

'Bird's Milk in Samos' Strabo's Use of Geographical Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions

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Why use proverbs in a geographical survey?¹ The *παροιμία* in Greek and the *proverbium* in Latin² are usually sentences or phrases in prose or in metre, concise, witty, and sometimes enigmatic or allegorical. They express a certain experience and common sense, universal truths and popular wisdom. At times they also hold moral and didactic values. Because of their popular origin, proverbs often reflect ancient historical experience and preserve traces of past events and periods. Many sayings relate to specific locations and so certain place-names become proverbial for particular situations, human characteristics and natural conditions. Thus, the particular event and the specific trait become models and examples for general types of similar occurrences.

Popular experience is not the only origin of ancient proverbs. Citations from literature, particularly poetic verses, sometimes become independent of their original context to form a self-contained saying. Among these sayings, many derive from comedies which in their essence imitate and reflect the language and thoughts of common people. Thus, there seems to be a bilateral correlation between poetry and proverbs: poetry, particularly comedy, uses popular expressions reflecting spoken language, and specific verses are detached from their original context to become prevalent expressions.

The popularity of proverbs and their antiquity turn them into a first rate source of interest for historians and anthropologists. They preserve various facts, sometimes through generations, after the original circumstances have long changed or after a certain phenomenon has disappeared. They are remains of the past undamaged by time. Their value for the historian is especially precious because they hold unbiased information which was not inserted consciously and deliberately for historiographical purposes. In this sense they are indeed pieces of 'oral archaeology',³ straightforward and unequivocal in the same sense as material archaeology.

Since Greeks and Romans used proverbs primarily for rhetorical and didactic purposes, proverbs were discussed in works on rhetoric and philosophy. Gradually, paroimiography became prevalent in the form of collections of sayings as handbooks for the

¹ An early Hebrew version of this paper was presented at the annual lecture in memory of Alexander Fuks at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 29 November 2001. I wish to thank Joseph Geiger and the anonymous readers for their helpful comments which have improved this paper.

² There are also γνώμη and ἀπόφθεγμα in Greek and sententia, elogium and dictum in Latin which convey more the inner wisdom, wit and moral in the sayings, but still appear interchangeably. Strabo uses only παροιμία and its derivatives. For definitions see Arist. *Rh.* 2.21 and discussions in Barley (1972); Kindstrand (1978); Huxley (1981); Tzifopoulos (1995); Russo (1997); Shapiro (2000).

³ Huxley (1981) 339.

aid of orators and teachers.⁴ Moral essays and speeches are also the most common contexts in which we find proverbs in Greek literature. They appear mainly in public orations, serving speakers to demonstrate points in their discussion and helping them enhance the effect of their persuasive talent, or in philosophic works where the proverb represents an idea or is the premise for an idea.⁵

So why use proverbs in a geographical survey? In his first-century CE description of the entire habitable world known at the time,⁶ Strabo of Amasia incorporated many proverbs and proverbial expressions. Almost a century ago Joseph Keim (1909) studied the proverbs and expressions used by Strabo. Keim's dissertation was a collection of these proverbs, making a clear distinction between proverbs used as an integral part of Strabo's own style of writing and those applied as grammatically independent expressions in their role as proverbs. The present study focuses on the latter sort; it includes several proverbs and proverbial expressions that escaped Keim's notice, and, more importantly, it discusses this linguistic phenomenon from a slightly different point of departure. By defining these expressions as 'geographical proverbs', always accompanied by explanatory stories, I hope to provide some insights into Strabo's choice of themes which results in his overall geographical narrative.

By 'geographical proverbs' I mean proverbs including a geographical reference — a toponym or an ethnonym — which refer to specific local circumstances at a given period of time. Strabo incorporates almost forty such proverbs and proverbial expressions, all connected to geographical sites.⁷ As a rule, his choice of proverbs does not belong to the proverbial moral facet, because as we shall see Strabo had in mind aspirations other than his readers' moral edification. To most of the proverbs in his work he attaches an explanation and a background story. The numerous occurrences of these vignettes in the *Geography* call for attention. Although they are not presented systematically as part of a fixed structured descriptive plan, they do form peculiar thematic and literary units with stylistic and constructive characteristics.

There are several ways to approach any body of proverbial phrases and particularly in a work such as Strabo's: list them according to the order of their appearance in the work (see table); sort them according to a certain geographical order (that is, in the order of Strabo's work); classify them according to their grammatical formulation whether

⁴ Works of ancient paroimiography include Aristotle's lost *Paroimiai*, collections by Hellenistic scholars such as Aristophanes of Byzantium and Lucillus of Tarrhae, and in Hadrian's time the still extant collection of Zenobius, which was largely dependent on his predecessors. For modern editions see *CPG* and Otto (1962).

⁵ See for instance Plat. *Sph.* 231 c 3; Arist. *Metaph.* 983 a 3; *Pol.* 1255 b 28; Dem. 25.89.

⁶ Main recent studies on Strabo's work and personality are: Prontera (1984); Maddoli (1986); Ambaglio (1990); Syme (1995); Clarke (1997) and (1999); Potheary (1997) and (2002); Engels (1998) and (1999); Dueck (1999) and (2000).

