

Biblical exodus story. These works, he explains, may have been provoked by the anti-Egyptian flavour of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The value of the present volume lies in two factors: 1) it provides a fresh translation that is far more readable than the old-fashioned English of the Loeb edition; 2) it provides a wealth of references to secondary literature.

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Yuval Shahar, *Josephus Geographicus. The Classical Context of Geography in Josephus*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 98. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004. 305 pp. ISBN 3 16 148256 5.

This is a case in which, in a way, the 'context' earns more attention than the 'text'. As his title makes clear, the author proposes to deal with 'the Classical context of geography in Josephus'; and indeed slightly more than two thirds of his work surveys some well-known tendencies in Greek and Latin geography, while 'Josephus Geographicus' enters the stage only in chapter 6 (190). Taking what seems a metaphor most appropriate for such a study, we might say it feels almost as if one must travel through several centuries and compositions — from Homer to Pliny — in order finally to reach the Promised Land. And this 'promised land' appears to be rather exotic in the primary sense of 'very different or unusual and striking'.

But first things first. The book is constructed in chronological order, presenting a survey of the role of geographical descriptions particularly in historiographical compositions. Within this chronological framework, Shahar highlights specific aspects relevant to each of the authors under inspection.

Chapter 1 surveys Greek approaches to geography first apparent in the Homeric epics and later transmitted into traditional historiographical writing through the mediation of geographical descriptions in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE Ionian works. Shahar discusses three characteristics of Greek geographical descriptions as they appear mainly in the works of historians and Strabo. These are the geographical, political and cultural idea of the *oikoumene*; the emphasis put on non-Greek lands and people in deference to Greek regions of the world (*barbarike* being more elaborate than *Hellenike*); and linear methodology using natural lines as co-ordinates on a verbal map.

Shahar enumerates Homer's significant role as a fourth foundation alongside the three mentioned, but it seems that while the three others have to do with actual methodology and, in a way, disciplinary axioms, Homer's role falls into a different category perhaps of inspiration or model and thus should be defined separately from the three criteria. Moreover, while the three aspects are manifest in all Greek and Latin 'geographies',<sup>1</sup> Homer's inspiration is somewhat faded (Thucydides) or non-existent (Romans) in some of them.

Homer is definitely Strabo's great Muse, and the relationship between Strabo and Homer is indeed essential to the understanding of the scholarly orientation of the Augustan geographer.<sup>2</sup> Shahar notes that 'Homer ... is not merely a source of information, but is a methodological source

<sup>1</sup> I use 'geographies' in the sense of geographical descriptions and surveys although generally they appear in historiographical contexts. This distinction and interaction are thoroughly discussed and analysed in K. Clarke, *Between Geography and History. Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World*, Oxford 1999.

<sup>2</sup> The discussion could benefit also from three studies by A.M. Biraschi: 'Strabone e la difesa di Omero nei Prolegomena', in *Strabone. Contributi allo studio della personalità e dell'opera*, 1, ed. F. Prontera, Perugia 1984, 127-53; 'Strabone e Omero. Aspetti e problemi della tradizione omerica nel Peloponneso di Strabone', in *Strabone e la Grecia*, ed. A.M. Biraschi, Naples, 1994, 23-57; 'Omero e aspetti della tradizione omerica nei libri straboniani sull'Asia Minore', in *Strabone e l'Asia Minore*. eds. A.M. Biraschi and G. Salmeri, Naples, 2000, 45-72.

for Strabo as well...' (23). This assertion implies a fixed set of rules to be found in the Homeric epics, whereas it may be more accurate to describe the function of the Homeric epics in Strabo's *Geography* as that of a model or a matrix into which Strabo casts later information. Thus, for instance, Strabo clearly follows the order of the Homeric *Catalogue of Ships* in his description of Greece.

Chapter 2 takes the themes discussed in the previous chapter and applies them to the geography and ethnography in Herodotus. Both by pointing out general tendencies throughout the *Histories* and by presenting specific sections within the work — e.g. descriptions of the Hellespont, Thessaly and Thermopylae — Shahar explicates Herodotus' approach while raising also the issue of what he defines as 'military topography', that is, references to topographical conditions and orientations within battle scenes.

