BOOK XXXIV

Polybius devoted one book of his history to a separate treatise on the geography of the continents.   Strabo, 9, 1, 1.

1. IN their Greek histories Eudoxus gave a good, but Ephorus the best, account of the foundations, blood connexions, migrations, and founders of states; but I shall now give some information on the position of countries and their distances, which are the subjects most properly belonging to the science of Geography. . . .

2. It is not Homer's manner to indulge in mere mythological Homer true to   stories founded on no substratum of truth.   For nature.   there is no surer way of giving an air of verisimilitude to fiction than to mix with it some particles of truth.   And this is the case with the tale of the wanderings of Odysseus. . . .

For instance, Aeolus, who taught the way of getting through the straits, where there are currents setting both ways, and the passage is rendered difficult by the indraught of the sea, came to be called and regarded as the dispenser and king of the winds ; just as Danaus, again, who discovered the storages of water in Argos, and Atreus, who discovered the fact of the sun's revolution being in the opposite direction to that of the heaven, were called seers and priest-kings.   So the priests of the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and the Magi, being superior to the rest of the world in wisdom, obtained rule and honour in former generations.   And on this principle, too, each one of the gods is honoured as the inventor of something useful to man.   I do not allow therefore that Aeolus is wholly mythical, nor the wanderings of Odysseus generally.   Some mythical elements have been undoubtedly added, as they have in the War or

Ilium; but the general account of Sicily given by the poet agrees with that of other historians who have given topographical details of Italy and Sicily.   I cannot agree therefore with the remark of Eratosthenes that "we shall discover where Odysseus wandered, when we find the cobbler who sewed up the leather bag of the winds."   See for instance how Homer's description of Scylla agrees with what really happens at the Scyllaean rock, and the taking of the sword fish : [1]

> "And there she fishes, roaming round the rock,
> For dog-fish and for dolphins, or what else
> Of huger she may take that swims the sea."

For the fact is that tunnies swimming in great shoals along the Italian coast, if they are drifted from their course and are prevented from reaching Sicily, fall a prey to the larger fish, such as dolphins, dog-fish, or other marine monsters ; and from hunting these the sword-fish (called also xiphiae, or sometimes sea-dogs) are fattened.   The same thing happens at a rise of the Nile, and other rivers, as in the case of a fire or a burning forest ; the animals crowd together, and, in their effort to escape the fire or the water, fall a prey to stronger animals.

3. Fishing for sword-fish at the Scyllaean rock is carried on in this way.   A number of men lie in wait, two each in small two-oared boats, and one man is set to look out for them all.   In the boat one Fishing for sword-fish. man rows, while the other stands on the prow holding a spear. When the look-out man signals the appearance of a sword-fish (for the animal swims with one-third of its body above water), the boat rows up to it, and the man with the spear strikes it at close quarters, and then pulls the spear-shaft away leaving the harpoon in the fish's body ; for it is barbed and loosely fastened to the shaft on purpose, and has a long rope attached to it. They then slacken the rope for the wounded fish, until it is wearied out with its convulsive struggles and attempts to escape, and then they haul it on to land, or, if its size is not too great, into the boat.   And if the spear-shaft falls into the sea it is not lost; for being made of two pieces, one oak and the other pine, the oak end as the heavier dips under water, the

[1] *Odyss.* 12, 95.

other end rises above it and is easily got hold of. But sometimes it happens that the man rowing is wounded, right through the boat, by the immense size of the animal's sword; for it charges like a boar, and hunting the one is very like hunting the other.

This would lead us to conjecture that the wandering described by Homer was near Sicily, because he has assigned to Scylla the kind of fishing which is indigenous to the Scyllaean rock; and because what he says of Charybdis correctly describes what does happen in the Straits. But the

" Thrice sends she up the darksome tide,"

Island of Meninx, instead of twice "a day," is an error to be off the lesser ascribed to the copyist or the geographer.[1] So Syrtis. See 1, 39. also Meninx answers to his description of the Lotophagi.

4. Or if there are some points which do not answer, we must lay the blame on ignorance or poetic licence, which uses real history, picturesque detail, and mythological allusion. The object of history is truth, as when in the catalogue of ships the poet describes the features of the several localities, calling one city "rocky," another "frontier-placed," another "with wealth of doves," or "hard by the sea." But the object of picturesque detail is vividness, as when he introduces men fighting; and that of mythological allusion is to give pleasure or rouse wonder. But a narrative wholly fictitious creates no illusion and is not Homeric. For all look upon his poetry as a philosophical work; and Eratosthenes is wrong in bidding us not judge his poems with a view to having any serious meaning, or to seek for history in them.

