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978-0-521-23445-0 - The Cambridge Ancient History: The Hellenistic World, Part I - Second Edition

Edited by F. W. Walbank, A. E. Astin, M. W. Frederiksen and R. M. Ogilvie

Excerpt

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CHAPTER 1

SOURCES FOR THE PERIOD

F. W. WALBANK

From the hundred years following Alexander's death the work of no single contemporary historian has survived other than fragmentarily. Yet the period had been fully covered both in universal histories and in specialized works dealing with particular kings, peoples or regions. In the latter category there are forty-six authors known to have written about the Hellenistic period: all are lost. On the causes of this holocaust one can only speculate. Most works had of course been written in the contemporary Greek idiom (the so-called *koine*), which did not appeal to later scholars (and copyists). Then again, many works may never have existed in sufficient numbers of copies to render them safe against the ravages of time; this was especially likely to be true of local historians. But above all the sheer bulk and length of many works alienated the average reader, and the appearance of résumés, abridgements and even lists of contents created the conditions for a kind of literary Gresham's law to operate, so that the inferior products drove the original out of circulation and hence eventually out of existence.

The disappearance of primary sources is the main problem for the historian of the third century. But there are others. The years from 323 to 217 saw an unparalleled expansion of the Greek world as a result of which Greeks, Macedonians and the peoples of Asia Minor were brought into close contact with the inhabitants of Egypt, Phoenicia, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Iran and central Asia. Everywhere Greeks settled and established a *modus vivendi* of some kind or other with the original populations. But the voice of the non-Greeks is rarely heard. All our sources are in Greek or are derived from Greek. Manetho the Egyptian priest and Berosus the Babylonian were encouraged to write the earlier history of their peoples down to the time of Alexander's death in Greek (for Greeks did not normally learn foreign languages); but we possess no Egyptian or Babylonian account of the period of Alexander's successors (the Diadochi) nor any history of Seleucid Asia written from the point of view of a Persian or a Babylonian, nor of Ptolemaic Egypt from that of a native Egyptian. The Jews, it is true, have left us their own version of the Hasmonean risings of the second century (in the

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Maccabees), but only three chapters of Josephus' *Antiquities* (xii.1–3) concern the century from Ptolemy's occupation of Egypt to the loss of Coele-Syria at Panium in 200. Furthermore, within the Graeco-Macedonian milieu itself all our accounts are written from the point of view of the dominant classes in society. The voices of the natives and those of the poor are equally silent; in many places such as Egypt natives and poor tended to be the same people.

The limitations of the source tradition do not end there. For the period after 300 there is no consecutive account of historical events in the eastern Mediterranean basin (other than the brief résumé in Justinus (see p. 7)) until we come to Polybius' description of the rise of the Achaean League and of the Cleomenean War in Book II of his *Histories*. Such important events as the Chremonidean War in Greece and the early wars between Egypt and Syria have to be reconstructed from odd scraps of information eked out with inscriptions and papyri.

Of the lost writers of the period 323 to 217 five stand out as especially important. There is strong evidence that it is these five who have predominantly stamped their character and their version of events on the surviving tradition; and it is possible to gain some impression of the contents and characteristics of their work from later writers who have drawn on them. In this chapter I shall begin by examining these lost writers. I shall then go on to consider those historians whose works survive, either wholly or in part, and how these relate to the primary sources. That done, I propose to discuss briefly some of the other sorts of information available to the historian.

I. LOST WRITERS

By far the most important of the lost historians is Hieronymus of Cardia (died c. 250),¹ whose political and military career, first under Alexander (whose archivist he was), then under Eumenes and, after his death, under Antigonus I, Demetrius I and Antigonus Gonatas, gave him a broad military experience and reinforced his judgement as a historian. His *Histories* (their exact title is uncertain) covered the period of Alexander's successors (cf. Diod. xviii.42) from 323 probably down to Pyrrhus' death in 272, and were the chief source of Diodorus xviii–xx, which constitutes our only sustained and continuous narrative for the period down to the battle of Ipsus. But Hieronymus is not Diodorus' only source, nor is it certain whether Diodorus used him directly or through an intermediary (though the former is more likely). Hieron-

¹ *FGrH* 154; cf. Hornblower 1981: (B 21).