⁷ Usually Strabo uses the word *παροιμία* to define these proverbs. He uses *παροιμάζονται* four times; *παροιμάζεσθαι* once; *παροιμακῶς λεχθέν* once. He uses verbs denoting the oral and popular nature of the proverbs: *εἶρεσθαι*, *λέγεσθαι*, *καλοῦσιν* and *καλοῦμεν* four times. In a few cases he does not add any defining terminology, for instance when citing for the second time a proverb which he had already defined earlier as *παροιμία* or when using a one-word proverbial expression.

complete sentences or phrases;⁸ or arrange them according to their content in terms of what they convey and what they reflect. Since my primary goal for now is to gain some insight into Strabo's way of putting together and presenting his theme, I choose here the last possibility, referring to several 'Strabonian' proverbs particularly in relation to their content.⁹

Many of the proverbs in Strabo preserve traces of historical periods and particular events. Thus, the expression 'Thracian pretence (Θρακία παρεύρεσις)' became proverbial due to an historical incident:

The Thracians, after making a treaty with the Boeotians, attacked them by night when they, thinking that peace had been made, were encamping rather carelessly; and when the Boeotians frustrated the Thracians, at the same time making the charge that they were breaking the treaty, the Thracians asserted that they had not broken it, for the treaty said 'by day', whereas they had made the attack by night. (9.2.4)¹⁰

Although untraceable in time, this one-time circumstance gave birth to an expression applicable in other similar situations. We also see here an example of Strabo's consistent interest in presenting to his readers the background story of popular maxims.

Strabo is sometimes the only source we know for the stories explaining origins of proverbial senses of words and phrases, as is the case with Colophon. Our term *colophon* for the subscript of a manuscript or book comes from the meaning 'an end' in Greek.¹¹ Strabo goes back to the history of the city of Colophon in Asia Minor in order to explain this:

The Colophonians once possessed notable naval and cavalry forces. In the latter they were so far superior to the others that whenever in wars that were hard to bring to an end, the cavalry of the Colophonians served as ally, the war came to an end. From this arose the proverb 'he put Colophon to it (τὸν Κολοφῶνα ἐπέθηκεν)' which is quoted when a sure end is put to an affair. (14.1.28)

When describing Crete in book 10 of the *Geography* Strabo reports:

... The Cretans in earlier times were masters of the sea, and hence the proverb 'the Cretan does not know the sea (ὁ Κρήσις ἀγνοεῖ τὴν θάλατταν)', is applied to those who pretend not to know what they do know, although now the Cretans have lost their fleet. (10.4.17)

⁸ The geographical proverbs in Strabo's *Geography* form five groups distinct in their grammatical construction: (1) coherent, complete, independent sentences which do not require any context; (2) complete, independent sentences needing some background details for their understanding; (3) coherent expressions added in suitable contexts to make up whole sentences; (4) expressions requiring additional knowledge in order to be understood; (5) single words formed from toponyms or ethnonyms indicating local or ethnic traits.

⁹ For a complete list of the proverbs in Strabo's *Geography* see the appended table. I have restricted my discussion to several exemplary proverbs that demonstrate main points in this study.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise specified, the English translations of the texts cited are based on versions of the LCL editions with some adaptation.

¹¹ See for instance Pl. *Euthd.* 301 E; *Lg.* 673 D-E.

This proverb demonstrates the situation in the so-called Minoan period when the Cretans dominated the sea around their island.¹² The entire section discussing Cretan customs and history is based on the writings of Ephorus,¹³ as Strabo specifically says. Ephorus had said that evidence for the past should not be drawn from the present because things and people change; then comes the reference to the proverb. It is not certain whether it was Ephorus or Strabo who first used this proverb in this context, but the natural flow of ideas seems to show that the proverb was probably an integral part of the original discussion in Ephorus. Thus, although in this case we cannot see for sure an independent Strabonian interest in proverbs, we may at least note that Strabo chose to integrate this part in his geographical survey. The proverb itself as a self-contained adage may originate in the poetry of Alcman or Alcaeus.¹⁴ We cannot, however, tell whether the poet was already using it as an independent proverb or whether it was a lyric verse which later became an authorless proverb. Since no poetic origin is mentioned in this section, we may infer that by Strabo's or perhaps even Ephorus' time the saying was already a common and independent phrase.

Ancient seafaring is also reflected in a proverb connected to Cape Malea in southern Laconia. Strabo says that sailors were afraid to sail in its vicinity because of the strong winds, the opposing currents and the two seas — the Aegean and the Ionian — that meet at this point (8.6.20). This dangerous situation is already described in the third book of the *Odyssey*, depicting the return of Menelaus and his fleet after the Trojan War:

When he in his turn, as he passed over the wine-dark sea in the hollow ships, reached in swift course the steep height of Malea, then Zeus, whose voice is borne afar, planned for him a hateful path and poured upon him the blasts of shrill winds, and the waves were swollen to huge size, like mountains. Then he split the fleet in two, bringing some ships to Crete where the Cydonians dwelt about the streams of Iardanus. (3.286-92)¹⁵

The danger in sailing near Malea apparently became famous and is reflected in the phrase quoted by Strabo: 'when you double Malea forget your home (Μαλέας δὲ κάμψας ἐπιλάθου τῶν οἴκαδε)' (8.6.20). No particular source is known for this proverb, which probably emerged from the actual experience of sailors in earlier times. This same experience is the backdrop for the description in the *Odyssey*. The citation of the proverb in this context enlivens the description for Strabo's readers.

