

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

STRABO'S REMARKS ON THE JEWS

by

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This article discusses the sources which Strabo used for his discussion of the Jews in his *History* and *Geography*. After a brief résumé of his life and background, there follows an examination of the sources he used for the *History* (Timagenes, Asinius Pollio, Poseidonius and Polybius) as well as a description of how Josephus made use of him and Nicolaus of Damascus. Stern states that probably much material in Josephus not explicitly ascribed to Strabo came from his works. The differences between the political outlook of Strabo and Nicolaus act as sign-posts, though it is impossible to define any detail with exactitude.

As Nicolaus was a Greek citizen of Damascus and a confidant of Herod, he had a definitely negative attitude towards the Hasmonean dynasty, which had tried to conquer his home-town, and which Herod had overthrown. Moreover, Nicolaus distinguishes himself as being the only Hellenistic writer of his time to make use of biblical source for his historical accounts, Strabo, on the other hand, is shown: 1) to have held a more balanced view of the Hasmoneans; 2) to have been positively impressed by the achievements of the Jews; 3) to have held the untraditional opinion that the Jews were Egyptian in origin; and 4) to have been ignorant of the details of Jewish religious practice,

In proof of 1) three examples are offered: the reign of Aristobulus I, who is described as a definitely positive character (as opposed to Josephus's account of Aristobulus, borrowed from Nicolaus); Hyrcanus II, described by Josephus (again drawing on Nicolaus) as a weak character under the influence of Antipater (Herod's father)-Strabo, however, borrowed from the works of Hysicrates and Asinius Pollio, describing Hyrcanus as militarily active in Mithridates's invasion of Egypt in 47 B.C; and finally, the execution of Antigonos, a popular figure with the Jews and rival to Herod, but damned by Josephus (drawing on Nicolaus) for being a coward. In support of 2), Stern points to Strabo's account of how Cleopatra III's only loyal supporters were amongst the Jews in her struggles against her son, Ptolemy Lathyrus; that the Jews held an influential position in Cyrenean society

* in: מחקרים בתולדות ישראל ובלשון העברית; ספר זכרון לגדליה אלון
(Studies in the History of Israel and Hebrew Language; Gedalya Allon Memorial Volume)
Published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1970.

and that they had spread throughout the whole world, especially in Cyrene and Egypt, where they had gained much power. In support of 4), the example is given of Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, described in the *Antiquities* as having taken place on a fast-day and not on the Sabbath. Josephus repeats this mistake of Strabo's but does not make it in the *Wars*, for which he used Nicolaus as a source. This is explained as another of those confusions frequently made by Gentiles of past times in associating the Sabbath with a fast – a mistake which Nicolaus would not have made.

Having established these 'trade marks' of Strabo's *History*, as preserved in Josephus, Stern examines the *Geography*, its date and place of composition. He shows that the sources of Strabo's remarks on the Jews in it date back to the second century B.C., as the fragments describe the ethnic groups of Palestine of that period – the Idumeans and Ashdodites (both of whom had lost their political independence by the second century) and the Gazaites (who lost theirs about 96 B.C.) are described by Strabo as contemporary peoples. In his description of the coast of Phoenicia, Strabo is shown to be even more anachronistic: of the chief ports, he mentions Ptolemais but omits Caesarea's port (called by the old name of Strato's Tower) and Dora. Stern suggests that Strabo may have used Artimedorus of Ephesus as a source. His description of Jewish settlement of the Carmel and the Sharon also better fits a state of affairs in the Hasmonean period. Moreover, his remarks about Gaza, which he always described as in ruins, does not fit its flourishing state in the Augustan period. Stern concludes that this whole section on the Phoenician coastland antedates the Augustan period,

He then examines the history and sources of Strabo's theory of the Egyptian origin of the Jews and of Moses's foundation of a religion of pure monotheism with its subsequent degeneration in the hands of later Jews. Discussing Hecataeus's similar remarks on Moses and his God (that he surrounds the earth as the sky), Stern sees no difference in opinion between them, save that the former ascribes the degeneration to social causes and the latter to political ones. Direct borrowing from Hecataeus is not necessary as it is possible that Strabo borrowed from an early Stoic. Strabo's admiration for Moses's theology is compared to that of Marcus Terentius Varro, who commended the pristine Roman cult and that of Moses, as neither worshipped images. Earlier Stoics, it is mentioned, also abominated images of the gods in worship. Stern compares Strabo's theories to those of Celsus, Manetho and Cheremon, who also thought Moses an Egyptian priest, but in contrast to them, Strabo had a positive attitude towards the Jews.

He then recapitulates the scholarly discussion on the last point. Much material is cited to evidence that Strabo depended on Poseidonious, whether directly or indirectly. Stern sees no reason why Strabo could not have acquired this information from Poseidonious himself, as he did elsewhere, though he himself does not accept the ascription of the Moses-passage in

Strabo to Poseidonius's *History* or a special monograph by him, there being no sound evidence for either, and moreover, the passage under discussion mentions a character, Decaeneus, who lived around 40 B. C., after Poseidonius's death. In his summary, Stern sees no positive proof that the passage originated in Poseidonius at all, or in a Jew, as others have claimed. His own suggestion is that the theory is one of Strabo's own making and that he formed a syncretism of theories he found in Egypt with general attitudes to religion and prayer of his own. Strabo's source for Pompey's invasion is ascribed to Theophrastus of Mytilene. The paper ends with an appraisal of Strabo's position in the Jewish and Hellenistic world.

Summary by Mervyn Lewis