

THE EXPRESSION “OUR TIMES” IN STRABO’S *GEOGRAPHY*

SARAH POTHECARY

STRABO’S *GEOGRAPHY*, WRITTEN under Augustus and in the early years of Tiberius’s principate (the latest event that Strabo mentions is dated to A.D. 23), contains much historical information. In the course of giving this information, Strabo frequently tells us that such-and-such an event happened καθ’ ἡμᾶς. The expression is usually taken to mean “in my lifetime.” It was thus understood by B. Niese who, in two seminal articles in the last century, argued that the earliest event thus characterized by Strabo is the reduction in the number of local rulers of Galatia in Asia Minor from twelve to three, which Niese attributed to Pompey and dated to late 63 or early 62 B.C.¹ He further argued that Strabo’s description of interior Paphlagonia as subject to several rulers μικρὸν πρὸ ἡμῶν, which Niese interpreted as “a little before my lifetime,” applies to the situation there after Pompey’s recognition of the dynasty of Pylaemenes, which Niese dated to early 64 B.C. Thus, Niese concluded, Strabo was born in late 64 or 63 B.C. This is the standard date now given for the year of Strabo’s birth.²

While Niese’s conclusions concerning Strabo’s birthdate continue to be accepted, both the passages on which he based his argument (12.5.1 C567 and 12.3.41 C562)³ have been the subject of much controversy, among historians of Asia Minor as well as scholars interested in Strabo’s dates.⁴ I seek to resolve that controversy by examining the way in which Strabo uses καθ’ ἡμᾶς as a temporal expression.⁵ I argue that it should be interpreted as

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1. B. Niese, “Beiträge zur Biographie Strabos,” *Hermes* 13 (1878): 33–45, esp. 38–41, and “Straboniana,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* n.f. 38 (1883): 567–602, esp. 567–75.

2. E. Honigsmann, “Strabon 3,” *RE* 4A.1 (1931): 76–155, esp. 76–77; G. Aujac, in the Budé edition, *Strabon. “Géographie,”* ed. G. Aujac, F. Lasserre, and R. Baladié (Paris, 1966–89), esp. vol. 1(i): viii–ix. See also OCD², s.v. Strabo, and *CHCL*, 1:857.

3. All references are to Strabo’s *Geography* unless otherwise stated. I use the Budé edition for Books 1–8 and 10–12, otherwise A. Meineke, *Strabonis Geographica* (Leipzig, 1852–53). The translations are my own. All occurrences of καθ’ ἡμᾶς in a temporal sense, and ἐφ’ ἡμῶν, are noted in this article and have been checked by means of the electronic text of Strabo’s *Geography* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, which is based on Meineke’s edition.

4. See nn. 15–21.

5. Strabo’s use of καθ’ ἡμᾶς meaning “in our times” must be differentiated at the outset from his use of καθ’ ἡμᾶς meaning simply “our,” with no particular temporal connotation, as in ἡ καθ’ ἡμᾶς θάλαττα (passim),

meaning not “in my lifetime” but, more literally, “in our times” or “in my times” (since Strabo does sometimes use the first person plural pronoun in place of the singular). “Our times” or “my times” signifies the period leading up to, and including, the period of Strabo’s own activity and that of his approximate contemporaries, and is the latest of the historical periods into which Strabo divides the events of the past. “Our times” begin not with Strabo’s own birth, but with a historical event of enormous importance for Asiatic Greeks like Strabo, namely Pompey’s reorganization in 65–63 B.C. of the lands that had constituted the kingdom of Pontus under King Mithridates VI Eupator, defeated by the Romans under Pompey in 66 B.C.⁶ Pompey’s reorganization symbolized the end of a dynasty that had lasted for some two centuries and marked the beginning of a period in which the core of Mithridates’ kingdom initially came under Roman provincial rule, while other areas were subject to local rulers who had found favor with the Romans.⁷ Mithridates had used an era based on an epoch of 297 B.C., probably the date claimed for the start of the Pontic kingdom,⁸ but in the ensuing Roman period, new epochs were adopted.⁹

As well as altering the whole political complexion of Asia Minor, the downfall of Mithridates VI and Roman intervention affected Strabo’s own family fortunes. Strabo’s family was from Amaseia, part of the old kingdom of Pontus. Family members from his grandfather’s generation, his great-grandfather’s and his great-great-grandfather’s generation had enjoyed intimacy with Mithridates VI and his predecessor, Mithridates V. During the later stages of the conflict between Mithridates VI and the Roman state, some of Strabo’s family had decided to go over to the Roman side. Strabo’s great-great uncle had betrayed Mithridates, only to be found out by the king and punished. Strabo’s grandfather had managed to betray Mithridates without being discovered, although Strabo complains that the promised reward from the Romans never materialized.¹⁰

The impact of Roman intervention on the political history of Asia Minor, and on Strabo’s perception of it, is evident in Strabo’s descriptions of those areas that had once formed part of the kingdom of Pontus or had come under its influence. Strabo organizes these historical accounts around two

which translates as “our sea” and designates the Mediterranean and Pontus (Strabo also uses the term “our seas”); similarly, “our coast” (*passim*), meaning the coast of “our sea,” “our inhabited world” (*passim*), “our part” or “our quarter” [*sc.* of the earth], “our hemisphere,” “our temperate zone,” and so on.

6. D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, vol. 1: *Text*, vol. 2: *Notes* (Princeton, 1950), esp. 1:351–78, and S. Mitchell, *Anatolia, Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 1: *The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1993), 31–34.