Referring again to past events, Strabo says elsewhere that on the banks of the river Sagra in southern Italy a battle occurred between 10,000 Locrians and Rheginians and 130,000 Crotonians. The unexpected happened and the smaller army won the battle. Word of this astounding victory, which seems to have taken place some time between the years 580-576 BCE,¹⁶ spread so quickly that on that very same day it became known at the Olympic games.¹⁷ Since this was an exceptional, incredible and famous event, a proverb emerged regarding matters which are beyond doubt as 'truer than the result in Sagra (ἀληθέστερα τῶν ἐπὶ Σάγρᾳ)' (6.1.10). The expression was perhaps coined in a

¹² The thalassocracy at the time of King Minos is mentioned in Thuc. 1.4.

¹³ Cf. *FGrH* 70 F 149.

¹⁴ Incertum 15 West; Alcman 164 Page.

¹⁵ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 5.192-3.

¹⁶ For the date see Bicknell (1966) 294-301.

¹⁷ Plu. *Aem.* 25.1

comedy as we have evidence — not Strabo himself — connecting it with several comic poets, including Menander.¹⁸ A demonstration of the use of this phrase in a conversation even when the original circumstances are not mentioned occurs in Cicero's *De natura deorum* 3.13. There, Lucilius in the course of his discussion with Cotta says: '... the Greeks actually have a proverbial saying ... when they make an assertion they say it is "more certain than the affair on the Sagra". Surely their authority must carry weight with you?' Here the proverb was used to reflect a certain situation without necessarily indicating that the person who used it knew all about the historical circumstances behind it. I assume that occasionally such proverbs offered an occasion for people to learn about past events but generally they probably became prevalent for their originally secondary sense which in time became their primary meaning. In Strabo, however, we see the proverb used as an integral part of the historical circumstances.

The age of Greek tyranny produced a proverb quoted by Strabo in his description of Samos. The local tyrant Syloson, the brother of Polycrates who had himself been the tyrant of Samos, was appointed to his position by the Persians, and according to Strabo he 'ruled so harshly that the city became depopulated, and from this situation arose the proverb "thanks to Syloson there is plenty of room (ἔκητι Συλοσῶντος εὐρυχωρή)"' (14.1.17).¹⁹ This ironic proverb reflects an age of depopulation in Samos caused either by the mass emigration of inhabitants who were forced to leave the island or by the tyrannical decimation of the opposition. Herodotus too refers to the Samian desolation but does not hold Syloson responsible for it:

The Persian captain Otanes ... of set purpose put away from his memory the command given him at his departure by Darius to kill or enslave no Samian but deliver the island unharmed to Syloson; and he commanded his army to kill all they took, men and boys alike ... the Persians swept it [Samos] clear and delivered it over uninhabited to Syloson. (3.147 and 149)

Strabo's proverb, attributed (not by Strabo) to Anacreon,²⁰ connects the island's desolation specifically with Syloson's actions, and thus does not conform to the Herodotean version. It seems to reflect and preserve a slightly different historical tradition and demonstrates once again the historical information inherent in certain popular proverbs.

Strabo does not explain the circumstances behind the following proverb but uses it rather as a means to distinguish between three identical toponyms. The island of Aegina was also known as Oenone and this reminds Strabo of two Attic demes with similar names. To one of them he attaches an unidentified poetic verse and to the other the proverb: 'to Oenone — the torrent (Οἰνώνη τῆν χάράδραν)' (8.6.16).²¹ The historical-anecdotal basis of this expression, according to the Hadrianic collection of Zenobius, is that

¹⁸ Men. 32 K.-A.; Sophron 169 Kaibel; Alexis 306 K.-A.; Cratinus 488 K.-A.

¹⁹ See Huxley (1981) 341-2, who notes that the phrase in Strabo is in the Ionic dialect and thus may show its local Samian origin.

²⁰ Anacreon 505b Page.

²¹ The name of the demos was Oenoe. Strabo or his source must have confused Oenone and Oenoe so as to change the toponym in the proverb. Meineke saw in the whole excerpt a non-Strabonian gloss. The poetic quotation associated with the other homonymic deme is ascribed to Euripides; thus this proverb may be ascribed to the same poet although it is not counted as a separate Euripidean fragment, see *TGF Eur.* 179.

the people of Oenoe turned the channel of the river in order to water their fields. But the result was heavy damage. Therefore the proverb indicates people who are the authors of their own misfortune.²² In this case we have an example of the way Strabo uses a proverb and a poetic verse as a sort of attribute defining specific sites and differentiating between homonymic places.

'Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth (οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς εἰς Κόρινθόν ἐσθ' ὁ πλοῦς)' (8.6.20) — this proverb, possibly originating in a comedy,²³ contains the idea of something which is beyond the reach of someone. Strabo gives the following explanation:

It was also on account of these women [i.e. temple-slaves, courtesans] that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for the ship-captains easily squandered their money, and hence the proverb.

