

## BOOK REVIEW

*A Historical and Topographical Guide to the Geography of Strabo.* By DUANE W. ROLLER. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xix + 1165. Hardback. \$190.00. ISBN 978-1-107-180659.

Strabo's *Geography*, completed in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, is the primary source for the history of Greek scholarship on geography and the formative processes of the earth. In addition, this lengthy and complex work (seventeen books; Strabo himself refers to it as a *kolossourgia* ("colossal [statue of a] work") in 1.1.23/C 14) contains a vast amount of information on many other topics, including the expedition of Alexander the Great, cultic history, the history of the eastern Mediterranean in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and women's history. Strabo (c. 63 BC – c. AD 24; we have few details about his life and are not even absolutely sure whether "Strabo" was his actual name) was born to an affluent family in Pontus (Asia Minor). He travelled extensively, as he himself indicates in the *Geography*. It is not known precisely when the *Geography* was written, though within the work we find indications that this occurred within the reign of the emperor Tiberius. The latest passage to which a date can be assigned is his reference to the death of Juba II, king of Mauretania, in AD 23, who is said to have died 'just recently' (Str. 17.3.7/C 828). Strabo probably worked on the *Geography* for many years and revised it steadily, though not always consistently. Except for parts of Book 7, it appears the complete work has been transmitted.

Strabo was not an author who was read extensively in antiquity: it is surprising to notice that his *Geography* seems to have remained largely unnoticed by the Romans—even to Pliny—although it was apparently known in the East. At present, some thirty manuscripts of the *Geography* or parts of it have survived, almost all medieval copies. A "modern" edition of the *Geography* (first?) appeared in the west in 1423. Isaac Casaubon published first in 1587 at Geneva, next in 1620 (at Paris), an edition of the work that would have tremendous impact on further studies into the work of Strabo, if only by the specific way Casaubon paginated the work. The work is still frequently cited by Casaubon's pages (indicated by a C, followed by a number between 1 and 840).

After Casaubon, scholars have struggled for about a century and a half to produce an accurate edition. From the 1840s onwards, a more or less standard version was established. The ten-volume edition by Radt (S. Radt (ed.), *Strabons Geographika. Mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 10 vols), with Casaubon pagination, published at Göttingen between 2002 and 2011, is the last one in the series of editions of the *Geography* and the edition to be used, as indeed does Roller. Apart from Radt's edition, Roller also bases the *Guide* on his own translation of Strabo's work: D. W. Roller, *The Geography of Strabo. An English Translation, with Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge 2014. This is one of the first (if not the first) in many years since the by now obsolete and not always accurate translation by H. L. Jones for the Loeb Classical Library (1917–1932, in eight volumes), which, moreover, is not accompanied by a commentary.

Though since the 1970s many new publications on Strabo's work have been published, the *Guide* provides, to the best of my knowledge, the first comprehensive analysis of and/or commentary on Strabo's text in English, and as such simultaneously serves as a companion to the author's translation of the work. The book thoroughly analyzes each of the seventeen books and, I believe, provides one of the most thorough bibliographies—even though obviously not complete—as yet created for Strabo's work.

As Roller states in the "Preface" to the book under scrutiny, its purpose is "to illuminate historical and topographical issues in the *Geography* of Strabo." In my view it does so well and is, moreover, a suitable companion to the volumes dedicated by Stefan Radt to his commentary as well: obviously, Radt's comments are valuable but predominantly provide a philological and linguistic analysis. The *Guide*, on the other hand, informs the modern reader on different aspects of the *Geography*, aspects that are perhaps more practical for "daily use." As such it clearly is a valuable tool especially for the historical issues, in spite of its sometimes less manageable dimensions (though, in fact, only an impediment of minor importance). Obviously, there always remain issues one would have hoped to receive an answer to, like the matter of the flood of the Nile (Str. 17.1.5/C 790), but as it is the question is dealt with as sufficiently as possible, underlining the practical use of this *Guide*. It gives the reader the (in my view largely right) impression that, though emphatically within the limits of our knowledge, s/he has access to the world beyond the *Geography* for the first time, certainly in combination with Radt's edition (or, for that matter, Roller's own translation). As regards the topographical issues, I am less enthusiastic: for a book with "Topography" emphatically in its title, I find the number of maps (three) and plans (none) far below what

might be expected. The reference (on p. ix) to an online map, even if that were perfect (it is not, in my view), is simply insufficient and disregards the challenge this poses for readers without (direct) access to the Internet.

As might be expected for a volume with such a price tag (and from a publisher with the reputation as the CUP), it looks great and the printing is excellent, as shown by the small number of typos (I detected only very few of them), even though my copy did not remain opened easily and a reading ribbon would have been a convenient extra. As indicated before, the bibliography is ample (over thirty pages). Both the *index locorum* and the general index are exhaustive and a useful tool for anyone working on or making use of the *Geography*. The final conclusion ultimately can be no other than that this is, in spite of the lack of maps, nevertheless an essential book for everyone who works with the *Geography* on more than an occasional basis.

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