A similar treatment is applied to Thucydides in Chapter 3. Starting from the well-known stylistic and ideological differences between Herodotus and Thucydides, Shahar brings to the fore the episodes in Pylos and in Sicily and concludes by defining Herodotus as a telescopic historian and Thucydides as a microscopic one. By this definition Shahar refers to the Herodotean tendency to describe larger geographical contexts within the *oikoumene* in opposition to the Thucydidean approach which focuses more on the topographical set-up of battle scenes.

Besides some cases of awkward English and incomprehensible sentences, Shahar seems specifically to misuse the term toponym to refer to a geographical co-ordinate or topographical layout. For instance, to give only one example, he says (125): 'toponymy in Thucydides is made up of natural and man-made lines. The commonest man-made toponym is the wall ...' (see also 208). While a toponym is specifically 'a place-name' and toponymy is 'the place-names of a country or district as a subject of study', it would have been clearer to replace this word in the contexts mentioned above with a more suitable and accurate term.

Polybius initiates a new approach to geography both in the role he attaches to it and in the place he devotes to it within his work. Thus, in Chapter 4 Shahar rightly connects his work with Strabo's later endeavour. He also shows that Polybius synthesised in a way the telescopic approach of Herodotus and the microscopic one of Thucydides.

Before attending to the main novelty of this book, Shahar includes one more chapter (5) to complete the survey by presenting the role and character of geographical descriptions in Latin historiography. He refers in particular to Livy, Caesar, Tacitus and Pliny, and connects their attitude to geography with the political developments of Roman rule in the *oikoumene*.

It is in Chapter 6 that we finally reach Josephus' approach to geographical descriptions. Shahar systematically analyses excerpts from the works of Josephus which include geographical and topographical descriptions, and, as he has done with previous historians, emphasises the treatment of particular battle scenes. He analyses specifically the description of the sites in Jotapata (212), Taricheae (214), Gamala (215), Machaerus (219) and Masada (221).

Shahar compares Josephus' descriptions of battles in places where he was absent with those of clashes where the historian was present. He concludes that in the former Josephus relied mainly on Roman sources and thus concentrated on tactics, the numerical advantage of the Roman army and the numbers of losses among the Jewish rebels. These descriptions usually lack any geographical reference. In contrast to this, descriptions of battles where Josephus was present (even if as a captive) refer more extensively to details of tactics on both sides and include an elaborate geographical survey of the battle scene. According to this criterion of autopsy, Shahar goes on to challenge the *communis opinio* that Josephus was not present at the sieges of Masada and Machaerus and proposes that the historian was present at both (207).

Beyond the general survey of Josephus in his function as 'Geographicus', Shahar's main thesis and the predominant novelty of his work is his assertion that Josephus relied on Strabo's *Geography* and that later on Tacitus relied on Josephus' work. While it is apparent that Josephus knew Strabo's earlier historiographic work — he quotes it 12 times — there is no straightforward

evidence that he ever saw the *Geography*. Moreover, it is generally accepted among modern Strabonists that the geographical work was unknown or at least not quoted until the second century CE.<sup>3</sup> It is against this opinion that Shahar painstakingly insists on such an influence.

Shahar shows that Josephus followed the Polybian and Strabonian view of geography as mainly instructional for the benefit of educated readers in high political and military positions. There are also similarities in descriptive methods such as observing a certain order of description, delineating borders and applying considerations other than purely linear. All of these, together with the emphasis on truth as an essential requirement of an historian, may indicate a general tradition of Polybio-Strabonian spirit along the lines of a similar school of geographical thought. However, they do not in themselves constitute a solid demonstration of a direct relationship between the works of Strabo and Josephus. Shahar next turns to a detailed comparison of passages in the works of the two authors which focus on the same places in Judaea.

Shahar refutes the possibility of a common source for both authors and prefers to explain similarities by a direct relationship. However, the fact that 'Strabo is the only classical author before Josephus who wrote about all these places together' (211) is hardly surprising since Strabo's work is the only surviving one to have surveyed the entire *oikoumene*. Further, why should Josephus look for historiographical details in Strabo's *Geography*? Shahar himself admits that the tradition is general and need not be specifically Strabonian (212). It should also be remembered that so far as we know, Strabo was never present in Judaea whereas Josephus certainly was.

In the detailed Table<sup>4</sup> on 246-50 comparing the description of the environs of the Dead Sea in the works of four authors — Diodorus, Strabo, Josephus and Tacitus — it is worth noting, contrary to Shahar, that there is no close relation between Strabo and Josephus particularly as compared to the closer versions of Diodorus and Tacitus. Shahar himself also rightly states that Strabo and Josephus are far apart in spirit as reflected in their view of the *oikoumene*, Strabo emphasizing its Homeric and Roman character, while Josephus comes from a Roman and Jewish orientation.