This general account in Strabo becomes more personal when Aulus Gellius quotes Sotion the peripatetic on the Corinthian courtesan named Lais:

'Lais of Corinth', he says, 'used to gain a great deal of money by the grace and charm of her beauty and was frequently visited by wealthy men from all over Greece; but no one was received who did not give what she demanded, and her demands were extravagant enough'. He says that this was the origin of the proverb common among the Greeks: 'Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth', for in vain would any man go to Corinth to visit Lais who could not pay her price.²⁴

Strabo wrote about 170 years after Corinth was destroyed and the proverb reflects the glorious past of the city. He quotes the same proverb again in his description of Comana in Pontus which he calls Μικρὰ Κόρινθος, 'little Corinth' (12.3.36). In this Asiatic city, too, there were sacred prostitutes, who belonged to the cult of the Cappadocian goddess Ma, identified with the Roman Bellona. Strabo thus associates this proverb also with Comana although it originally referred to Corinth. Here we may point to an original Strabonian touch of expanding the application of a proverb to another site with similar social and cultural conditions.

Horace incorporates an almost identical expression in one of his *epistulae*, in which he advises his friend how to promote himself. In wishing to point out that not every person can associate himself with men of virtue because one needs first to enhance his own *virtus*, he says: 'to have won favour with the foremost men is not the lowest glory. It is not every man's lot to get to Corinth (*non cuivi homini contingit adire Corinthum*)'.²⁵ This example shows that by the time of Horace the originally Greek proverb had already blended into the Latin language, and it also demonstrates the difference between using a proverb for its proverbial value (Horace) and exploiting it for the historical information encapsulated in it, as Strabo regularly does.

Strabo's method of using proverbs and their background story for presenting historical information on surveyed sites is also applied to proverbs reflecting local traits of

²² Zenobius 5.29 (= *CPG* I, p. 131).

²³ See Ar. 928 K.-A.

²⁴ Gel. 1.8.3-4; cf. the verb κορινθιάζομαι as denoting the act of fornication in Ar. 370 K.-A. For this cult phenomenon see Yamauchi (1973).

²⁵ Hor. *Ep.* 1.17.35-6

certain geographical sites or their inhabitants, that is, delivering geographical and ethnographical details. Particular spots become symbols for great abundance or exceptionally bad conditions and certain people are proverbial for typical characteristics.

The expression ‘a Lerne of ills (Λέρνη κακῶν)’ (8.6.8) emerged, Strabo says, from the Argives’ habit of performing ceremonial purifications in the lake of Lerne. Others associated the concentration of ills in this lake with the mythical Hydra, the many-headed monster, who used to live in Lerne and was eventually killed by Heracles.²⁶ Thus, we see how local customs or popular myths give certain places their bad reputation.

Aegina became proverbial for its poverty in natural resources:

Ephorus says that silver was first coined in Aegina ... for the island became a merchant center, since, on account of the poverty of the soil, the people employed themselves at sea as merchants, and hence, petty wares were called ‘Aeginetan merchandise (Αἰγιναία ἐμπολή)’. (8.6.16)

In this case Ephorus may be Strabo’s source for the use of the proverb in this particular context. Again it derives from a specific local case and becomes an example for a general phenomenon or a similar type of material, in this case inferior merchandise.

On another unattractive site Strabo says:

Scolus is a village in the Parasopian country at the foot of mount Cithaeron, a place that is rugged and hardly habitable. From this rose the proverb ‘neither go to Scolus yourself nor follow another there (εἰς Σκῶλον μήτ’ αὐτὸς ἵναι μήτ’ ἄλλω ἔπεσθαι)’. (9.2.23)

More than a century later, Pausanias (9.9.4) reports that the village of Scolus is indeed deserted.

In contrast to Lerne and Scolus stands the island of Samos. Strabo reports that it ‘is not altogether fortunate in regard to wines, but in all other respects it is a blest country, as is clear from the fact that it became an object of contention in war, and also from the fact that those who praise it do not hesitate to apply to it the proverb “it produces even bird’s milk” (φέρει καὶ ὀρνίθων γάλα) as Menander somewhere says’ (14.1.15). Here the unusual wealth of the Samian resources is expressed by a comic comment that anyone would recognize as an exaggeration, since birds do not provide milk. We find a similar expression — hen’s milk (*lac gallinaceum*) — in Latin texts expressing the same idea. Pliny, for instance, says the following: ‘There is a marvellous neatness in the titles given to books among the Greeks. One they entitled ... *Honeycomb*; others called their work ... *Horn of Plenty* so that you can hope to find a draught of hen’s milk in the volume ...’ (NH praef. 24). By this he meant ironically to say that everything, even non-existent things, may be found there.

Back to Strabo, we cannot know whether the original context in Menander²⁷ had to do particularly with Samos; perhaps it denoted a general description of rare and

²⁶ For Lerne as a symbol of malignant anger see *TGrF* adesp. 229.

²⁷ Men. 880 K.-A. The phrase was used earlier in comedy by Aristophanes in *V.* 508; *Av.* 734, 1673 and by Eupolis 411 K.-A. Strabo mentions Menander as a source but not the Aristophanic references. This may indicate a deliberate preference for New Comedy; see my ‘Strabo’s Use of Poetry’, forthcoming. Meineke suspected that the entire section, including the proverb and the allusion to Menander, was not originally Strabonian, and deleted it from his edition of the text. In view of Strabo’s series of proverbs, his method of using them and

exceptional things. Strabo however saw or heard it in a specific reference to Samos from 'those who praise it'. This is a case which reflects well on the process of the creation of certain proverbs: originating in comedy they are applied later, usually detached from the original context, to denote an idea, a concept, or certain characteristics in an altogether different sphere.

