

Lee E. PATTERSON
Strabo as a Source of Local Myth

This paper bridges two areas of scholarship that have recently drawn more attention. Strabo has lately been the subject of an increasing number of studies (e.g., Clarke 1999, Dueck 2000). Likewise, book-length studies on kinship diplomacy have sprung up in recent years, including epigraphical analyses of kinship terms and a general survey of kinship diplomacy (Jones 1999). The purpose of this paper is to show how Strabo is an important source for analyzing inscriptions that refer to kinship.

These inscriptions are essentially documents of such diplomatic activity as grants of asylia and exchanges of polity. The communities interacting in this manner often asserted a putative kinship as a justification for the diplomatic venture. It was most common for the shared ancestor to be a mythological personage; however, the basis for the sungeneia or oikeiotes mentioned in the document is very rarely given, leaving researchers wondering what myths the parties had in mind when they claimed kinship. Local foundation stories are the most likely avenues by which a community will trace its connection to another. Written sources that give us direct access to these charter myths are especially valuable for reconstructing the putative ties of kinship that lay behind the inscriptions. Like Pausanias, Strabo is such a source because he traveled extensively and recorded much of what he saw and heard about the culture of various localities as he compiled material for his geography.

But great care must be taken. First we must be confident that the myth we find in Strabo is a genuine local myth. One way to satisfy the requirement is to demonstrate as conclusively as possible that Strabo visited the community in question. Short of direct references to such visits (e.g., Corinth: 8.6.21), we can rely on various criteria that Dueck discusses (2000: 22f.), including detailed descriptions of physical characteristics. Another method is to find a written source that is local in origin. For example, Antiochus of Syracuse would be a viable source for the foundation myth of Syracuse, but Ephorus, if he had written of it, would not because he would be at best a secondary source.

Using the first method, we can have confidence that Strabo visited Phygela and thus relates at 14.1.20 a myth that is an expression of local identity, explaining the Phygelans' Achaean origins. Around 300 BCE Miletus issued a document renewing isopolity with the Phygelans (StV III 453), and it justified the decree with a claim of kinship. The link seems to be Hellen, one of whose sons, Aeolus, was an ancestor of Miletus' founder Neleus son of Codrus, and another, Xuthus, father of the Achaeans' eponymous ancestor Achaeus. The second method can be employed to enlighten the situation behind I.v. Magnesia 72, in which the people of Syracuse acknowledged kinship with the Magnesians. The latter claimed descent from Magnes son of Aeolus while the founders of Syracuse, according to Antiochus, were a descendant of Heracles named Archias and a group of Dorians (6.2.4, 6.1.12, cf. Thuc. 6.3.2). Thus, the most likely link to the Magnesians would be through the Dorian line, especially as Heracles was the Dorians' greatest hero. Once again two sons of Hellen, Dorus and Aeolus, provide the link.