It is better, again, to take the line [2]

" Thence for nine days the foul winds drave us on,"

to mean that he made but a short distance—for foul winds do not favour a straight course—than to imagine him to have got into the open ocean as running before favouring winds. The distance from Malea to the Pillars is twenty-two thousand five hundred stades. If we suppose this to have been accomplished

[1] *Odyss.* 12, 105.　　　　　　　[2] *Odyss.* 9, 82.

at an even speed in the nine days, he would make two thousand five hundred stades a day. Now, who has ever asserted that any one made the voyage from Lycia or Rhodes to Alexandria in four days, a distance of four thousand stades?

To those who ask how it was that Odysseus, though he came to Sicily three times, never once went through the straits, I answer that all subsequent sailors avoided that passage also. . . .

5. In treating of the geography of Europe I shall say nothing of the ancient geographers, but shall confine my attention to their modern critics, Dicaearchus, Eratosthenes, who is the most recent writer on geography, and Pytheas, who has misled many readers by professing to have traversed on foot the whole of Britain, the coastline of which island, he says, is more than forty thousand stades. And again by his stories of Thule and the countries in its neighbourhood, "in which," he says, "there is neither unmixed land or sea or air, but a kind of compound of all three (like the jelly-fish or Pulmo Marinus), in which earth and sea and everything else are held in suspense, and which forms a kind of connecting link to the whole, through which one can neither walk nor sail." This substance, which he says is like the Pulmo Marinus, he saw with his own eyes, the rest he learnt by report. Such is Pytheas's story, and he adds that, on his return thence, he traversed the whole of the coast of Europe from Gades to the Tanais. But we cannot *Cadiz to the Don.* believe that a private person, who was also a poor man, should have made such immense journeys by land and sea. Even Eratosthenes doubted this part of his story, though he believed what he said about Britain, and Gades, and Iberia. I would much rather believe the Messenian (Euhemerus) than him. The latter is content with saying that he sailed to one country which he calls Panchaia;[1] while the former asserts that he has actually seen the whole northern coast of Europe up to the

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[1] Panchaia or Panchēa, the fabulous island or country in the Red Sea or Arabian gulf, in which Euhemerus asserted that he had discovered the inscriptions which proved the reputed gods to have been famous generals or kings. Plutarch, *Is. et Osir.* 23, Diodor. fr. 6, 1. The Roman poets used the word as equivalent to "Arabian." See Verg. *Georg.* 2, 139.

very verge of the world, which one would hardly believe of
Hermes himself if he said it.   Eratosthenes calls Euhemerus
a Bergaean,[1] yet believes Pytheas, though Dicaearchus himself
did not.[2] . . . Eratosthenes and Dicaearchus give mere
popular guesses as to distances.

6. For instance, Dicaearchus says that the distance from
the Peloponnese to the Pillars is ten thousand stades
and still further to the head of the Adriatic; and from
the Peloponnesus to the Sicilian straits three thousand;
and therefore the remaind'er, from the Straits to the Pillars,
is seven thousand stades.   I say nothing about the three
thousand stades, whether they are right or wrong; but
the seven thousand cannot be made out, whether you measure
along the coast or straight across the sea.   The coast route is
a kind of obtuse angle, contained by two lines resting on the
straits and the pillars respectively; so that we have a triangle,
of which the apex is Narbo, and the base the straight line
representing the course by the open sea; of the two sides of
the triangle which contain the obtuse angle, that which extends
from the straits to Narbo is more than eleven thousand two
hundred stades, the other from Narbo to the Pillars is a little
under eight thousand.   The longest distance from Europe to
Libya across the Tuscan sea is allowed to be not more than
three thousand stades, that by the Sardinian sea is some-
what less; but let us call it three thousand stades.   Now
suppose a perpendicular let down through the gulf of Narbo
to the base of the triangle, that is to the straight sea-
course, measuring two thousand stades; it requires only a
schoolboy's geometry to prove that the coasting voyage is
longer than the direct sea voyage by nearly five hundred
stades.[3]   And when the three thousand stades from the

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[1] That is "as great a liar as Antiphanes of Berga."   See below.   Strabo
classes Antiphanes with Pytheas and Euhemerus more than once (see 2, 3, 5).
Hence came the verb βεργάζειν, "to tell travellers' tales" (Steph. *Byz.*).   But
there is considerable doubt as to the identification of the traveller Antiphanes,
some confounding him with a comic poet of the same name, and others with
the author of an essay περὶ ἑταιρῶν.   Berga was in the valley of the Strymon.

[2] Strabo here protests against Dicaearchus being treated as a standard of
geographical truth.   For Pytheas see Appendix.