Excessive luxury is associated also with the word 'Κανωβισμός' coined from the name of the city of Canopus in Egypt and denoting a life of luxury and extravagance. Strabo says that in Eleusis near Alexandria on the Canobic canal there are 'lodging places and peeping windows for those who wish to engage in revelry, both men and women, and [this] is a beginning, as it were, of the "Canobic" life and the shamelessness there current' (17.1.16). Strabo is the only known author to mention this word. The description in the present tense and the nature of the details supplied seem to indicate that they are based on Strabo's autopsy at a relatively recent time. Perhaps it was Strabo himself who coined this expression.

The temple of Zeus in Dodona was the most ancient oracular shrine in Greece. According to Strabo the people of Corcyra dedicated to it a large copper vessel, above which stood a statue of a man or a boy holding a copper whip. The long whip was attached to a chain on which bones were suspended and when wind moved the bones they hit the copper vessel and 'produced tones such that anyone who measured the time from the beginning of the tone to the end could count to four hundred' (7. fr. 3). Therefore, the two proverbs appearing in this passage — 'the copper vessel in Dodona (τὸ ἐν Δωδώνῃ χαλκεῖον)' and 'the whip of the Corcyraeans (ἡ Κερκυραίων μάστιξ)' — indicate incessant talkers.²⁸

We find a pre-proverbial use of the Dodonian object in Menander:

Give this creature Myrtille the merest touch or simply call nurse, and there's no end to her talking. To stop the gong at Dodona, which they say sounds all day if a passer by lays a finger on it, would be an easier job than to stop her tongue; for it sounds all night as well.²⁹

I define it as a pre-proverbial form because Menander uses the gong as a comparative means to define the excessive jabbering of Myrtille, whereas the same expression as a proper proverb does not act as an element in a comparison but rather as a metaphor to say that a certain person *is* the gong in Dodona.

As for ethnic traits, according to the proverbs in Strabo's *Geography* it is particularly not recommended to speak in the presence of a person from Corcyra, who is a symbol for the prying individual who cannot keep secrets. Strabo relates how the people of

his approach to quotations from poetry in general, I see no reason to doubt that Strabo himself alluded to the proverb and to Menander; in my opinion these words should not be rejected.

²⁸ Cf. Huxley (1981) 336-7. The gong in Dodona originally had a different form which consisted of tripods arranged in a circle so that whenever one of them was hit the sound moved in a circle from one vessel to another to produce a constant hum of bronze. In both forms the sound of bronze was meant to frighten off all evil influences and this long vibration became proverbial. On this see Cook (1902).

²⁹ Men. 65 K.-A.; and see in Callimachus: 'lest it be said that I was but awakening the echoes of the bronze at Dodona', Call. 483 Pfeiffer. Both are translated by Cook (1902).

Corycus in Asia Minor used to spy on merchants who anchored in various ports. They overheard what cargoes they were carrying and where they were heading and then attacked them and plundered their goods. 'Therefore' says Strabo 'we call every person who is a busy-body and tries to overhear private and secret conversations a Corycaean, and we say in a proverb "well then the Corycaean was listening to this (τοῦ δ' ἄρ' ὁ Κωρυκαῖος ἤκροάζετο)" when one thinks that he is doing or saying something in secret, but fails to keep it hidden because of persons who spy on him and are eager to learn what does not concern them' (14.5.2).

This expression was relatively common even before Strabo's time and seems to have appeared mainly in comedies. Dioxippus in his play *Thesaurus* says 'let not the Corycaean overhear me' and Antiphanes had a whole play named Κώρυκος.³⁰ In one of his letters Cicero writes to his friend Atticus (10.18.1): 'henceforward I won't write to you what I am going to do, only what I have actually done. For all the Κωρυκαῖοι seem to have an ear cocked to catch what I say'.

Strabo quotes another expression denoting a physical characteristic of people that became proverbial for the same characteristic in general. Thus, the Myconians (10.5.9) are synonymous with bald people because many of the islanders were bald, as the Corycaean became proverbial for spying and the Thracians for pretence.

There are several instances where Strabo mentions what I define as 'geographical proverbs' without his usual practice of presenting the proverb and focusing on its meaning and origin. These instances are cases in which we learn of such (mostly ethnic) proverbs when Strabo refers to other topics and the proverbs are not his focus. Thus in these few cases the expressions do not form part of a context such as the description of the site or nation relevant to the proverb. However, they should still find their way into our discussion as proverbs which contain popular geographical or ethnographical information.

These are:

1. 'More timid than a Phrygian hare (δειλότερος λαγὼ Φρυγός)' (1.2.30) — an example of double hyperbole: a hare is timid and a Phrygian is considered a coward.³¹

2. 'To own a farm smaller than a Laconian letter (ἐλάττω ἔχειν γῆν τὸν ἀγρὸν ἐπιστολῆς Λακωνικῆς)' (1.2.30) — in the same context and with the same effect of hyperbole as the previous proverb, this time because of the famous brevity of the Laconic style.

3. 'Bergaeian' (Βεργαῖον) and also 'Bergaeian story' (Βεργαῖον διήγημα) (1.3.1; 2.3.5; 2.4.2) — denoting unreliable, ridiculous, absurd stories or evidence, after Antiphanes of Berga who was believed to have invented fabulous stories.³²

4. 'Phoenician lie' (ψεῦσμα Φοινικικόν) (3.5.5) — an expression meaning an unmitigated lie (perhaps derived from Poseidonius, as Strabo mentions him in this context) with reference to some details regarding the Pillars of Heracles (now Gibraltar).

