

Strabo's Wandering Sense Organs

Over the history of Strabonic scholarship there has been considerable concern to demonstrate the extent of Strabo's travels and thus the extent to which his geographical writing was based on personal autopsy rather than second hand scholarship (for example: Roller 2014; Dueck 2000; Clarke 1997; Wallace 1979; Waddy 1963). Strabo's own broad-brush description of the extent of his travels at 2.5.11 is often discussed and his work minutely examined for evidence of the author's personal experience. However, the immediately subsequent lines of 2.5.11 are often not considered.

In those lines, Strabo briefly develops an epistemology of geographic knowledge which prioritises hearing as a more important means of collecting geographical information than sight. The most obvious inference to be drawn from this prioritisation of second hand knowledge to autopsy is that Strabo had a pragmatic assessment of his project. Could he hope to personally survey all the territory covered by his world-spanning geography? No; he was reliant on informants. Waddy (1963, 296) asserts: "Strabo was an honest man, and he knew and admitted that his books were mainly compiled out of other people's books."

This practical limit on Strabo's autopsy no doubt played a part, but in his brief epistemology of geographical knowledge we need not see Strabo concealing a practical necessity behind the rhetoric of philosophy. Rather, Strabo's epistemology reflects a Stoic conception of knowledge acquisition in keeping with his education in and self-identification with that school.

In this paper, I examine Strabo's theory of knowledge acquisition in the light of Stoic epistemological concepts (especially sense-impressions, assent, judgement and *katalepsis*). I argue that Strabo's Stoicism allows him to place his sources in the role of sense organs and reserve judgement regarding their observations for his own mind. This conception of knowledge

acquisition detaches his ability to observe space from his body, granting an inherent sense of mobility and action to his sensory perception, his conception of space, and his narrative.

Bibliography

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