7. See Strabo’s own description at 12.3.1–42 C540–563.

8. For the evidence of Mithridates’ coinage, W. H. Waddington, T. Reinach, and E. C. F. Babelon, *Recueil général des monnaies grecques d’Asie Mineure*², vol. 1, fasc. 1: *Pont et Paphlagonie* (Paris, 1925; reprint, New York and Hildesheim, 1976), 8, 13–20, and Magie, 2:1087, n. 35.

9. The dates of the epochs varied from place to place. For a list of the coins and inscriptions that provide evidence for the dates of the epochs, and for the dates at which the epochs were adopted, C. Marek, *Stadt, Ara und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord Galatia* (Tübingen, 1993), 129–34. See also *JGR*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1906), esp. nos. 85, 89, 90, 91; Magie, 2:1180, n. 43; p. 1181, n. 45. A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*² (Oxford, 1971), 202, and p. 437, n. 17; A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology* (Munich, 1972), p. 246 and n. 4; p. 247 and n. 1.

10. 10.4.10 C477–78, 11.2.18 C499, 12.3.33 C557.

main timeblocks: the first, up to Mithridates' defeat; the second, beginning with Roman intervention. Events within the first timeblock may be allocated to "long ago" or a situation may be described as "always" having been the case, while later events still within the first timeblock may be described as happening in "the period of kings" or, more specifically, "under Mithridates." These events and situations are contrasted with occurrences in the second timeblock, where situations may be attributed to Pompey in particular, or to the Romans generally, and may then be brought up to date with an account of the situation "now," or an account couched in the present tense. Strabo sometimes uses a μέν . . . δέ construction to contrast the situation in the first timeblock with the second.

Describing Comana, a temple that had played an important role in the kingdom of Pontus, Strabo contrasts, by means of a μέν . . . δέ construction, its status "in the time of the kings" (ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων) with the situation "after Pompey took over" (παραλαβὼν Πομπήτιος τὴν ἐξουσίαν) and appointed Archelaus as priest (12.3.34 C558); then he tells us that the priesthood is "now" held by Dyteutus (12.3.35 C558). For the temple at Zela, Strabo first contrasts, using a μέν . . . δέ construction, the honors received by the priests from "the kings" with the situation "now" when everything is subject to Pythodoris; then Strabo reiterates his point, contrasting (again with a μέν . . . δέ construction) the situation "long ago" when "the kings" ran Zela not as a city but as a temple and when everything was subject to the priest, with the enlargement and organization of Zela as a city by Pompey (12.3.37 C559–69). Strabo has already had occasion to mention Zela earlier, where he similarly noted its organization under Pompey "after the destruction of Mithridates" (μετὰ τὴν Μιθριδάτου κατάλυσιν, 11.8.4 C512).

Describing Colchis, Strabo briefly gives its history before Mithridates' defeat, contrasting the mythical period of "long ago" (τὸ παλαιόν) with the period when Colchis was divided between kings and ultimately acquired by Mithridates "when his power had increased" (αὐξηθέντος Μιθριδάτου, 11.2.18 C498–99). Strabo then outlines the situation in Colchis "after Mithridates' destruction" (καταλυθέντος Μιθριδάτου),¹¹ beginning with the immediate situation and ending with what has happened "last," or "most recently" (ὕστατα). Amisus was held by "the kings" and was enlarged and improved by Mithridates; its subsequent fortunes were varied, but "now" it is well constituted (12.3.14 C547). Sinope was autonomous "for a long time" (πολὺν χρόνον); it was then enslaved by Pharnaces (a king of Pontus) and his successors "up until Eupator and the Romans who destroyed him" (μέχρι τοῦ Εὐπάτορος καὶ τῶν καταλυσάντων Ῥωμαίων); "now" it has a colony of Romans (12.3.11 C545–46). The area held by the Tibareni and the Chaldaei was "always" held by dynasts; "when Mithridates' power had increased" (αὐξηθεὶς Μιθριδάτης ὁ Εὐπάτωρ) the area came under his dominion; Pompey founded a city in the area, which is "now" well populated (12.3.28 C555).

11. For Strabo, καταλύεσθαι means "to be finished" in the sense of having one's career ended, not necessarily of being killed. Pompey defeated Mithridates in 66 B.C., but Mithridates did not die until 63 B.C.

In Strabo's account of Galatia, an area bordering on Pontus that had lain beyond Mithridates' direct control, Strabo again organizes his material around timeblocks, contrasting (by a μέν . . . δέ construction) the organization of Galatia "long ago" with the political situation "in our times" (καθ' ἡμᾶς), before describing the situation "now." Since this passage is one of the two on which Niese based his arguments, it is worth quoting it in full (12.5.1 C567):

Πάλαι μὲν οὖν ἦν τοιαύτη τις ἡ διάταξις, καθ' ἡμᾶς δὲ εἰς τρεῖς, εἴτ' εἰς δύο ἡγεμόνας, εἴτα εἰς ἓνα ἦκεν ἡ δυναστεία, εἰς Δηϊόταρον, εἴτ' ἐκεῖνον διεδέξατο Ἀμύντας· νῦν δ' ἔχουσι Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ ταύτην καὶ τὴν ὑπὸ τῷ Ἀμύντᾳ γενομένην πᾶσαν εἰς μίαν συναγαγόντες ἐπαρχίαν.