Finally, in describing Scyros Strabo mentions the quality of its goats (9.5.16). There was an expression 'Scyrian goat (αἰξ Σκυρία)', denoting prosperity, but Strabo does not

³⁰ Diox. 2 K.-A.; Antiph. 132-4 K.-A. see also Men. 137 Koerte; Call. 191, 82 Pfeiffer; Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 27.

³¹ See the fourth-century BCE comic verse of Apollodorus 6 K.-A.: 'οὐ Φρύξ εἶμι'.

³² Cf. the verb βεργαίζω.

mention it as such. The information in Strabo may demonstrate the origin of the proverb which is clearly based on the quality of the local goats.³³

Bearing in mind the special characteristics of proverbs and popular sayings and their role in Greek and Roman literature, let us now concentrate on our present focus which is Strabo's use of proverbs or the use of proverbs in a geographical work. Even in a major encyclopaedic work such as the *Geography*, the appearance of a peculiar literary phenomenon more than a few times calls for attention. Strabo invested several years in composing this work and probably also relied on research — reading and travel — he had done earlier.³⁴ He must have come across multitudinous details of all sorts of information and yet he made his choice to include some and omit others. His choice to include geographical proverbs and to attach to most of them a background story seems to derive from a double motivation: thematic and literary.

Thematically, the proverbs hold in them local information, whether historical or geographical, so that they convey to the readers bits of information. Their peculiar form, however, makes them even more valuable than mere descriptive paragraphs: they enhance stylistic and literary variation of an otherwise somewhat monotonous geographical narrative. The stylistic variation is achieved not only by the anecdotal and picturesque character of the proverbs and their accompanying stories but also by the fact that some proverbs are in metre, whether or not we can identify their poetic origin. Strabo has thus removed proverbs from their traditional didactic role. Instead of deriving an idea from a proverb or quoting a proverb to support an idea, he presents proverbs in a geographical context to support his survey of the world. The proverbs are condensed pieces of information put in a neat and catchy form. In this sense Strabo uses proverbs in a new way by quoting them in a geographical context, an innovation made yet more apparent by quoting background stories for the proverbs. The special Strabonian use of proverbs comes across clearly in the different way that Strabo and Horace use the same proverb (see above): Strabo quotes it ('not for every man is the voyage to Corinth') in order to reflect on the city's luxurious life style, whereas Horace uses it for its proverbial meaning to make a didactic point.

Strabo's proverbs fall into two main groups: (1) proverbs preserving traces of historical periods and particular events; (2) proverbs reflecting local traits of places or peoples. The distinction between the groups is not always clear-cut: some proverbs may belong in both categories. Nevertheless, this general division is particularly appropriate in a Strabonian context because Strabo was both a historian and a geographer. Not only was there a traditional connection between history and geography in early Greek literature; Strabo's scholarly career demonstrates his own double interest: he first composed historiographical work(s) according to the best Hellenistic (particularly Polybian) tradition, and later turned to his magnum geographicum opus. Moreover, the *Geography* itself is full of historical references.³⁵

³³ Keim (1909) 23 decided to include it as a Strabonian proverb.

³⁴ See Dueck (1999).

³⁵ On the interrelations between geography and history in Greek thought see the broad discussion in Clarke (1999) esp. 1-76. Strabo's historiographical endeavors are examined in Amaglio (1990) 377-425; Clarke (1999) 245-93; Engels (1999) 76-89; 277-97; Dueck (2000) 69-75.

Most of the proverbs deal with extreme situations and exceptional occurrences and therefore provide a comparative standard in similar circumstances: unusual victories; outstandingly good or bad physical conditions; extreme dangers. This was the reason for their emergence in the first place and their preservation in the collective memory for denoting similar extreme circumstances. From Strabo's point of view these proverbs with their extremities and oddities are means to characterize certain sites on the basis of special local occurrences. Exceptions are therefore ingredients in Strabo's aspiration to enrich his descriptive style and to enhance his readers' interest.³⁶

It is also evident that the proverbs in Strabo's *Geography* refer to sites in the Hellenistic world, mainly in Greece proper, Asia Minor and Southern Italy. This geographic spread also explains the occurrence (and absence) of proverbs in certain books of the work.

Where did Strabo find these proverbs? To answer this question we should first distinguish between the proverbs themselves and their background stories. Let us begin with the expressions. Strabo himself does not indicate his proverbs' origin. In several instances we may assume that a proverb appeared in the writings of one of Strabo's predecessors, for instance Ephorus, although we cannot always tell for sure in which context. Another possibility is that Strabo knew them in their original wider poetic context or else that they had become common as independent proverbs. A third option is that proverbs were accepted through oral transmission of popular sayings in everyday speech. The last possibility, and in my opinion the least probable, is that Strabo consulted collections of proverbs, choosing from them those suiting his purpose.

The suggestion that Strabo may have consulted ancient collections of proverbs does not seem very plausible, in view of his unsystematic incorporation of proverbs in the *Geography*. The inclusion of the proverbs throughout the work is random and makes the impression that Strabo incorporated them by way of association and according to what he remembered as relevant to specific sites as he was writing. This also suits and emphasizes the popularity of these proverbs both in the sense of wide distribution and common nature. Therefore I tend to assume that Strabo interwove the expressions in a more associative way.

