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STRABO'S CILICIANS*

I. GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS IN STRABO'S CILICIA

Strabo's description of Cilicia confronts us with two major problems. First of all, this region is naturally divided into two sections which are completely different from a geographic point of view: the mountains of the Taurus (Toros Dağları) on the one hand, the alluvial plains of modern Çukurova on the other, called respectively Tracheia (that is "rugged") and Pedias (that is "plain") Cilicia. Secondly, as regards its inhabitants, it is quite impossible to establish a decisive line of boundary between Cilicians and their western and northern neighbours, as the mountains represent a physical, not an anthropic border-line. In general terms, one can say that the Strabonian "construction" of this region points out with particular clearness the difficulties involved in a kind of political geography which, like Strabo's, intends to satisfy at the same time the conditions of the physical, "scientific", geography.

Beginning with the second problem, the mountain Cilicians (Tracheiotae) dwelt both on the north-western and on the south-eastern sides of the Taurus mountains (respectively, inside, and outside the Taurus, as the Greeks said)¹; so, as the Taurus line is the east-west axis of the whole Asian continent (including Anatolia), the Tracheiotae are dealt with in different places of Strabo's *Geography*². In any

case, the fullest description of both areas of the region is at the end of Anatolia, that is nearly at the end of the fourteenth book³ (which closes with Cyprus), after Strabo has described Pamphylia.

Here is the beginning of Strabo's text (in H.L. Jones' Loeb translation, which we will use also in the rest of this text): "As for Cilicia outside the Taurus, one part of it is called Tracheia and the other Pedias. As for Tracheia, its coast is narrow and has no level ground, or scarcely any; and, besides that, it lies at the foot of the Taurus, which affords a poor livelihood as far as its northern side in the region of Isaura and of the Homonadeis as far as Pisidia; and the same country is also called Tracheiotis, and its inhabitants Tracheiotae. But Cilicia Pedias extends from Soli and Tarsus as far as Issus, and also to those parts beyond which, on the northern side of the Taurus, Cappadocians are situated; for this country consists for the most part of plains and fertile land. Since some parts of this country are inside the Taurus and others outside it, and since I have already spoken of those inside it, let me now speak of those outside it, beginning with the Tracheiotae"⁴.

In a preliminary presentation of the general characteristics of Asia, in the second book of his *Geography*, Strabo seems to propose a tripartition, rather than a simple bipartition in "inside" and "outside the Taurus". Indeed, he says that a number of peoples, including the

* We don't consider here the so-called "Homeric Cilicians", even if Strabo speaks of them in more than one place (e.g. XIII, 1, 7; 60; XIV, 4, 1; 5, 21); in fact, this population, like so many other Asian peoples which appear in the *Iliad*, is important for Homer's, not for Strabo's, geography (I have dealt with this subject in a recent book: P. Desideri-M. Jasink, *Cilicia-Da Kizzuwatna alla conquista macedone*, Firenze, 1990, 27-28 1a; refer to this book also as regards bibliography on the geography of Cilicia: see especially Parte I, cap. 1, 1).

1) Strab., II, 5, 31; XI, 1, 2; 12, 1.

2) In fact, as we will see soon, they are mentioned in the Strabonian description of Cappadocia, of Pamphylia, of Lycaonia, of Pisidia.

3) XIV, 5.

4) XIV, 5, 1.

Cilicians, live in the mountains, in this case considered as an intermediate region between the "inside" and "outside" regions. At the end of the same paragraph, however, "the Cilicians, both the others and the Tracheiotae"⁵, appear among the peoples "outside the Taurus"⁶.

Finally, just at the beginning of his description of Asia in the eleventh book, Strabo notes that in many places the Taurus has "as great a breadth as three thousand stadia" (that is more than five hundred kilometres); therefore some peoples (among which, once again, the Cilicians) "are comprised within the vast width of the mountains". But here he formulates a different principle of exposition, which runs as follows: "those which lie for the most part in its (i.e. Taurus') northerly parts must be assigned there, and those in its southern part to the southern, while those which are situated in the middle of the mountains should, because of the likeness of their climate, be assigned to the north, for the climate in the middle is cold, whereas that in the south is hot"⁷.