Such, then, was their organization long ago. In our times, power passed to three, then two chiefs, then one, Deiotarus, whom Amyntas succeeded. Now the Romans possess both this [sc. region, i.e., Galatia] and the whole [sc. region] that used to belong to Amyntas, and have united it into one province.

Strabo has just described how the Galatians originally came to be in possession of their lands and how their three tribes—the Tolistobogii, the Trocmi and the Tectosages—each came to be divided into four tetrarchies (each headed by a tetrarch), making a total of twelve tetrarchies in all. It is this organization that characterizes the period "long ago." In order to date the "passing of power to three" that Strabo attributes to "our times," Niese turned to the beginning of Strabo's description of Pontus where Strabo, after first giving the extent of the kingdom as held by Mithridates, goes on to describe Pompey's activities "after he had destroyed him [i.e., Mithridates]" (καταλύσας ἐκεῖνον, 12.3.1 C540–41). Strabo's account includes Pompey's policy concerning Galatia and interior Paphlagonia, which, like Galatia, had lain beyond Mithridates' direct rule. We are told that Pompey "handed over certain parts [sc. of the interior lands of the Paphlagonians] to the members of the dynasty of Pylaemenes to rule, just as he also [sc. handed over] the Galatians to the hereditary tetrarchs" (τινὰς βασιλεύεσθαι παρέδωκε τοῖς ἀπὸ Πυλαιμένους, καθάπερ καὶ τοὺς Γαλάτας τοῖς ἀπὸ γένους τετράρχαις). Niese identified Pompey's handing over of the Galatians "to the hereditary tetrarchs" at 12.3.1 with the passing of power "to three" at 12.5.1. Niese concluded that the passing of power "to three" took place at the hands of Pompey, and that it should be dated to late 63 B.C. or early 62 B.C. Therefore, according to Niese's interpretation of καθ' ἡμᾶς as "in my lifetime," Strabo was already alive by this date.¹²

There are two main problems with Niese's argument. The first concerns the interpretation "in my lifetime." Are we to suppose that Strabo's audience knew the date of his birth?¹³ Is Strabo really using his birthdate to date an event in Galatian history? Would it anyway be meaningful for Strabo to char-

12. Niese, "Beiträge," 40 and "Straboniana," 568–69. Magie, 1:373, and 2:1235, n. 40, accepts Niese's identification and interpretation.

13. Honigmann, "Strabon 3," cols. 77, 87, accepts Niese's interpretation "in my lifetime" and a birthdate for Strabo of 64/63 B.C., yet recognizes that the significance of 64/63 B.C. is that it coincides with the Roman incorporation of Asia Minor. Honigmann suggests that the coincidence would have been noted in Strabo's history (Strabo's only other known work, now lost). It is much simpler to eliminate the issue of Strabo's birthdate altogether and to see "our times" as referring directly to the period following Roman incorporation

acterize an event as early as 63 or 62 B.C. as happening "in my lifetime" when, on Niese's own calculations, Strabo would have still been a new-born babe? How were the audience supposed to realize that the event dated right from the beginning of Strabo's lifetime? The second problem is that Niese had no real basis on which to identify the passing of power "to three" with Pompey's handing over of the Galatians "to the hereditary tetrarchs," as his critics pointed out.¹⁴ The position adopted in this article is that, given Strabo's contrast of καθ' ἡμᾶς with "long ago," that is, the first timeblock, he is using the expression to mean not "in my lifetime" but "in our times" and to indicate the second timeblock, the period beginning with Pompey's reorganization. Strabo's interest is in characterizing the situation in Galatia following Roman intervention, which he does by telling us that "in our times, power passed to three, then two chiefs, then one," etc. There is no evidence for any event later than Pompey's reorganization itself to which power passing "to three" might apply;¹⁵ and the interpretation of καθ' ἡμᾶς as "in our times" would preclude identifying the passing of power "to three" with any earlier event. Ironically, then, the interpretation of καθ' ἡμᾶς in this article supports Niese in his identification of power passing "to three" with Pompey's handing over of Galatia to "the hereditary tetrarchs." This vindication of Niese's identification is, however, at the expense of his own interpretation of καθ' ἡμᾶς and thus his conclusions concerning Strabo's birthdate.

Niese saw the passing of power "to three" and Pompey's handing over to "the hereditary tetrarchs" as indications of a direct reduction by Pompey of the original twelve tetrarchs of Galatia to three. It is possible, however, that the process of change in Galatia had already started before Pompey's reorganization, perhaps in 86 B.C., when Mithridates murdered most of the Galatian tetrarchs.¹⁶ In the case of Tolistobogii, at least, tribal power may have already been concentrated in the hands of one tetrarch at the time of the reorganization, for one of the tetrarchs established or confirmed by Pompey was Deiotarus,¹⁷ presumably the same Deiotarus whom Strabo

of Asia Minor. The concept of "our times," however, may have been reinforced in Strabo's history, the bulk of which began where Polybius' history left off (11.9.3 C515), i.e., 146/145 B.C., and probably finished some time in or after the mid-20s B.C. (D. Ambaglio, *Gli Historika Hypomnemata di Strabone* [Milan, 1990], F20).