[3] Polybius proves his point by the demonstration of the proposition "The

Peloponnese to the straits are added, the whole number of
the stades even of the straight sea course will be more than
double Dicaearchus's reckoning. And if we measure to the
head of the Adriatic we must add still more by his own
admission ; that is to say, from the Peloponnese to Leucas is
seven hundred stades, from Leucas to Corcyra seven hundred,
from Corcyra to Ceraunia seven hundred, and from Ceraunia
along the Illyrian coast six thousand one hundred and fifty.[1]

In talking such nonsense he might well be regarded as
having gone beyond even Antiphanes of Berga, and, in fact,
to have left no folly for his successors to commit. . . .

7. From Ithaca to Corcyra is more than nine hundred
stades ; from Epidamnus to Thessalonica more than two
thousand. From Marseilles to the Pillars is more than nine
thousand ; from the Pyrenees, rather less than eight thousand.
. . . The Pagus from source to mouth is eight thousand,
not following its windings, but taking a direct line. . . .
Eratosthenes is quite ignorant of the geography of Iberia,
and sometimes makes statements about it entirely con-
tradictory. He says, for instance, that its western coast as
far as Gades is inhabited by Gauls, since the whole western
side of Europe, as far south as Gades, is occupied by that

square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled-triangle is equal to the squares of the
sides containing the right angle."

B Narbo
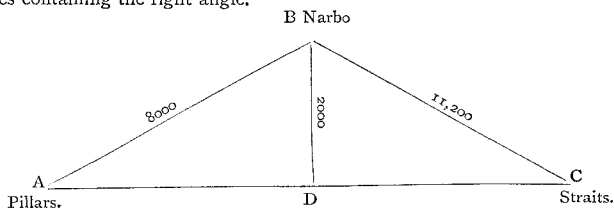
By applying this principle $AD = 7745.9$ . . and $DC = 11019.9$ . ., and the
whole $AC = 18765.8$; whereas $AB + BC$ (*i.e.* the coasting voyage) = 19200
stades (a difference of 434.2 stades, not 500).   Add to this the 3000 from the
Peloponnese to the Straits, the total coast voyage is 22,200 stades, as against
Dicaearchus's 10,000.

[1] Strabo quotes this reckoning of the distance from the Peloponnese to the
head of the Adriatic to prove that Polybius, on his own showing, is wrong in
admitting that this distance (8250 stades) is greater than that from the Pelo-
ponnese to the Pillars, which Dicaearchus said was 10,000 stades, and which
Polybius showed to be 18,765 stades by the shortest route.

people : and then, quite forgetting he has said this, when
taking a survey of the whole of Spain, he nowhere mentions
the Gauls. . . .   The length of Europe is less than that of
Libya and Asia put together by the distance between the sun-
rise in summer and at the point of the equinox ; for the source of
the Tanais is at the former, and the Pillars are at the western
equinox, and between them lies Europe, while Asia occupies
the northern semicircle between the Tanais and equinoctial
sunrise. . . .

Southern Europe is divided into five peninsulas—Iberia ;
Polybius's fivefold Italy ; a third ending in the Capes Malea and
division of the Sunium, in which are included Greece and
European penin- Illyria, and a part of Thrace ; a fourth called
sulas, as opposed the Thracian Chersonese, bounded by the
to the threefold the Thracian Chersonese, bounded by the
division of Era- strait between Sestos and Abydos ; and a fifth
tosthenes. along the Cimmerian Bosphorus and the en-
trance to the Maeotis. . . .

8. In the sea off Lusitania acorn-bearing oaks grow, upon
which the tunnies feed and fatten themselves, which may, there-
fore, well be called sea-hogs, as they feed like hogs on acorns. . . .

These acorns are sometimes carried by the tide as far as
the coast of Latium, unless they may be thought to be the
produce of Sardinia or neighbouring islands. . . .

In Lusitania both animals and man are extraordinarily
productive, owing to the excellent temperature of the air ; the
fruits never wither ; there is not more than three months in
the year in which roses, white violets (or gilly-flowers), and
asparagus do not grow ; while the fish caught in its sea is
far superior to what is found in our waters for quantity, quality,
and beauty. There, too, a Sicilian medimnus of barley is
sold for a drachma, and one of wheat for nine Alexandrine
obols. A metreta of wine costs a drachma, and a good kid
or hare an obol, and a lamb from three to four obols ; a fat
pig weighing a hundred minae costs five drachmae, and a
sheep two. A talent of figs is sold for three obols, a calf
for five drachmae, a draught-ox for ten. The flesh of wild
animals is not thought worth fixing a price upon at all, but the
people give it to each other for nothing and as a present,[1] . . .

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[1] To enable the reader to follow this list of prices, a short table is here sub-

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