As a matter of fact, Cilician mountain dwellers (sometimes called Tracheiotae) are mentioned by Strabo nearly every time he deals with populations and regions of central and southern Anatolia. They are the southern and south-western neighbours of Cappadocians⁸, even if "Cilicia" is also the name of one of the ten "strategies" of that region⁹. They also "lie above" Lycaonia, and occasionally claim sovereignty over this area¹⁰. The Pamphylians are defined as "sharing much in the traits of the Cilician stock of people"¹¹, and also the Pisidians are considered similar to the Cilicians, as regards way of life and political organization¹². The Lycians, on the other hand, are completely different from Pamphylians and Cilicians, notwithstanding the striking similarities of the geographic features of all these regions¹³; Strabo reaffirms here, al-

though in negative terms, the paradigmatic value of Cilician (and Pamphylian)¹⁴ life and manners.

Summing up, Strabo's Tracheiotae emerge as one of the major ethnic entities of Anatolia. One can also say that Strabo is right in criticizing Ephorus, at the end of his Cilician section, for speaking of Cilicians only as a coastal, not as an inland *and* coastal, population¹⁵. In fact, it is fair to admit that Ephorus probably didn't have good information (nor a keen interest, indeed), as regards the interior of Anatolia. But one must also recognize that many new things happened during the three centuries which separate Strabo from Ephorus, so that the political scene of south-eastern Anatolia had completely changed in the meantime: without the collapse of the Persian and the Macedonian Empires it is of course impossible to explain the new importance acquired by the populations of inland Cilicia, which Strabo correctly reflects in his description of Anatolia. In fact, it is easy to realize that Strabo's Cilicia Tracheia is, first of all, both in its inland and coastal parts, the historical and political region of piracy and brigandage; phenomena which had much less importance, or no importance at all, in the periods of strong "imperial" control in the whole area.

We can now better understand the meaning of the preliminary division stressed by Strabo between Tracheia and Pedias Cilicia (by the way, it must be noted that the toponym Pedias appears here for the first time in our sources)¹⁶. Substituting the mountain/plain for the inland/coast division Strabo strengthens the political element of his geographic description. Actually, as is well known, he identifies two basically different ways of human life, the mountain- and the plain-dwellers', which, according to him, have a decisive influence on the economic, social and

5) For this expression compare XIV, 3, 1 (where "the Tracheian Cilicians" are distinguished from "the other Cilicians, living round the Gulf of Issus").

6) II, 5, 32.

7) XI, 1, 4.

8) XII, 1, 1.

9) XII, 1, 4 (comp. 2, 7). This is surely a relic of the Herodotean "Great Cilicia" (or the Persian Cilicia), which reached as far as the Halys river (see the forthcoming book of n. 1).

10) XII, 6, 1; 4.

11) XII, 7, 2; see also XIV, 5, 5.

12) XII, 7, 3.

13) XIV, 3, 2.

14) Which is the same: see above, n. 12.

15) XIV, 5, 24.

16) On this point see my *Le città della pianura di Cilicia in Strabone* (14, 5, 8-19), in *Hestiasis - Studi di tarda antichità offerti a Salvatore Calderone*, Messina, II, 1986 (1988), 331-346 (331).

political conditions of each population¹⁷. From this point of view Cilicia, due to the aforesaid variety of its orographic situation, is a very interesting region, as it represents the incidence of geographic differences on one and the same people: the mountain-dwellers are at the top of civility and civilization. But geography alone cannot explain everything: we are now going to see that Strabo also stresses the role played by historical conditions in shaping the character of peoples.

II. PIRACY AS THE WAY OF LIFE OF CILICIAN MOUNTAIN-DWELLERS

Immediately after the introductory paragraph, cited above, of his Cilicia, commenting on Coracesium, the first coastal stronghold outside Pamphylia, Strabo tackles its central political problem: piracy and brigandage. Coracesium, Strabo says, was a landing place of Diodotus Tryphon, one of the first great pirates of this area. Continuing, he outlines, rapidly but very clearly, the history of Cilician piracy from its beginning to its end, dealing with its causes and circumstances¹⁸. So he gives us what he calls a "brief digression", truly the richest and most useful representation now available of piracy in Hellenistic times.