14. P. Meyer, "Quaestiones Straboniana," *Leipziger Studien zur Classischen Philologie* 2 (1879): 49–72, esp. 50, 54, argued that the passing of power "to three" could not be dated and could not therefore be used to establish Strabo's birthdate, which Meyer put in 68 B.C. Meyer was rebutted by Niese, "Straboniana," 568. Then G. F. Unger, "Umfang und Anordnung der Geschichte des Poseidonios," *Philologus* 55 (1896): 245–56, esp. 249–50, argued that the passing of power "to three" took place in 66 B.C. at the latest and that Strabo was therefore already alive at that date, and he, too, moved Strabo's birthdate earlier, putting it in 67/66 B.C. A. Gercke, "War der Schwiegerohn des Poseidonios ein Schüler Aristarchs?" *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* n.f. 62 (1907): 116–22, esp. p. 119 and n. 1, argued that the date of Pompey's reorganization in Galatia was unknown and therefore did not provide a *terminus ante quem* for Strabo's birth (which Gercke put between 66 and 60 B.C.).

15. Niese, "Straboniana," 569. For the dating of the subsequent passage of power "to two" and then "to one," see Coupry, in J. Coupry and Remzi Oguz Arik, "Les Tumuli de Karalar et la sépulture du roi Deiotarus II," *Revue Archéologique*, 6th series, 6 (1935): 133–51, esp. 140–50.

16. App. *Mith.* 46. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:29 and n. 20, sees Strabo's description of power passing "to three" as referring to a reduction in the wake of this massacre and argues that, when Strabo places the event in our times, he "should not be taken literally."

17. App. *Mith.* 114, *Syr.* 50. Magie, 2:1235–38, nn. 40–41; p. 1275, n. 58; p. 1276, n. 60; Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 1:33–36; and Syme, *Anatolica*, 127–36, identify this Deiotarus with the Deiotarus who, according to Strabo at 12.5.1 C567, ended up as sole Galatian leader.

describes, at the later point in time when Pompey made him a king, as “also holding the tetrarchy of the Galatians, the Tolistobogii, inherited from his father” (ἔχοντα καὶ τὴν πατρώαν τετραρχίαν τῶν Γαλατῶν, τοὺς γε Τολιστοβωγίους, 12.3.13 C547). Whatever political changes had already taken place in Galatia prior to Pompey’s activities, it is not to any such changes that Strabo refers when he tells us that “in our times” power passed “to three,” but to Pompey’s reorganization itself even if, as is now often supposed,¹⁸ this constituted a clarification or ratification, rather than a one-off reduction from the twelve of “long ago.”

The other passage on which Niese based his argument for Strabo’s birthdate concerns interior Paphlagonia. In Strabo’s frustratingly brief account of this area, the situation “now” is contrasted (by means of a μέν . . . δέ construction) with the situation “a little before our time” (μικρὸν πρὸ ἡμῶν). Again, this important passage is worth quoting in full (12.3.41 C562):

Ταύτης δέ, καίπερ ὀλίγης οὔσης, μικρὸν μὲν πρὸ ἡμῶν ἦρχον πλείους, νῦν δ’ ἔχουσι Ῥωμαῖοι, τοῦ γένους τῶν βασιλέων ἐκλιπόντος.

This [sc. region], though small, was subject to several rulers a little before our times, but now is subject to the Romans, since the royal family has died out.

“Several” is used by Strabo to mean several simultaneously rather than successively. We are left wondering who the “several rulers” are. Niese argued that the “several rulers” should be identified with “the members of the dynasty of Pylaemenes” to whom Pompey “handed over” these parts of Paphlagonia, just as he also handed over the Galatians “to the hereditary tetrarchs” (12.3.1 C541).¹⁹ Niese dated Pompey’s activities in Paphlagonia to the first half of 64 B.C. and, interpreting μικρὸν πρὸ ἡμῶν as “a little before my lifetime,” argued that Strabo must have been born after that date. Again, there is no real basis for Niese’s identification of the “several rulers” with the Pylaemenids after Pompey had “handed over” interior Paphlagonia to them. It seems unlikely that Strabo is attempting to date the “several rulers” by reference to his birthdate, which the audience would have to know very precisely in order for the expression “a little before my time” to be meaningful. If, however, the expression means, in effect, “a little before Pompey’s reorganization,” then the “several rulers” would be those who were in power not after, as Niese argued, but before Pompey clarified the situation by handing over interior Paphlagonia “to the members of the dynasty of Pylaemenes.” Indeed, several historians have made this link and in doing so have tacitly rejected Niese’s identification.²⁰ Beyond that, the identity of the “several rulers” remains unsolved. They may have included those Pylaemenids later recognized by Pompey or they may have been the

18. Lasserre, *Géographie*, 9:119, n. 2; Syme, *Anatolica*, 129; Coupry, “Les Tumuli de Karalar,” 133–51, esp. 143.

19. Niese, “Beiträge,” 38–40.

20. Jones, *Cities*, 162, and p. 424, n. 29, thinks that Strabo’s reference is to petty principalities into which Paphlagonia disintegrated under Mithridates, before Pompey handed it over to the Pylaemenid dynasty. Syme, *Anatolica*, 113, argues that the “several rulers,” since they are put before Strabo’s birth in 63 B.C., are unlikely to be the rulers after Pompey’s reorganization (although it was partly by making this identification that Niese came up with Strabo’s birthdate of 63 B.C. in the first place).

dynasts in power before Mithridates' defeat, whose existence Strabo implies when he tells us that this part of Paphlagonia was subject to dynasts "even after the destruction of Mithridates" (12.3.9 C544).²¹