Strabo reveals only once the source of the proverbs he quotes. This probably has to do with the fact that the proverbs had become independent of their original context — if it was a literary one — and Strabo treats them as such and does not search for their origin, whether oral and popular or poetic. However, through a relatively simple search one may detect possible literary origins for some of the proverbs Strabo quotes. It is worth noting that many of them are ascribed to the poets and may come from tragedy, comedy, elegy or lyric poetry. Here we may again propose two possibilities: either a captivating poetic verse was in time absorbed in the colloquial language and became an independent proverb detached from its original context or else the independent self-contained proverbs were earlier than certain pieces of poetry and poets, too, like later authors, incorporated them in their poetry. There is no definite way to determine the right alternative for each case; it may depend on the extent to which a certain expression is linguistically

³⁶ Note also that Strabo's affiliation with the Stoic school probably influenced his interest in θαυμαστά and thus the peculiar and the extreme are his choice. On Strabo's Stoic tendencies see Engels (1999) 40-44; Dueck (2000) 62-9.

simple and colloquial (indicating a possible oral origin) or elaborate and picturesque (indicating a possible poetic origin). Even when the name of Menander emerges in the context of some of the Strabonian proverbs, we should bear in mind that Strabo does not himself mention, and probably does not know, the origin of his quoted proverbs. The Menandrian parallels thus seem to indicate that comedy also exploited popular aphorisms and did not necessarily create them.

The stories behind the proverbs are another matter. Strabo is consistent in his habit of not merely quoting expressions and sayings, but also of attaching the explanation for their origin. These explanations suggest that Strabo does not assume that his readers knew the maxims. They are also an important part of what seems to be Strabo's intent in his use of proverbs. The proverbs, and particularly their background, contribute to the central goal of the entire work: description of the *oikoumene*. Thus, all the proverbs are connected with sites, and the explanation adds to the information — historical, ethnic, topographical — about these places. The stories together with the proverbs are a thematic unit, for the explanation is an integral part of the proverb and adds to the descriptive mosaic. The background stories function both as explanations and as entertainment, enhancing the variation of style and content in the work. Strabo presents a stylistic approach peculiar to him: instead of mentioning another river, animal or plant, as he does throughout his vast survey, he chooses this stylistic variation, which stands out of the flow of the text and to some extent decorates it.³⁷

Some of the stories behind the proverbs appear in the Hadrianic collections of proverbs, such as the one compiled by Zenobius, which Strabo obviously could not know. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that he invented them even when, as in the case of Colophon, he is the only known source for an explanation. Strabo's sources for the anecdotes may be either literary or oral, and in any case he probably did extra research for the stories. In cases where we cannot find an earlier allusion to a certain story we may assume with caution that Strabo was the first to put it in writing, although there is always the possibility that an earlier, lost source has escaped our knowledge. It is noteworthy that when we find different versions of background stories, the Strabonian version is almost always the one preserved in the twelfth-century writings of Eustathius.³⁸

A further observation related to Strabo's use of proverbs has to do with the relationship between author and reader. Strabo clearly did not assume that all his readers knew the stories behind the proverbs. This has to do with the particular nature of Strabo's intended readership. As he himself declares towards the beginning of his geographical work, he aimed at both educated and knowledge-seeking Greeks and militarily oriented Roman generals (1.1.16; 1.1.23). Thus, while he could assume that some of his Greek readers, and perhaps even some of his Roman audience had heard of the proverbs (as we saw that Cicero, Horace and Gellius all used some of these expressions), he probably could not take for granted their familiarity with the circumstances behind the birth of these proverbs. Even a man well-educated in Hellenistic traditions could have used a proverb without necessarily knowing its origin. The proverbs were more than

³⁷ For the decorative motivation see my 'Strabo's Use of Poetry,' forthcoming.

³⁸ For Eustathius' dependence on Strabo, see Pritchard (1934) and for the Eustathian connection to Strabo's proverbs see Keim (1909) on each proverb.

decorations for Strabo: they were neatly arranged coloured capsules of information on various places around the Hellenistic world.

This relates to the curriculum of studies both in the Greek and Roman worlds. In both societies, beside the scientific subjects of geometry and astronomy, the literary texts recited and explained were primarily poetic. Prose was secondary and in it several historians were read, particularly Herodotus, Xenophon, Hellanicus and Thucydides in Greek and Sallust by the Romans.³⁹ Other means for acquiring knowledge of past events were anecdotes and exempla incorporated in orations and philosophical treatises and, as Strabo shows us, proverbs and their origins.

The overall application of proverbs in the *Geography* is therefore an important part of Strabo's narrative technique. Like the numerous poetic citations in the work,⁴⁰ the proverbs, too, help Strabo to enrich his long detailed survey with pleasing and sometimes humorous details. The result is a series of literary sign posts, so to speak, which Strabo puts 'beside the road (παροίμιας)'⁴¹ from site to site in the course of his survey of the world.

Bar Ilan University

Geographical Proverbs in Strabo

1.2.30	More timid than a Phrygian hare δειλότερος λαγῶ Φρυγός
1.2.30	To own a farm smaller than a Laconian letter ἐλάττω ἔχειν γῆν τὸν ἀγρὸν ἐπιστολῆς Λακωνικῆς
1.3.1 and 2.4.2	Bergaeian Βεργαῖον
2.3.5	Bergaeian story Βεργαῖον διήγημα
3.5.5	Phoenician lie ψεῦσμα Φοινικικόν
6.1.5	The hero of Temesa presses ὁ ἥρωσ ὁ ἐν Τεμέσῃ ἐπίκειται
6.1.10	Truer than the result in Sagra ἀληθέστερα τῶν ἐπὶ Σάγρα

³⁹ See Marrou (1965) 248-56; 404-6.

