-15). As for the Black Sea coast between the Danube and the Dniestr, the author gives some practical information about distances, the presence of lagoons and the navigability of the latter (7.3.15-17). The other two populations mentioned in 2.12.5, the Tyregetae and Bastarni, are also mentioned at the beginning of the section about the Scyths, but nothing is said about the Tyregetae, while about the Bastarni we learn here that they belong to the Germans and they are divided into several tribes (7.3.17)⁴³. As for the usual question regarding the effect of recent information, according to the preliminary notes, we would expect Strabo to have collected most of his information from recent reports. Actually, most of what is told about these populations could come from Posidonius quoted several

³⁹ On the Danube in ancient sources VEDALDI IASBEZ 1994, 137-140.

⁴⁰ GEHRKE 2020, 240-241 stresses the political dimension of Strabo's considerations.

⁴¹ The knowledge of the last population is denied in 7.2.4.

⁴² As for the composition and sources of book VII see once again BALADIÉ 1989.

⁴³ On Bastarni see also above n. 37.

times, while what concerns the coast should have its origin in Arthemidorus' *Periplus*⁴⁴. Nevertheless, once again there is some information that Strabo owes to contemporary works: all the knowledge about Burebistas and the Daco-Getan power at his time could derive from the work of Asinius Pollio, as we have already seen, or another recent historian and Strabo might have already included it in his *Historikà Hypomnemata*⁴⁵. Moreover, some data about Dacian power after the above-mentioned king and the clarification about the name of the Danube could derive from personal contacts of the author with the imperial entourage or high rank officers. Even though the Dacian threat is known also in the *Res Gestae* and thus belongs to the same type of official report⁴⁶, nonetheless in this context the relation between Roman military explorations and Strabo's geographic knowledge seems to emerge less than in the case of the Germans and Britons.

If we read the first preliminary passage, we do not gain any information on recently discovered lands thanks to the Romans outside Western and Central Europe, while important elements for this study are in the second one. Indeed, if Strabo is able to describe the Caucasian, Iberians and Albanians much better than before, it is yet another consequence of the Roman military activity. In book XI, in the chapter on the Iberians (11.3), apart from physical geographic information, great importance is given to buildings, the inhabitants' economic activities based on the orography of their territory and their attitude, which Strabo interprets as a consequence of their relationship with the surrounding space. Then, at the end of the section, we find a digression on social classes, another fundamental piece of evidence of the new approach also applied to these far regions in terms of geography. The following chapter (11.4) about their neighbours has a similar structure: after the physical description of the territory, the Albanians' customs are given greater importance. They are inclined to fighting, not very developed and in this sense the author stresses their scarce use of money, weight and measures, and they are not keen on growing crops, despite the very rich soil at their disposal. For both territories, strategic information, such as mountain passes and military

⁴⁴ BALADIÉ 1989, 18-22. In general, as to Arthemidorus as Strabo's source, BIANCHETTI 2008, 39, writes: «l'analogia di impostazione rilevata da Marciano tra l'opera di Artemidoro e quella di Strabone giustifica verosimilmente l'ampio ricorso ai *Geographoumena* da parte del geografo dell'impero».

⁴⁵ BALADIÉ 1989, 38-40; on the use of Asinius Pollio see above n. 29. The image of Burebista's power seems to be exaggerated by Strabo for political purposes according to ZIMMERMANN 2019, who mentions no sources but only literary models.

⁴⁶ *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 30.2. On the origin of this information see BALADIÉ 1989, 35-37 and more recently ZIMMERMANN 2019, underlining Strabo's difficulty in following official propaganda and his focus on particular elements to distract the readers and better persuade them of the correctness of the emperor's activity. In his opinion, the case of the decision not to conquer Britain seen above is similar.

equipment, is extremely important and it is a very useful clue to identify Strabo's source (11.3.5; 11.4.5).

In the fourth chapter, the author mentions στρατεύσαντες explaining the way of life of this community (11.4.3), and it is natural to relate them to the attention for Pompey's campaign of 66-63 BC and to think about Theophanes of Mytilene, friend of the Great who escorted him as counsellor and historiographer during the entire campaign, as Strabo himself remembers (11.5.1). As regards the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to notice that he was the first Greek to visit and describe these lands⁴⁷. On the one hand, the geographer from Amaseia certainly obtained most of his information from the historian from Lesbos. However, the plural form στρατεύσαντες suggests the involvement of at least one other person: this is certainly Quintus Dellius, Antony's friend and his legate for the Parthian campaign of 36-35 BC, who wrote a report of it⁴⁸, while it is difficult to establish how much information derived from each work. However, both campaigns were carried out during the period treated in the *Historikà Hypomnemata* and, as stated for Caesar, it is highly likely that Strabo included here all the information on historic facts⁴⁹.

4. Conclusions

The relation between Strabo's work and recent campaigns emerges clearly from the analysis of these few examples, but we should be cautious. Undoubtedly, Strabo gained a significant amount of information from them; however, he continued to largely use older sources he trusted as a starting point, first of all Posidonius, as seen for Britannia and the Danube regions. As remarked in a contribution on Spain published last year, in some cases perhaps Strabo had no more recent information to replace the one provided by his most exploited sources⁵⁰. As seen, also for new discovered lands located at the edges of the ecumene, the Amasian, as Polybius and Posidonius did with Western Europe, mainly follows his ethnographic, human approach, while displaying no interest for the Roman provincial organization which was being structured in his time. Even if it is remarkable that intellectuals from the military environment referred

⁴⁷ On Theophanes as Strabo's source, LORDKIPANIDZE 1996, 208-213, 240, 270-272; NICOLAI 2001, 101, 113-117. A large debate about the reception of Theophanes in Strabo is in LASSERRE 1975, 16-23.

⁴⁸ In addition to LASSERRE 1975, 23-25, see recently DUECK 2000, 94 and NICOLAI 2001, 95-107, who highlights a noticeable weight of the Dellius' work for Antony's campaign. Generally, KELLY 2008, 217-218, 233 reduces the weight of his work.

⁴⁹ NICOLAI 2001, 121.

⁵⁰ SÁSETA NARANJO 2021.

information related to anthropic geography, as in the description of the Caucasus, most reports or narrations from the Roman aristocratic or imperial environment concerned mainly military campaigns or administrative, political situations, not useful to update Strabo's main sources. Only for Germany can we trace such a process, as even recently pointed out by Hans-Joachim Gehrke, who writes that Strabo represents «den neuen Kenntnisstand»⁵¹.

To sum up, I would like to quote a sentence from a book of the *Geography* about populations living beyond Sogdiana, valid not only for that territory, but more in general: the author says he can only suppose something about populations who live beyond Sogdiana, because στρατεῖαι δ'οὐ γεγόνασι ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡμῶν γνώριμοι (11.11.6): the best evidence of the close relationship in this work between military expeditions and a rigorous method when writing about geography in newly discovered lands.

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⁵¹ GEHRKE 2020, 225.

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