Elsewhere in his treatment of Asia Minor, Strabo's usage of "our times" as a timeblock similarly suggests that it refers to the period beginning with Pompey's reorganization. For the Amanus mountain range to the east of Plain Cilicia, Strabo contrasts, with a μέν . . . δέ construction, the fact that it was "always held by several tyrants" (ἀεὶ μὲν ὑπὸ πλείονων δυναστευόμενον τυράννων) with the fact that "in our times" one man, Tarcondimotus, was established as "lord of the whole region" (κύριος πάντων, 14.5.18 C676).²² The political nature of the contrast suggests that Pompey at least confirmed Tarcondimotus,²³ even though he may have been in power earlier. Describing Cataonia, Strabo points out that "the ancients" considered it to include Melitene and to be separate from the rest of Cappadocia; that Cataonia and Melitene are each one of the ten στρατηγίαι constituting Cappadocia as it was held by "the kings of our times" before Archelaus, and that "in our times" Melitene and Cataonia each had their own στρατηγός (12.1.2 C533–34). Strabo's words do not preclude the possibility that the division into στρατηγίαι pre-dates Pompey,²⁴ and that Pompey confirmed or clarified the existing divisions. Strabo also mentions that Dyme in Achaea was "earlier" called Stratus, and "still earlier" Paleia, then tells us that "a little before our times" it received as colonists some of the pirates from the pirate-bands that Pompey had destroyed (8.7.5 C387–88). Pompey won a major naval battle against the pirates off the coast of Rough Cilicia in 67 B.C.,²⁵ and probably resettled some of them at Dyme soon thereafter.

"Our times" are characterized not only by the political situation but also by the famous people from the various cities of Asia Minor and the Asian coast who were active in this period. Strabo often contrasts them with earlier, sometimes mythical, persons. He introduces them with the formula "in our times, such-and-such a person was notable" or "such-and-such a notable person lived,"²⁶ meaning that the activities for which they are famous extended into, or began during, "our times" (not necessarily that they were

21. Meyer, "Quaestiones Strabonianae," 57–58, identified the "several rulers" with the dynasts in power before Mithridates' destruction, which allowed him to put Strabo's birth earlier than Niese had, in 68 B.C. In response, Niese, "Straboniana," 570–75 denied that the "several rulers" are the dynasts in power before Mithridates' destruction. Unger, "Umfang und Anordnung," 250–51, argued that, since the "several rulers" were in power before Strabo's birth, which Unger dated to 67/66 B.C., they can be identified with the dynasts before Mithridates' destruction, and concluded that Strabo's "several rulers" must be a reference to the members of the Pylaemenid dynasty before Pompey handed over power to them.

22. Magie, 2:1240, n. 53, translates "lord of several tyrants," but πάντα means the "whole region" (cf. νοὺν δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ Πυθοδαορίδι πάντ' ἔστιν, 12.3.37 C559). Strabo's contrast suggests that Tarcondimotus was, at least officially, the only dynast.

23. Jones, *Cities*, 202, and p. 437, n. 18, and Syme, *Anatolica*, 161. See also Magie, 2:1240, n. 53; R. Syme, *Roman Papers*, vol. 1, ed. E. Badian (Oxford, 1979), 129, and G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), 46.

24. For the earlier existence of the στρατηγίαι, Magie, 1:493; Lasserre, *Géographie*, 9:47, n. 2.

25. Magie, 1:298–301, 357.

26. Those notable "in our times" are: from Mytilene, Potamon, Lesbocles, Crinagoras and the historian Theophanes who, Strabo tells us, became a friend of Pompey (13.2.3 C617); from Pergamon, Mithridates, friend of Julius Caesar, and Apollodorus the rhetor, friend of Augustus (13.4.3 C625); from Miletus, Aeschines the rhetor, a critic of Pompey (14.1.7 C635); from Erythrae, Heracleides the Herophileian medical doctor (14.1.34 C645); from Tralles, Pythodorus, friend of Pompey, and Menodorus, killed by Domitius

born “in our times”);²⁷ and two notables are described as living “a little before our times.”²⁸ Rulers and leaders (in Asia Minor and beyond) succeed or reign during, or commit deeds at various points within, “our times”;²⁹ or, in the case of Bogus and Bocchus, succeed “a little before our times.”³⁰ Intellectual opinions are held, and scholarly works produced, “in our times.”³¹

In a closely related usage, καθ’ ἡμᾶς is used to qualify nouns that have a verbal meaning, like “ruler,” “king,” “philosopher,” etc., or to qualify the proper names of individuals denoted by such nouns. In these contexts, the expression maintains its temporal sense and may be rendered “of our times.”³² In Egypt, for example,³³ Cleopatra is described as “queen of our times” (14.6.6 C684),³⁴ and her father as Auletes “of our times” (17.1.11 C796).³⁵ Tiberius, the emperor at the time Strabo was completing his work, is called “the leader of our times” (ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἡγεμὼν, 13.4.8 C627); the superiority “of the leaders of our times” (τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἡγεμόνων) is a

Ahenobarbus (14.1.42 C649); from Cnidus, Theopompus, friend of Julius Caesar, and his son Artemidorus (14.2.15 C656); from Halicarnassus, Dionysius the historian (14.2.16 C656); from Cos, Nicias the tyrant (14.2.19 C653); from Mylasa, the rhetors and city leaders, Euthydemus and Hybreas (14.2.24 C658–60); from Seleucia, the Peripatetic philosophers Athenaeus, friend of Murena, and Xenarchus, friend of Augustus and teacher of Strabo (14.5.4 C670); from Sidon, Boethus, with whom Strabo studied, and Boethus’ brother, Diodotus (16.2.24 C757); from Tyre, Antipater (16.2.24 C757).