Tryphon is considered by Strabo, because of his revolt against the Syrian kings, the main founder of Cilician piracy, but he stresses also other, more profound responsibilities. First of all, "the worthlessness" of the Syrian kings themselves, of whose reign Cilicia was a part. In the second place, Strabo points out an economic motive: "the exportation of slaves induced most of all (the Tracheiotae) to engage in this evil business, since it proved most profitable". But the economic advantages depended, in their turn, on a political situation: "the cause of this

was the fact that the Romans, having become rich after the destruction of Carthage and Corinth, used many slaves; and the pirates, seeing the easy profit therein, bloomed forth in great numbers, themselves not only going in quest of booty but also trafficking in slaves".

The political scene is now complete: also the kings of Egypt and Cyprus, the republic of Rhodes, and even the Romans had their share of responsibility, as they tolerated and profited from the development of piracy, besides contributing to the general conditions which favoured the phenomenon. At the end, however, "the Romans were forced to destroy them by war and with an army, although they had not hindered their growing power"; so in conclusion Strabo can declare that "it is hard to condemn the Romans of negligence", as they had even more serious problems, both in the West and at home, in the same period.

Further on, dealing with Elaeussa, an island lying close to the mainland right next to Corycus, Strabo makes some more comments on piracy, stressing this time the natural opportunities the region affords for this kind of activity, especially as regards the useful connexions between sea and land operations, that is between piracy proper and brigandage: "the region was naturally well adapted to the business of piracy both by land and by sea - by land, because of the height of the mountains and the large tribes that live beyond them, tribes which have plains and farm-lands that are large and very easily overrun, and by sea, because of the good supply, not only of shipbuilding timber, but also of harbours and fortresses and secret recesses"¹⁹.

In fact, this passage immediately recalls other Strabonian comments in different places of his description of South-Anatolian regions, such as XII, 6, 2 (referring to the military campaigns by P. Servilius called Isauricus)²⁰ and XII, 7, 2 (Pamphylian raids in the northern sides

17) See especially XIII, 1, 25 (with reference to Plato's *Nomoi*), with the comments by E.C. Van der Vliet, *L'ethnographie de Strabon; ideologie ou tradition?*, in F. Prontera (ed.), *Strabone-Contributi allo studio della personalità e dell'opera*, I, Perugia,

18) XIV, 5, 2. The best reference book on ancient piracy is still H.A. Ormerod's *Piracy in the Ancient World - An Essay in Mediterranean History*, Chicago, 1967 (= 1924); Ormerod devotes an entire chapter (VI) to "The pirates of Cilicia" (for the history of Diodotus Tryphon see pp. 204-205). Nearly twenty years ago, in his important study *Poseidonios on Problems of the Roman Empire* (JRS, LV, 1965, 40-53), H. Strasburger showed convincingly that most ethnographical and historical information, including Strabo's on Cilician piracy, goes back ultimately to Poseidonios' *Histories* (see especially 42-44). This view has since been widely accepted by scholars (see e.g. J. Malitz, *Die Historien des Poseidonios*, München, 1983, 134 ff.; 164 ff.). It must however be admitted that Strabo develops, using Poseidonian materials, a geographic discourse of his own, which it is our intent to trace here.

19) XIV, 5, 6.

20) "He subjected these places (i.e. Isaurian regions, on the northern sides of Taurus) to the Romans and also destroyed most of the strongholds of the pirates that were situated on the sea" (74 B.C. On this campaign see Ormerod, *o.c.*, 214-215; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Rome, Pamphylia and Cilicia, 133-170 B.C.*, JRS, LXVI, 1976, 1-14 (11). It deserves mention that Strabo stresses his

of Taurus)²¹, whereas other passages seem to imply the possibility that even more populations were involved in what can finally be called "the piratic socio-economic system"²². All these passages actually confirm the fundamental idea that Cilician piracy had a vital link with its, as it were, inland back : functioning, one could say, as an integrated system of sea and land robbery economy, which had also developed its own peculiar social and political features.

