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Jon Charles Miller

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JON CHARLES MILLER

Abstract: In this discussion note, I put forth evidence to argue against the recent assertions made in favor of the late 1740s or early 1750s date for the composition of Hume's memoranda. In particular, I show that the claims made regarding Hume's reference to Strabo in the memoranda do not provide evidence for such a late date of composition but, rather, provide evidence for the date of composition being considerably earlier.

In early 1751, Hume wrote a letter to his friend Gilbert Elliot asking to borrow a copy of Strabo's *Geography*. At the time, Elliot was a member of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh and thus had access to their considerable library. (Unfortunately, there is no surviving record telling us which edition of the *Geography* Elliot actually lent Hume.)¹ In his letter, Hume claimed that he had "never read" that classic work before.² From this Peter Lopton has recently concluded that the citation of Strabo in Hume's "early memoranda" allows us to "confirm that this part of that document at least must date from 1751 or later; it is not then so 'early' a text."³ And similarly, in a recent analysis comparing the content of the memoranda with texts Hume published in the early 1750s, Tatsuya Sakamoto asserts that the evidence shows that Hume "wrote the passage on Strabo in the memoranda . . . only after consulting the copy borrowed from Elliot," thus also placing a date on the memoranda to at least 1751.⁴ In this discussion note, I put forth evidence to challenge Lopton's and Sakamoto's assertions. Before doing so, I provide the reader

with a brief overview of the current argument regarding the dating of Hume's memoranda, especially as it relates to the Strabo citation.

Hume's mentioning to Elliot that he had "never read" Strabo had already been suggested as relevant to the dating for the memoranda and as a reason for questioning the accuracy of Hume's referencing of sources. In 1977, J. P. Pittion had argued that some of what appears in the memoranda can be traced back to Hume's reading of French periodicals that, in turn, guided Hume to particular sections of Pierre Bayle's works.⁵ In other words, some of what appear in the memoranda to be primary sources are, in fact, secondary sources.⁶ Given this, Pittion speculated that the date of the composition of the memoranda lies somewhere between 1734–1737, while Hume was in France working on the *Treatise* (Pittion, "Hume's Reading of Bayle," 383). In response to Pittion's analysis, M. A. Stewart claims that the citation of Strabo only helps to prove Pittion's conclusion that "there is considerably more secondhand citation in these memoranda than we had realized."⁷ However, based upon his forensic analysis of the memoranda, Stewart disagrees with Pittion's dating and, instead, places it sometime between the late 1730s and the early 1740s (Stewart, "The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts," 285–86). Unfortunately, neither Pittion nor Stewart provides much information about the all-important Strabo reference. Pittion does not mention it at all, and Stewart only offers it up as circumstantial evidence. As a consequence, there is still room for Loptson and Sakamoto to claim that the reference to Strabo dates the memoranda to as late as, or even after, 1751.

According to Sakamoto, the letter to Elliot provides "decisive evidence for the dating of the memoranda," because it explains the reason for Hume's eagerness to borrow a copy of Strabo's *Geography* (Sakamoto, "Hume's 'Early Memoranda' and the Making of His Political Economy," 155). Hume tells Elliot:

I have amus'd myself lately with an Essay or Dissertation on the Populousness of Antiquity, which led me into many Disquisitions concerning both the public & domestic Life of the Antients. Having read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin, since I form'd that Plan, I have extracted what serv'd most to my Purpose: But I have not a Strabo, & know not where to get one in this Neighbourhood. (Hume to Elliot, 152–53)

Noticeably, Hume mentions that he requires the *Geography* for his upcoming essay "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations," which was soon to appear in his collection *Political Discourses*.⁸ Consequently, Sakamoto believes, "[this] passage as a whole should be taken as direct evidence for the theory that the memoranda (the "General" section in particular) was prepared as part of Hume's historical and sociological research into ancient societies that was to take shape in the economic essays (the essay on ancient population in particular) of the *Political Discourses*"

(Sakamoto, 155). Furthermore, in that same letter, Hume asks Elliot to loan him “a Copy [of the *Geography*], either in the original Language or even in a good Translation” (Hume to Elliot, 153). From this, and from additional evidence adduced earlier, Sakamoto concludes that “Hume’s proud remark strongly suggests that the memoranda were based upon primary sources. There is no reason to exclude the one entry from Strabo as an exception to this rule” (Sakamoto, 156).