27. Correct translation is important here since, in many cases, Strabo’s words are the best evidence we have for the dating (albeit only broad) of such individuals. H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo*, vols. 1–8 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1917–32), esp. vol. 6, consistently mistranslates, e.g., “born . . . in my time” (143), “in my time . . . was born” (243), “here were born in my time . . .” (335).

28. From Tyre, Apollonius (16.2.24 C757); from Ascalon, Antiochus the philosopher (16.2.29 C759). In the case of Antiochus, Jones, *Geography*, 7: 277, mistranslates “was born a little before my time.” The meaning is rather that Antiochus lived (and died) a little before our times. Antiochus, who was born ca. 130 B.C., is attested in Syria in 69 B.C. “shortly before he died” (Cic. *Luc.* 61). His death is therefore put in 68 or 67 B.C. by J. Barnes, “Antiochus of Ascalon” in *Philosophia Togata*, ed. M. Griffin and J. Barnes (Oxford, 1989), 52–59.

29. Events happening “in our times”: a shrine in Moschice near Colchis was sacked by Pharmaces (a king of Bosphorus) (11.2.17 C498); Ilium was improved by Julius Caesar (13.1.27 C594); Nora in Cappadocia was the treasure-hold of Sisines (12.2.5 = 12.2.6 C537 in editions before Kramer) (Magie, 1:435 and 2:1286, n. 26, identifies Sisines with Archelaus; Syme, *Anatolica*, 148–50, convincingly rejects the identification); Joubas (I) succeeded as king of the Masaesylians (17.3.9 C829); Queen Candace ruled the Aethiopes (17.1.54 C820); Decaeneus, the diviner for Byrebistas, was held as a god among the Getae (16.2.39 C762). “The last to have ruled over the Cappadocians in our times” (17.1.11 C796) is a reference to Archelaus.

30. “A little before our times, kings Bogus [the spelling of the name varies in the MSS] and Bocchus took possession of it [sc. Marousia]” (μικρὸν πρὸ ἡμῶν οἱ περὶ Βόγον βασιλεῖς καὶ Βόκχον κατεῖχον αὐτήν, 17.3.7 C828). For the expression οἱ περὶ, S. L. Radt, “Noch einmal Aischylos, Niobe Fr. 162 N.² (278 M),” *ZPE* 38 (1980): 47–58, esp. 55, and “οἱ (αἱ etc.) περὶ + acc. *nominis proprii* bei Strabon,” *ZPE* 71 (1988): 35–40.

31. Media and Armenia are considered “in our times” to be part of northern Asia, while for Eratosthenes they were part of southern Asia (11.12.5 C522). *On the Nile* was produced “in our times” by the scholars Eudorus and Ariston the Peripatetic (17.1.5 C790).

32. As also one “of the censuses of our times” (τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς τιμήσεων, 3.5.3 C169). Sometimes the sense verges on “our,” as in “our lifestyle” or “life in our times” (ὁ καθ’ ἡμᾶς βίος), which Strabo characterizes as having become indolent and self-indulgent, in contrast with the righteous Scythians (7.3.7 C301).

33. One other example has been noted above: the Cappadocian “kings of our times” (12.1.2 C533). Also, Eurycles is “Lacedaemonian leader of our times” (8.5.1 C363) and Cleon is “brigand leader of our times” on Mount Olympus in Mysia (12.8.8 C574).

34. The accession of Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII is dated to 51 B.C.; Cleopatra’s expulsion to 48 B.C.; her restoration as joint ruler with Ptolemy XIII to 47 B.C. After the death of Ptolemy XIII, Ptolemy XIV ruled with Cleopatra from 47–44 B.C. (*RE* 23.2: 1756–60).

35. Auletes began his rule in 80 B.C. but was expelled in 58 B.C. He was restored (by Pompey) in 55 B.C. and died in 51 B.C. (*RE* 23.2: 1748).

reference to both Augustus and Tiberius (6.4.2 C288);³⁶ "those now and of our times" (οἱ νῦν καὶ καθ' ἡμᾶς) is a reference to Pompey, Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Augustus' children, friends, wife, and sister, whom Strabo goes on to name (5.3.8 C236). Intellectuals may also be "of our times,"³⁷ as when Strabo characterizes Posidonius the Stoic as "the most learned of the philosophers of our times" (ἀνὴρ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς φιλοσόφων πολυμαθέστατος, 16.2.10 C753).³⁸

Strabo uses the expression ἐφ' ἡμῶν in the same way as καθ' ἡμᾶς, meaning "in our times" and signifying the period beginning with Pompey's reorganization of Asia Minor. Strabo tells us that the temple at Olbe in Rough Cilicia was founded by Ajax, son of Teucer, and that the priest of the temple became the dynast of the area. Subsequently, Strabo continues, many tyrants attacked the area and pirate-bands were established. Then the pirate-bands were destroyed (67 B.C.), and the dynasty and priesthood were called Teucrican "even in our times" (ἐφ' ἡμῶν ἤδη, 14.5.10 C672).³⁹ A variety of other events, in Asia Minor and elsewhere, took place ἐφ' ἡμῶν.⁴⁰ Three events happened "recently in our times" (νεωστὶ ἐφ' ἡμῶν). Describing the city of Rhegium in Italy, Strabo tells us that it "always" provided a fortified defense against Sicily, both "long ago" and "recently in our times" when Sextus Pompeius caused Sicily to revolt (43 B.C., 6.1.6 C258).⁴¹ Sicily itself was subject to brigandage, at first by individuals and then by bigger groups, and "recently in our times" a certain Selourus, leader of a whole army in Sicily, was sent to Rome for execution (probably mid-30s B.C., 6.2.6 C273).⁴² The characteristics of Arabia have become evident as a result of