It is exactly this political aspect of Cilician piracy that we must now examine. Of course, piracy had a long history behind it in this moment, as it went back at least as far as the *Odyssey*, as is well known. Strabo himself, speaking of the Cretan constitution, presents a sort of general history, or better a historical scheme, of the Mediterranean piracy throughout the centuries : "but later, he says, it (*i.e.* the original constitution, which had very good laws) changed very much for the worse ; for after the Tyrrhenians, who more than any other people ravaged Our Sea, the Cretans succeeded to the business of piracy ; their piracy was later destroyed by the Cilicians ; but all piracy was broken up by the Romans, who reduced Crete by war, and also the piratical strongholds of the Cilicians"²³. But it doesn't seem it ever developed an outright political system like the Cilicians', of which Strabo again gives us important clues. To be sure, he uses the term *συνίστασθαι* to indicate its establishment²⁴; he speaks of *κατοικίαι* (colonies) to define the villages the pirates founded in Cappadocian Taurus²⁵; he says that their form of government was a tyrannical one²⁶: a political system, even if, of course, not the best.

So it is not surprising if we don't find any trace of the Cilician piracy and brigandage system in the classification recently attempted by E.C. L. Van der Vliet of the natural ways of life of the barbarian or semi-barbarian

populations²⁷. There is nothing similar, in fact, between the "simple" brigand way of life, like the Corsicans' or the Arabs', and the complex, sea and land brigandage system of the Tracheian Cilicians and their neighbouring peoples. As Strabo says in the above-cited introductory paragraph (XIV 5, 2), in this case we are faced with a peculiar historical development, which must be considered as a perverse result of political and economic factors which the Romans carried out, finally crowned with Pompeian success, to destroy this gangrene of the international order of the civilized world ; even though, as we saw, the Roman themselves had previously had some responsibilities in its developing.

III. THE INHABITANTS OF CILICIA PEDIAS

Pompey treated the surviving pirates with a "philanthropia" which was highly appreciated by the historians, first of all Posidonius, who knew the problems of this particular area very well²⁸: in fact, he was born in Syrian Apamea and spent most of his life in Rhodes; he was, indeed, a close friend of Pompey. Pompey seems to have thought that after all the pirates were not the sole or even the guiltiest party responsible for the moral and political disorder which had strengthened their state ; as we saw, they had only filled the political vacuum created by others, and their activities had ultimately just met the demands of a world-wide slave-market which continued to develop from the last decades of the second up to the middle of the first century B.C.

Most of the former pirates were uprooted by Pompey from their mountain seats and settled in the "other"²⁹ Cilicia, or rather in some of its towns, such as Soli³⁰, Mallus, Adana, Epi-

personal acquaintance with the Roman commander, which presumably means that he could claim first-hand information on the operations, and above all avail himself of Servilius' personal judgements and strategic evaluations.

21) On the Pamphylian piracy, perfectly similar to that of the Cilicians, see XIV, 3, 2 (on the other hand, Strabo considers Cilicians and Pamphylians as one and the same people : see n. 12).

22) See for example XII, 6, 5 (apparently referring to the Homonadeis) and XII, 2, 7 (populations of southern Cappadocia).

23) X, 9.

24) XIV, 5, 2 ; 10; XII, 1, 4.

25) XII, 6, 2.

26) XIV, 5, 18 ; XII 7, 3.

27) In the article cited above (n. 18). This is a very important contribution, but one must note that the problems of historical development are unduly understated.

28) See Strasburger, *op. cit.*, 50-51.

29) XIV, 5, 8.

30) Str. XIV, 5, 8.

phaneia and so on³¹, in order to accustom them to an orderly way of life. As many of these towns had been recently ravaged and depopulated during the Armenian invasion of Tigranes in the seventies³², the pirates could even serve as re-settlers of the whole region.

Pompey's measure apparently presupposed some kind of affinity between Tracheian and "other" Cilicians; an affinity which, in spite of all the natural and historical differences, can be traced back through the centuries at least as far as the period of Assyrian sovereignty in the Cilician plain in the eighth century. It can surely be recognized, as regards Soli and its hinterland for example, in the harsh and strong resistance of this area to Alexander's conquest³³.