Shahar defines the relationship between Strabo and Josephus as a 'hidden dialogue', and one gets the feeling that this dialogue is indeed very well or perhaps too well hidden. In any case, given the foggy conditions, the author has perhaps phrased his thesis in a way which seems too assertive for the circumstances: 'The conclusion we reach from our analysis is, I think, clear and firmly based: Josephus not only followed in Strabo's footsteps when it came to genre, but he actually knew his *Geography* ...' (256).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See for instance A. Diller, *The Textual Tradition of Strabo's Geography*, Amsterdam, 1975, 7-19; 25-165.

<sup>4</sup> There is a repeated unclear and confusing application of tables (missing titles to define vertical cells, lack of suitable titles, non-existent explanatory text): 82-4; 110-12; 119; 152-3; 156-7; 159. The system of sub-titles is also quite confusing as varying fonts and letter-sizes are used, in some cases obscurely, see for example 190 and compare with 207.

<sup>5</sup> A similar undue assertion appears on p. 258. One cannot say that 'there can be no doubt that Strabo based his picture of the empire on Augustus' *Res Gestae*'.

To sum up, despite some stylistic and linguistic shortcomings and although potentially controversial, Shahar's thesis offers provocative implications which are intriguing and contain the seeds of future scholarly discussion.

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R. Talgam and Z. Weiss, *The Mosaics of the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris, Excavated by E.M. Meyers, E. Netzer and C.L. Meyers*. Qedem 44. Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University, 2004. xvi + 136 pp. ISSN 0333 5844.

Z. Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2005. xvi + 360 pp. ISBN 965 221 057 9.

Historians of ancient Palestine should be extremely grateful to the excavators of Sepphoris for the energy with which the work has been pursued over the last few decades, for the stream of spectacular discoveries which so complicate any attempt to write the social and religious history of the region, and in particular to the excavators of the 'House of Dionysos' for the decision that Rita Talgam and Zeev Weiss could go ahead with a detailed report on the main mosaic, in advance of a full publication of the house itself.

The result is the extremely useful Qedem Monograph, devoted to the elaborate mosaic laid in the floor of the *triclinium* of the grand mansion in question, located just south of the theatre. The mosaic consists of a central oblong panel surrounded by 15 further panels, all showing episodes from the myth of Dionysos and Herakles, and all (of the 11 preserved panels at least) carrying Greek inscriptions identifying either persons or events ('Drunkenness', 'Procession', 'Marriage', and so forth). A U-shaped outer set of panels complements this with a representation of worshippers participating in a Dionysiac procession.

The authors survey comparable mosaics from the region, revealing as they do so how fragile, and often circular, the available arguments for dating them are; and then move to a very careful and useful step-by-step analysis of the various elements. The programme of the mosaic is of exceptional complexity, and is not merely unmistakably pagan, but carries a message as to the restraint and moderation of alcoholic consumption by Dionysos compared to the excesses and lack of control of Herakles; and it is also exceptional in combining the representation of myth with that of real-life worship.

While in its detailed execution the mosaic, made with relatively large *tesserae*, is not of the highest order, its very explicit and elaborate mythological design is of exceptional interest, and not least because the excavators date it to the late second or early third century CE — earlier, that is, than two other important 'pagan' mosaics from Sepphoris, the Orpheus mosaic of perhaps the second half of the third century, and the 'Nile Festival' mosaic of perhaps the early fifth: see the same two authors, 'The Nile Festival Building and Its Mosaics', in J.H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East 3* (*JRA* Supp. 49, 2002), 55.

If this dating is correct, and *if* the traditional story, based on later Talmudic sources, that R. Judah ha-Nasi moved to Sepphoris about this time and redacted the Mishnah there, is also correct, then of course a range of fundamental questions about what sort of place Sepphoris was come into play. But here we have to be rather more careful about the historical framework and its multiple ambiguities than the authors are. For a start, the official name of the town in this period was not 'Sepphoris', but 'Diocaesarea' ('Caesarea of Zeus'). As M. Avi-Yonah set out in *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquests (536 BC to AD 640): a Historical Geography* (1966), 108f. — and as the reviewer tried to emphasise in *The Roman Near East* (1993), ch. 10.4, 'Syria