

Landscape and the Memory of Conflict in Strabo's Italy

Strabo's *Geography* opens with a defense of the genre's utility, in which he argues that rulers and generals—anyone who needs to understand the physical landscape as the setting for the human affairs in which they participate—will benefit from a thorough understanding of the land's features and history, and gives examples of military campaigns won or lost due to detailed knowledge of the local topography (1.1.16-17). This link between geography and political or military affairs is perhaps best illustrated by Strabo's discussion of his own homeland in Asia Minor: scholars have been able to use various autobiographical details offered in the *Geography* to reconstruct Strabo's family history of negotiating tensions between the Mithridatic dynasty and Rome in the complex shifting political landscape of Asia Minor (Bowersock 2005, Cassia 2000, Dueck 2000), but he displays a clear awareness of the political and historical significance of the landscapes he describes as they relate to local struggles with Rome's expanding power throughout the Mediterranean, including Italy (Biffi 1988, Migliario 2017).

Strabo's closing remarks on peninsular Italy at the conclusion of Book 6 explicitly connect Roman successes with specific geographic features of the Italian peninsula that they have “conquered and established as a base for their general supremacy” (6.4.2 τῶν κατασχόντων αὐτὴν καὶ κατεσκευασμένων ὀρμητηριον πρὸς τὴν σύμπασαν ἡγεμονίαν); he claims that the Italian peninsula has been at peace since it was subjected to Roman control, though it has been subject to repeated episodes of internal conflict (6.4.2 διαστᾶσαν πολλάκις). Although the Italian landscape had not witnessed major conflict for decades at the time of Strabo's death ca. 24 CE, this paper argues that the memory of that warfare persists in Strabo's description of Italy, populating his topographic narrative with reminders of the bloody history of clashes between

Romans and Italians. Scholarly discussions of Strabo's writing in the context of the Augustan age and early Empire have highlighted the role that geographic writing played in establishing the new status quo between Rome and the rest of the Mediterranean world during this rapidly changing era (e.g. Engels 1999, Braund 2005). Strabo's perspective, shaped by his family background in the political elite of a distant province, allows him to speak about this new world as an outsider to Roman Italy, but one who nevertheless came to Rome with privileged access and knowledge (Dandrow 2017, Dueck 2000, Madsen 2017).

This paper discusses Strabo's association of specific features of the natural topography and the built environment of Italy with sites of conflict and argues that his narrative creates a version of Italy which has literally been reshaped by repeated episodes of violence between Romans and Italians. As a result, these features of the natural and built landscape reflect spatially specific memories of those conflicts that persisted despite decades of Roman hegemony: sites associated with the Social War, the defection of allied Italian communities to Hannibal, and cities that long-term resistance to Roman conquest, have all shaped Strabo's landscape and narrative. For example, Strabo identifies places where the nature of habitation has changed because of a history of disputes with Rome: he claims that there had previously been a metropolis at Picentia, but the Picentes were driven out and compelled to live in small villages by the Romans after their defection to Hannibal, while the fortification of Salernum was intended to create a Roman watchpost over the territory to deter future aggression (5.4.13).

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