

THE ROMAN GEOGRAPHICAL PERIODS

Romans carried forward the Greek tradition of contributions to the development of geography. The fields of historical and regional geography saw considerable progress, with Strabo and Ptolemy being the leading proponents, and Polybius and Posidonius contributing significantly to the study of physical geography.

Strabo

Strabo (64 B.C. to 20 A.D.) was born south of Black Sea in a Turkish town of Amasia, capital of the Barbarian kings, and supporting a large Greek population. Strabo's main contribution was his attempt to bring together all the existing geographical knowledge in the form of a general treatise. His seventeen-volume work titled 'Geography' was an encyclopaedical description of the world known to the Greeks. The first two volumes had in them a review of the work of other geographers since the time of Homer, while eight volumes were devoted to Europe, six to Asia, and one to Africa.

Strabo's historical work, introduced history of a country alongside its geography, while highlighting the intimate connection and interplay between the two.

He also attempted to trace the influence of the physical features on the character and the history of the inhabitants. Strabo's book targeted a specific group of readers such as administrative officers, statesmen, and commanders of the Roman Empire.

The purpose was to provide ready-at-hand information about people and places to aid the imperial officers in accomplishing their tasks easily. Strabo's work thus laid down firm foundation for chronological writing in geography.

Ptolemy

Claudius Ptolemy (90-168 A.D.), a native of Egypt, wrote an eight volume work, the 'Guide to Geography', which consisted of discussions on map projections (first volume), tables of latitudes and longitudes (six volumes) and maps of different parts of the world (eighth volume).

His best known works include the "Almagast" which dealt with complicated problems of mathematical geography and astronomy long remaining the most standard reference on the movement of celestial bodies.

Ptolemy firmly believed that geography is a science that deals with the art of map-making. He aimed at 'reforming' the map of the world on the basis of astronomical principles.

Ptolemy was far ahead of his contemporaries in the mathematical construction of map projection. It was Ptolemy who for the first time plotted the Gangetic Gulf or the Bay of Bengal, as it is presently known. He showed the source of the Ganges and also its main tributary flowing down from the Himalayas.

Although Ptolemy's calculations of latitudes and longitudes have been found erroneous, as it was based on the estimated lengths of the journeys between the places, however its great scholarly importance cannot be ignored or belittled.

Ptolemy believed that geography is a science which deals with the art of map-making. The basic objective of Ptolemy's book was "to reform the map of the world" on the basis of astronomical principles. He stressed on determining the latitudes and longitudes of all the important points of the earth's surface for making a map of the world. He made great improvements in previously drawn maps. Ptolemy also made great contributions in the field of mathematical geography. He contributed in determining the circumference of the earth, dimensions of the habitable world, prime meridian, graticules and design of projection.

He also made an attempt of dividing the earth into climatic zones. His description of Caspian Sea was very accurate one. He said that the Caspian Sea is an inland sea. He also studied central Asia