Even if some of the memoranda were used by Hume in later works, this would not necessarily mean that the memoranda were *written* when those works were composed, nor would it prove that the citation of Strabo dates from 1751. After all, Hume’s claim to having “never read” Strabo does not mean that he had never encountered quotations from Strabo in other works. In fact, we know he probably had, since Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* is referred to in the memoranda (Mossner, “Hume’s Early Memoranda,” 498), and in that work alone there are at least a hundred citations of the *Geography*. However, for reasons developed earlier in his essay, Sakamoto assumes that “the memoranda were based upon primary sources.” Yet his explanation here—that we can be further assured of this by Hume’s request for a copy of the *Geography* “either in the original Language or even in a good Translation”—is not convincing and actually raises more questions about Hume’s “proud remark,” his claim to have “read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin, since [he] form’d [the] Plan” to write “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations” (Hume to Elliot, 152).

As Moritz Baumstark has recently shown, it appears that Hume worked on the essay “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations” for about ten months and had a considerable personal library at his disposal from which to draw his research.⁹ But Baumstark argues that it is also likely that Hume was “going back to works he had encountered earlier as well as reading ones he was not yet familiar with” (Baumstark, “Hume’s Reading of the Classics at Ninewells,” 63) (that is, Strabo), all the while “skimming through” many of them looking for “all sorts of facts and arguments that could conceivably be used” (Baumstark, 71). What’s more, from a purely statistical viewpoint, it is unlikely that the memoranda had much to do with Hume’s intensive research for “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations.” As Baumstark reminds us, only a small fraction of the sources referred to in the memoranda are actually used (Baumstark, 66) and conspicuously the one reference to Strabo is not one of them. Moreover, there are a great number of ancient sources in “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations” that are not even mentioned in the memoranda, which suggests that when he wrote that essay Hume was working from a whole new set of more extensive notes that, regrettably, are now lost.

Sakamoto’s response to such objections is that none of them affect his main thesis that the memoranda were begun in 1747 and finished sometime in or after 1751. This is because first, the recent forensic analysis done on the manuscript of the memoranda by Stewart shows that 1) the citations are written in a well-organized

way, 2) the memoranda were written within a short time span, and 3) the memoranda were likely written after the publication of the *Treatise* (Sakamoto, 136).¹⁰ Additionally, because many of the citations in the memoranda only reappear in works that Hume published in his *Political Discourses* in 1752, the memoranda must constitute an immediate research document for these works (Sakamoto, 136). So even if it is true that there are other, now lost, documents that contained Hume's research from the late 1740s, this does not counter the claim that the memoranda were also compiled during that same time period (Sakamoto, 164n40). Finally, regarding the fact that there is only one Strabo reference in the memoranda even though there are many references to Strabo in the "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations" and other later works, Sakamoto says, "this simply means that when he wrote the letter to Elliot, Hume's compiling work in the memoranda had only progressed to some point before the Strabo entry and, further, that the memoranda do not reflect the entire results of Hume's detailed study of Strabo" (Sakamoto, 158). Although Sakamoto's explanation is plausible, it is ultimately dependent upon his belief that "the memoranda were based upon primary sources" and that "[t]here is no reason to exclude the one entry from Strabo as an exception to this rule" (Sakamoto, 156).

There is, however, a *very good* reason to exclude the one entry from Strabo as an exception to Sakamoto's rule: that particular reference to the *Geography* appears in a work we know Hume was already closely familiar with, namely Bayle's *Continuation des Pensées diverses*. According to Bayle, "[L]a ville de Tarente. C'etoit une Colonie Greque aussi idolatre qu'aucune autre: les jours de fête y surpassoient en nombre les jours ouvriers."¹¹ ("[T]he city of Taranto. That Greek Colony worships like no other: the holidays surpass the number of work days" [my translation]). This information about what is now Taranto, Italy (ancient Tarentum) is, of course, exactly what we find attributed to Strabo in Hume's memorandum: "The Holydays in Tarentum exceeded the Working days" (Mossner, 514).

Moreover, there is something striking about both Bayle's and Hume's citation of Strabo: they both get Strabo wrong and in exactly the same way. According to Strabo, "because of [the Tarantini's] prosperity, luxury prevailed to such an extent that the public festivals celebrated among them every year were more in number than the days of the year."¹² There is nothing in Strabo's account that states anything about "Holydays" or "Working days," but only that the number of "public festivals" outnumbered *all* "the days of the year" (which could just as easily mean more than one festival happening per day in different parts of Tarentum). So both Bayle *and* Hume mistake what Strabo is comparing: the number of "public festivals" (not the number of festival *days*) versus all "the days of the year" (not just the number of "Working days" in the year).

The similarities here are too close to be mere coincidence. It is highly unlikely that Hume got his memorandum reference to Strabo only after reading the

Geography for the first time in 1751 and just happened to make the same errors in that reference which also appear in a work we know Hume was earlier familiar with. We can, therefore, with great confidence state that the reference to Strabo in Hume's memoranda came from his reading of Bayle's *Continuation des Pensées diverses*. We can also be confident, considering Pittion's and Stewart's analyses, that this memorandum was probably written while Hume was reading Bayle's work sometime between the mid-1730s and early 1740s.