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ymus' merits were widely recognized and he was a source² for Plutarch's *Lives of Eumenes, Demetrius and Pyrrhus*, for Nepos' *Life of Eumenes*, for Arrian's account of the successors of Alexander, and for Trogus (in Books XIII–XIV of Justinus' summary). As far as the abbreviated version in these later writers allows us to judge, his work was serious and intelligent, and he saw the full significance of what was happening as Alexander's empire fell apart, giving way to the separate kingdoms, the rise of which formed the main theme of his story. Pausanias (1.9.8) accuses him of bias towards Antigonos, whom he served, a charge which can hardly be sustained, though Antigonos does receive considerable attention. Of all the lost primary sources Hieronymus' *Histories* undoubtedly constitute the most serious casualty.

Hieronymus directed his work in part against that of Duris of Samos (c. 340–c. 260),³ a pupil of Theophrastus who for many years was tyrant in his native island of Samos. His *Macedonica* covered Macedonian affairs from 370/69 probably down to 281/80, the year in which Seleucus I died (shortly after Lysimachus) and Ptolemy II seized Samos and brought Duris' tyranny to an end. Duris' work, which was used alongside Hieronymus' both by Diodorus and by Plutarch in his *Lives of Eumenes, Demetrius and Pyrrhus*, was hostile in tone towards the Macedonians, but its main purpose was to entertain the reader and it aimed at creating sensational impressions and specialized in lurid episodes and scenes designed to arouse the reader's emotions. The same characteristics were displayed by Duris' *Life of Agathocles*,⁴ which was based on second-hand sources and concentrated on exposing the tyrant's wickedness. Diodorus made some use of this biography for his account of affairs in the West. For Italy, Sicily and the western Mediterranean the most important of the lost sources was, however, Timaeus of Tauromenium (c. 350–255),⁵ who spent fifty years in exile at Athens, where he wrote his history of the western Greeks down to the death of Pyrrhus. This work was Diodorus' main source for his account of Agathocles. Timaeus was painstaking and accurate and he probably devised the system of chronology based on Olympiad years which Polybius later adopted (Polyb. XII.11.1). He lacked a developed critical sense, but Polybius' virulent polemic against him (especially in Book XII) is exaggerated and unjust.

For the mainland of Greece the most important writer was the

² Plut. *Eum.* 11, Diod. XVIII.42 and Nepos, *Eum.* 5.4–5 give very similar accounts of conditions in the blockaded town of Nora (which Hieronymus visited as Antigonos' ambassador: Diod. XVIII.50.4). Stratagems of Eumenes and Antigonos recorded in Polyaeus probably also go back to Hieronymus.

³ *FGrH* 76; cf. Lévêque 1957, 2: (C 46); Kebric 1977, 51–4: (B 23).

⁴ See ch. 10, p. 384.

⁵ *FGrH* 566; cf. Brown 1958: (B 7); Momigliano 1966, 1.22–53: (B 25).

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Athenian (or Naucratic) Phylarchus,⁶ who covered the years between Pyrrhus' death in 272 and that of Cleomenes III of Sparta in 219, and whose *Histories* in twenty-eight books thus began where Hieronymus left off. Though he savagely criticizes Phylarchus for emotional writing (rather like Duris) (Polyb. II.56–63) and was clearly irritated by his partisanship for Cleomenes, Polybius nevertheless used him in Book II for his own account of Peloponnesian events down to the death of Antigonos Doseon; he was also Plutarch's source in his *Lives of Agis and Cleomenes* (*Cleom.* 5, 28, 30), and was drawn on by Athenaeus and followed (probably) by Trogus Pompeius. Polybius' main source for Greek events before his main narrative opened in 220 was, however, the thirty books of the *Memoirs* of his fellow-Achaean, Aratus of Sicyon (271–213),⁷ which were designed as an apologia covering his career down to 220, including the controversial volte-face when he called in the Macedonians to destroy Cleomenes. Rough in style and marred by significant omissions, Aratus' *Memoirs* were certainly less reliable than Polybius asserts (II.40.4). Nevertheless, where their version can be recovered they provide a salutary corrective to Phylarchus.