Strabo stresses, not unexpectedly, the differences, even if he cannot help calling Cilicians the inhabitants of both parts of the region. His Cilicia Pedias is the realm of urban civilization, as opposed to the rough Tracheia; so, dealing with Seleucia near the Calycadnus river, perhaps the only settlement in Tracheia which can deserve the name of "town", he says that it "is well-peopled and far aloof from the Cilician and Pamphylian usages"³⁴. And even more so the further one advances into this part of Cilicia, even though one is sometimes reminded of the mountains which completely surround the plain, and of the particular political problems therein³⁵.

From an ethnic point of view, Strabo doesn't add a word to the aforesaid, except referring in some cases to the traditions of "Mycenean" or later colonial movements towards the region, that is ennobling its population through real or pretended injections of new (and better) cultural elements in ancient times. So he recalls the stories of the Achaean and Rhodian foundation of Soli³⁶, of the Teucran ancestors of the Olban

dynasty³⁷, of the Aegean origin of Tarsus³⁸, of the Mopsus and Amphilochoi arrival in the Aleian plain and the foundation of Mallus³⁹. These remarks are even more noteworthy, the more reticent Strabo is about similar traditions referring to some of the Tracheian coastal settlements, such as Nagidus and Celenderis, "Samiorum coloniae" according to Melas⁴⁰; and Holmi, whose inhabitants were resettled in the new town of Seleucia by Seleucus Nicator, which is defined πόλις Ἑλληνίς by Scylax⁴¹. Moreover Nagidus, Celenderis, and perhaps Aphrodisias mint coins with Greek legends even in the period of Persian domination in the region⁴². Evidently, Strabo's intention is not to endanger Greek reputation.

In any case, Strabo is convinced that the common features of the Pedianoι, the inhabitants of Cilicia Pedias (to use a term which actually can be found only in Stephen of Byzantium⁴³), because of their prominently urban way of life, can best be revealed through the description of the single towns, which, on the other hand, also permits us to appreciate the history and the special features of each of them. In this way, first of all the importance of the cultural achievements of Hellenistic Cilicia emerges, as is clear especially in the long digression on the intellectual life of Tarsus. It is not possible to dwell here upon the details of Strabo's description of the philosophical, rhetorical and even poetical traditions of the town. We confine ourselves to remember that Strabo puts Tarsus on a higher level even than Alexandria and Athens, from a cultural point of view, and explains at length the motives that justify such an appreciation⁴⁴. But Soli, too, proves to have been in recent years an important place as regards philosophy and poetry⁴⁵, and Mallus is recorded as having given birth to the stoic philosopher and

31) App., *Mithr.*, 444.

32) XIV, 5, 2; cp. XI, 14, 15. On Tigranes' "Armenian empire" see the recently published C. Mutařian, *La Cilicie au carrefour des empires*, Paris, 1988, 189-190.

33) See M. Jasink's and my *Cilicia* (cited in n. 1), 43.

34) XIV, 5, 4.

35) XIV, 5, 10 (Olba); 18 (Amanus).

36) XIV, 5, 8.

37) XIV, 5, 10.

38) XIV, 5, 13.

39) XIV, 5, 16.

40) I, 77.

41) 102.

42) On the problems of Greek pre-Hellenistic presence in the area see *Cilicia* (cited in n. 1), 151-163.

43) See *Tracheia*.

44) XIV, 5, 13-15. See H. Boehlig, *Die Geisteskultur von Tarsus im augusteischen Zeitalter mit Beruecksichtigung der paulinischen Schriften*, Goettingen, 1913.

45) XIV, 5, 8.

grammarian Crates⁴⁶. Finally, one must remember the Seleucian intellectuals, the peripatetic philosophers Athenaeus and Xenarchus, mentioned by Strabo, since Seleucia, in spite of its Tracheian position, is in fact completely different, Strabo himself says, from "Cilician and Pamphylian usages"⁴⁷.

In conclusion, Strabonian Cilicia Pedias must be considered as a completely Hellenized region, whereas the Tracheiotae scarcely reveal

any trace of Hellenic influence or origin. The comparison between the population of the two Cilician areas, which is in principle one and the same, therefore points out the strength of physical environment and of the historical conditions in moulding and transforming social characteristics and ways of life: a case study, as it were, of historical ethnography.

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46) XIV, 5, 16.

47) XIV 5, 4.