Knowing that the citation of Strabo is a citation of a secondary source—namely, Bayle—does not by itself nullify Sakamoto's "later-1740s" theory for the dating of the memoranda, but it does remove the Strabo citation as evidence for that theory—evidence to which Sakamoto attributes considerable importance (Sakamoto, 156–60). Furthermore it allows us to assert that it is simply not true that the memoranda, and in particular the all-important "General" section, contain only primary sources. Considering the significance of these two challenges to Sakamoto's theory, we should be skeptical of his claim that Hume wrote the memoranda at such a late date.

NOTES

I would like to thank Sarah Potheary for her help regarding the publishing history of Strabo's *Geography* as well as the two anonymous *Hume Studies* referees for their helpful comments.

1 It was most likely either Isaac Casaubon's posthumous second edition (Paris: 1620) or the later reprinting of that edition by Theodor Jansson van Almeloveen (Amsterdam: Joannem Wolters, 1707). Both are listed in the advocates' library catalogue (T. Ruddiman and W. Goodall, eds., *A Catalogue of the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. Part the First* (Edinburgh, 1742), 568). For more information on the editions of Strabo's *Geography*, see Aubrey Diller's *The Textual Tradition of Strabo's Geography* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1975), particularly chap. 4, 167–79.

2 Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, in *The Letters of David Hume*, vol. 1., ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 153.

3 Peter Loptson, "Hume and Ancient Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012): 741–72, 743n7. Loptson is reacting to the claim made by Ernest Mossner that the memoranda were primarily compiled before the publication of the *Treatise*. See E. C. Mossner's, "Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729–1740: The Complete Text," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948): 492–518. Mossner arranges Hume's memoranda into three sections: "Natural Philosophy" (Early Memoranda, 499–500), "Philosophy" (Early Memoranda, 500–503), and "General" (503–18). The citation of Strabo, to which Mossner assigned the number 214, appears in the "General" section and reads, "[t]he Holydays in Tarentum exceeded the Working days" (Early Memoranda, 514).

4 Tatsuya Sakamoto, “Hume’s ‘Early Memoranda’ and the Making of His Political Economy,” *Hume Studies* 37 (2011): 131–64, 157. Sakamoto refers to his proposed dating of the memoranda as the “later-1740s theory” (Sakamoto, 136), yet clearly, with his claim about the Strabo citation (among other evidence he presents), his theory is best described as the later 1740s to early 1750s theory.

5 Jean-Paul Pittion, “Hume’s Reading of Bayle: An Inquiry into the Source and Role of the Memoranda,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 15 (1977) 373–86. Pittion largely restricts his analysis to Hume’s references in the “Natural Philosophy” and “Philosophy” sections of the memoranda.

6 In particular, Bayle’s *Continuation des Pensées diverses écrites ti un Docteur de Sorbonne*, 2 vols. (Rotterdam: R. Leers, 1705), and *Réponse aux questions d’un provincial*, 4 vols. (Rotterdam: R. Leers, 1704–1707).

7 M. A. Stewart, “The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts,” in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. Paul Wood (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 267–314, 285.

8 Eugene F. Miller, foreword, to *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* by David Hume, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund Press, 1987), xiii.

9 Moritz Baumstark, “Hume’s Reading of the Classics at Ninewells, 1749–51,” *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 8 (2010): 63–77, 65, 68.

10 Sakamoto is referring to M. A. Stewart’s “Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts,” ed. Paul Wood, 276–88.

11 Pierre Bayle, *Continuation des Pensées diverses écrites ti un Docteur de Sorbonne*, vol. 2. (Rotterdam: R. Leers, 1705), 794. Bayle is probably using the 1620 Casaubon edition of the *Geography*. However, Hume may well have consulted the 1707 edition. Both the 1620 Casaubon edition and its reprinting by Almeloveen in 1707 contain the original Greek with Casaubon’s Latin translation.

12 Strabo, *Geography of Strabo*, vol. 3, trans. H. L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 3:114–15. Strabo’s original says, “ἔξισχυσε δ’ ἡ ὕστερον τρυφή διὰ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, ὥστε τὰς πανδήμους ἐορτὰς πλείους ἄγεσθαι κατ’ ἔτος παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἢ τὰς ἡμέρας: ἐκ δὲ τούτου καὶ χεῖρον ἐπολιτεύοντο,” which Casaubon translates, “Sed inferioribus temporibus luxus invaluit obres fecundas: ita ut plures publicas festivitates per annum celebrarent Tarentini, quam dies annus habet” (Strabo, *Geography*, ed. Almeloveen, trans. Isaac Causabon, 2nd ed. [Amsterdam, 1707], 429).