⁴⁰ See my 'Strabo's Use of Poetry,' forthcoming.

⁴¹ On this etymology of the word παροιμία, see Beiler (1936) 241-7 (a discussion of the word proverbium appears on pp. 247-50). There is evidence for publicly displayed proverbs: for instance, the oracular sayings in Delphi, and the scheme of Hipparchus to educate the Athenian public by setting up figures of Hermes along the roads and inscribing on them wise sayings in an elegiac form as testimonies of his wisdom. Such sayings were 'walk with just intent' and 'deceive not a friend'; see Pl. *Hipparch.* 228 D-E. An inscription from Miletopolis near Cyzicus dated c. 300 BCE carried 55 short maxims which read 'help your friends', 'avoid evil', 'love friendship', 'hate lies' etc.; see Hasluck (1907) 61-3. These examples, however, reflect the public presentation of gnomai with moral content rather than παροιμιαί as distinguished by Aristotle.

- 6.1.12 The last of the Crotonians was the first among all other Greeks
Κροτωνιατῶν ὁ ἔσχατος πρῶτος ἦν τῶν ἄλλων Ἑλλήνων
- 6.1.12 More healthful than Croton
ὑγιέστερον Κρότωνος
- 6.2.4 The tithe of the Syracusans would not be sufficient for them
οὐκ ἂν ἐξικνοῖτο αὐτοῖς ἡ Συρακουσσίων δεκάτη
- 7 fr. 3 The copper vessel in Dodona
τὸ ἐν Δωδώνῃ χαλκείον
- 7 fr. 3 The whip of the Corcyraeans
ἡ Κερκυραίων μᾶστιξ
- 7 fr. 8 Corcyra is free, relieve yourself where you will
ἐλευθέρα Κόρκυρα, χεζ' ὅπου θέλεις
- 7 fr. 33 A Datum of good things⁴²
Δάτος ἀγαθῶν
7. fr. 36 A Datum of good things
Δάτος ἀγαθῶν
- 8.6.8 A Lerne of ills
Λέρνη κακῶν
- 8.6.16 To Oenone – the torrent
Οἰνώνῃ τὴν χαράδραν
- 8.6.16 Aeginetan merchandise
Αἰγιναία ἐμπολή
- 8.6.20 When you double Malea, forget your home
Μαλέας δὲ κάμψας ἐπιλάθου τῶν οἴκαδε
- 8.6.20, 12.3.36 Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth
οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς εἰς Κόρινθόν ἐσθ' ὁ πλοῦς
- 8.6.23 Corinth is both beetle browed and full of hollows
Κόρινθος ὄφρυᾶ τε καὶ κοιλαίνεται
- 9.2.4 Thracian pretence
Θρακία παρεύρεσις
- 9.2.11 When the lightning flashes through Harma
ὀπότεν δι' Ἄρματος ἀστράψῃ
- 9.2.23 Neither go to Scolus thyself nor follow another thither
εἰς Σκῶλον μὴτ' αὐτὸς ἵναι μὴτ' ἄλλω ἔπεσθαι
- 10.4.17 The Cretan does not know the sea
ὁ Κρής ἀγνοεῖ τὴν θάλατταν
- 10.5.9 All beneath Myconos alone
πάνθ' ὑπὸ μίαν Μύκονον
- 10.5.9 Myconians
Μυκονοῖοι
- 11.2.16 To Phasis, where for ships is the farthestmost run
εἰς Φᾶσιν, ἔνθα ναυσίαν ἔσχατος δρόμος

⁴² In this context Strabo quotes another expression which is not originally connected specifically with Datum and thus is not considered here as a 'geographical proverb': 'spools of good things (ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθῖδα)' (7 fr. 33 and 36).

- 12.3.10 Whoever had no work to do walled Armene
ὅστις ἔργον οὐδὲν εἶχεν Ἄρμένην ἐτείχισεν
- 12.4.4, 8.2 Apart are the boundaries of the Mysians and the Phrygians
χωρὶς τὰ Μυσῶν καὶ Φρυγῶν ὀρίσματα
- 14.1.15 [Samos] produces even bird's milk
φέρει καὶ ὀρνίθων γάλα
- 14.1.17 Thanks to Syloson there is plenty of room
ἔκητι Συλοσῶντος εὐρυχωρή
- 14.1.28 He put Colophon to it
τὸν Κολοφῶνα ἐπέθηκεν
- 14.1.30 Abdera, beautiful colony of the Teians
Ἄβδηρα καλὴ Τηίων ἀποικία
- 14.1.32 Well then, the Corycaean was listening to this
τοῦ δ' ἄρ' ὁ Κωρυκαῖος ἠκροάζετο
- 14.1.32 A Corycaean
Κωρυκαῖος
- 14.5.2 Merchant, sail in, unload your ship, everything has been sold
Ἔμπορε, κατάπλευσον, ἐξελοῦ, πάντα πέπραται
- 17.1.16 Canobic (life)
Κανωβισμός

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