36. Both the examples given by Strabo of the superiority "of the leaders of our times" date from Augustus' principate: the entrusting by Phraates of the Parthian royal children to Augustus as hostages and the return (to Tiberius in 20 B.C.) by the Parthians of the trophies taken earlier from the Romans. However, 6.4.2 as a whole was probably written under Tiberius (F. Lasserre, "Strabon devant l'empire romain," *ANRW* 2.30.1 [1982]: 867–96, esp. 885–88).

37. Aristonicus "the teacher of our times" (1.2.31 C38); Theodorus "the rhetor of our times" (16.2.29 C759); Hybreas "the greatest rhetor of our times" (13.4.15 C630); Nestor "of our times," an Academic philosopher, teacher of Augustus' nephew Marcellus (14.5.14 C675); Aristocles "of our times" (14.2.13 C654).

38. A misunderstanding or misremembering of 16.2.10 C753 may lie at the root of a garbled passage of Athenaeus (Athenaeus 14.657E/F) in which Athenaeus appears to claim that Strabo personally knew Posidonius. The use of the present tense ἐστὶ at 16.2.10 C753, although regularly used of notables long since dead, (e.g., Demetrius of Scepsis, 13.1.55 C609), may have misled Athenaeus. Posidonius was active before "our times" but certainly survived into them and, indeed, was visited and honored by Pompey (in 62 B.C.) after the latter's success against Mithridates. Strabo (11.1.6 C491–92), who describes Posidonius as a "friend" of Pompey, refers to an earlier meeting between the two after the start of Pompey's campaign against the pirates, and probably tells us (depending on our interpretation of Strabo) that Posidonius wrote a history about Pompey. See L. Edelstein and I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius*², vol. 1: *The Fragments* (Cambridge, 1989), and vol. 2: *The Commentary* (Cambridge, 1988), esp. T8, T35–39, and F79, and W. Theiler, *Posidonios. Die Fragmente*, vols. 1–2 (Berlin and New York, 1982), T2c, T27, and F47a.

39. For ἤδη meaning "even," compare Strabo's account of the Getae, where he passes over "ancient matters" but recounts the situation existing "even up to our times" (εἰς ἡμᾶς ἤδη, 7.3.11 C303).

40. Aelius Catus relocated fifty thousand Getae across the Ister to Thrace (7.3.10 C303); Amyntas acquired the Isaura and Derbe (12.6.3 C569); Cato gave his wife Marcia to Hortensius (11.9.1 C515); a city was founded on the Greek island of Cephalonia by Gaius Antonius during his exile (10.2.13 C455); Nicopolis in Acarnania was founded (10.2.2 C450 but with some variant textual readings); Augustus sent a colony to Syracuse (6.2.4 C270); there was frequent internal strife among the Parthians (15.3.12 C732).

41. Lasserre, *Géographie*, 3:135, n. 4.

42. K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades," *JRS* 80 (1990): 44–73, esp. 53.

Aelius Gallus' campaign against the Arabs, which took place "recently in our times" (26–25 B.C., 16.4.22 C780).⁴³

"Recently" (νεωστί) is also used standing alone.⁴⁴ For example, describing the fate of the art-treasures of Corinth after the city was sacked by Rome, Strabo mentions that a picture by Aristides survived the sack and was preserved in the temple of Demeter at Rome, then was "recently" lost along with the temple itself in a fire (31 B.C., 8.6.23 C381).⁴⁵ Strabo enumerates the twelve districts of Achaëa and, for some districts, provides a brief note on their role in myth or ancient history, then tells us that "recently" the Romans, after their victory at Actium, settled a part of the army at Patrae, one of the districts, and that it is "now" exceptionally well populated (8.7.5 C387). Strabo gives the early history of Laconice, then tells us that "recently" Eurycles stirred up trouble, abusing his friendship with Augustus (8.5.5 C366) and that there are "ancient" stone quarries on Tænarum, while "recently" mining has started in the Taygetus (8.5.7 C367). Strabo recounts the earlier history of the war-like Salassi, then tells us that they were powerful "up into recent times" (μέχρι τῶν νεωστὶ χρόνων), giving as examples their treatment of Decimus Brutus (43 B.C.), of Messala (34 B.C.), and of Augustus, but that "later" Augustus overthrew them completely (25 B.C., 4.6.7 C205).⁴⁶ The city of Tanaïs in the Bosporus, founded by the Greeks, was "recently" sacked by Polemon (between 14 and 8 B.C., 11.2.3 C493).

Strabo uses both ἐφ' ἡμῶν and καθ' ἡμᾶς in conjunction with the expression "in the times of our fathers." Thus he tells us that the city of Laodicia in Phrygia saw an increase "in our times and in the times of our fathers" (ἐφ' ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων πατέρων) and that this is "despite having suffered a siege in the time of Mithridates Eupator" (12.8.16 C578).⁴⁷ Strabo similarly tells us that the shrine of Men Caru near Laodicia was set up "in our times" (καθ' ἡμᾶς) as a school of Herophileian doctors by Zeuxis and afterwards by Alexander Philaletes, just as "in the times of our fathers" (ἐπὶ τῶν πατέρων τῶν ἡμετέρων) the school of Erasistratian doctors was set up by Hicesius (12.8.20 C580).⁴⁸ In neither passage does "our times" refer to Strabo's own individual lifespan, any more than "the times of our fathers" refers to the lifespan of Strabo's own father. Nevertheless,

43. S. Jameson, "Chronology of the Campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius," *JRS* 58 (1968): 71–84, esp. 76–78, accepted by G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 46–49.

44. E. Pais, *Ancient Italy*, tr. C. D. Curtis (Chicago and London, 1908), 383–85, takes "recently" and "recently in our times" in these passages to mean "in the recent past," and uses them to support his theory that the *Geography* was initially written by 7 B.C., with only some later additions. Strabo does sometimes use "recently" for events of a much later date: the earthquakes of A.D. 17 (13.4.8 C627, 13.3.5 C621; cf. 12.8.18 C579); the death of king Joubas (II) of Marousia in A.D. 23 (17.3.7 C828, 17.3.9 C829); the accession of a son of Pythodorus as king of greater Armenia in A.D. 18 (12.3.29 C556). When Strabo tells us that Petronius, having led a successful campaign against the Aethiopes, sent the captives to Augustus, who had "recently" come from Cantabria (17.1.54 C821), the sense is that Augustus had come from Cantabria (24 B.C.) just before the captives were sent to him, not (as Pais, p. 384, assumes) just before the writing of the *Geography*.

45. Baladié, *Géographie*, 5:190, n. 1.

46. Lasserre, *Géographie*, 2:176, n. 4, and p. 177, nn. 1–2.

47. 88 B.C. (Magie, 1:214).

48. For Zeuxis, Alexander Philaletes, and the school at Men Caru, H. von Staden, *Herophilus* (Cambridge, 1989), 529–39.

the conjunction of the two expressions does suggest that Strabo thinks of "our times" as belonging to his generation, and therefore that Strabo's generation was the generation born after the defeat of Mithridates and the beginning of Roman dominance. Indeed, just as I consider myself to be part of the baby-boom generation, born after the war between 1945 and 1960, perhaps Strabo considers his generation to be those born in the period between, say, 65 B.C. and 50 B.C.

Strabo makes several autobiographical comments in the *Geography* that tend to confirm that he was born within the window 65–50 B.C., without enabling us to narrow down the date further. The key piece of information Strabo gives us is that he accompanied Aelius Gallus, while Gallus was prefect of Egypt,⁴⁹ on a voyage up the Nile (2.5.12 C118). He gives us several eye-witness descriptions of the places at which Gallus' entourage stopped. The voyage probably took place just before the Arabian campaign of 26/25 B.C. Strabo was certainly more than a boy at the time of the voyage, but young enough that he was still alive over four decades later, writing in or after ca. A.D. 17/18,⁵⁰ and as late as ca. A.D. 23.⁵¹ Strabo was personally present at some events that can be dated before the Nile voyage,⁵² but his comments are terse and give us no indication of Strabo's age at these dates.

CONCLUSION

The traditional methodology in dealing with Strabo's expression καθ' ἡμᾶς has been limited to identifying and dating the earliest event thus characterized, in order to establish the start-date of the time period to which the expression is taken to refer. The methodology I have used in this article is to look instead at the way in which the expression is used, in order to understand its significance. This approach leads to the recognition that καθ' ἡμᾶς, or "in our times," signifies the period beginning with Pompey's reorganization in Asia and that this is the period within which Strabo was born, rather than the period defined by his birth. Polybius, an important source for Strabo, uses similar expressions in his *Histories*, for example, οἱ καθ' ἡμᾶς καιροί, to denote the period that has historical significance for him, that is, from 220 B.C. onwards when, as Polybius perceives it, Fortune started to bring together the affairs of nearly the whole inhabited world under Roman domination (Polyb. 1.4.1–6; 2.37.4–9). Polybius himself was born some years later than 220 B.C., perhaps ca. 208 B.C. but more probably ca. 200 B.C.⁵³ For Polybius, as for Strabo, "our times" coincides not with his own

49. The probable commencement of Aelius Gallus' prefecture is 27 B.C., although it could have been as late as 26 B.C. or as early as 29 B.C. (Jameson, "Chronology," 78–79).

50. E.g., 4.6.9 C206, 12.1.4 C534, 16.2.3 C749.

51. 17.3.7 C828, 17.3.9 C829.

52. 12.6.2 C568 (before 44 B.C.), 6.2.6 C273 (before 29 B.C.), 10.5.3 C485 (29 B.C.).

53. I would like to thank F. W. Walbank for his help in pointing out these and other references to me. For Professor Walbank's own view, see *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1957), 217, where he notes on Polybius' use of "in our times" at 2.37.6: "strictly speaking, in his own lifetime, but probably conceived as covering the period from 220 onwards."

life precisely, but with the period in which he and his approximate contemporaries were born.

While this article challenges the *communis opinio* concerning Strabo's birth, it adds to our understanding of Strabo in other ways. His choice of Mithridates' defeat and Pompey's reorganization to mark the beginning of "our times" shows Strabo as an Asiatic, identifying with what had been Pontus although it had undergone many further changes by the time that he wrote. It is the historical experience of this region that shapes his outlook and provides him with a temporal framework, even though in other ways he is very much part of the Roman world.

University of Toronto