There were of course other third-century historians. Demosthenes' nephew Demochares (c. 360–275); composed a work in at least twenty-one books, mainly on Athens. Diyllus of Athens wrote a history in twenty-six books ending with the death of Cassander's son Philip; Proxenus was the author of a flattering biography of Pyrrhus, which drew on his *Memoirs*; and, for events in the West, there were the Syracusans Antander, who wrote a monograph on his brother, the tyrant Agathocles, and Callias, who wrote twenty-two books on the same subject.⁸ Both of these were laudatory in tone and their influence on existing works has been slight.

II. SURVIVING WRITERS

The earliest historian of the period to have survived in substantial amounts, and the only one of outstanding merit, is Polybius of Megalopolis (c. 200–c. 118).⁹ He pursued a public career as a statesman of the Achaean League down to 168 when, after the defeat of Perseus of Macedonia, he was compelled along with a thousand other Achaeans to go to Rome, where he was detained until 150. During these eighteen

⁶ *FGrH* 81; cf. Gabba 1957: (B 13); Africa 1961: (D 118).

⁷ *FGrH* 231; cf. Walbank 1933: (D 73).

⁸ *FGrH* 75 (Demochares), 73 (Diyllus), 703 (Proxenus), 565 (Antander), 564 (Callias); on Antander see Walbank 1968–9, 482–3: (G 10).

⁹ Books I–V survive intact, XVII, XIX, XXVI, XXXVII and XL (index volume) were lost by the tenth century and no genuine fragments survive; the remaining books consist of extracts. See Walbank, 1957, 1967 and 1979 (Commentary): (B 37); 1972: (B 38); 1977: (B 39).

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years he became the friend and teacher of P. Scipio Aemilianus (xxxI.23–30) and set about the composition of his *Histories*, originally designed to cover the years 220 to 167 in thirty books, in which he proposed to explain, primarily for Greek readers, ‘how and thanks to what kind of constitution’ (I.1.5) the Romans had during that period become masters of the whole of the civilized world, the *oecumene*. Later (probably after Scipio’s death in 129) he added a further ten books going down to 146 and intended, he says (III.4.6), to enable his readers to judge of the character and acceptability of the Roman empire. An important factor in his decision was, however, his desire to celebrate Scipio’s achievements and to recount his own experiences at Carthage, exploring the Atlantic (in a ship provided by Scipio), and as intermediary between the Romans and the defeated Achaeans after the sack of Corinth in 146. For the main part of his *Histories* (as distinct from the introductory Books I and II) Polybius drew on information derived from the careful questioning of eye-witnesses; but for the period down to 217, which included the rise of the Achaean League (in Book II) and, after 220, the Social War in Greece and the Fourth Syrian War between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV (in Books IV and V), he was obliged to use written sources. Among these, as we have seen, were Aratus and Phylarchus for mainland history. There is in fact some evidence that the account of the rise of Achaea (II.37–70) and the crisis created by the war with Cleomenes was originally a separate work (or the draft for one), which he included in the *Histories* only at a very late date. Polybius’ description (in Books IV and V) of the revolts against Antiochus III and the Fourth Syrian War goes back to excellent sources, but these cannot be identified. For later events Polybius was widely used by Livy, Diodorus and Dio Cassius; but for the period down to 217 he is our only continuous source.

After Polybius’ death there is a gap of almost a century before we come to another historian directly relevant to the military and political history of this period. We should indeed take some note of Agatharchides of Cnidus,¹⁰ who may have been a former slave who rose to the position of royal tutor at the Ptolemaic court c. 116, and composed two histories. One was a work in ten books *On Asia*, dealing with Alexander’s successors, the other consisted of forty-nine books *On Europe*, relating events in Greece from Alexander’s death perhaps down to the fall of the Macedonian monarchy in 168. Agatharchides also wrote a book *On the Erythraean Sea*, which can be largely reconstructed from extracts in Photius and passages in Diodorus based on it. This monograph contained interesting information about the Ptolemaic

¹⁰ *FGrH* 86; cf. Peremans 1967: (B 27); Gozzoli 1978: (B 18).

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elephant-hunts, on the gold-mines near the frontier of Egypt and Ethiopia and on similar topics. But neither this work nor the histories, of which little survives, made much impression upon the tradition. Mention should also be made of the *Lives* of *Phocion* and *Eumenes* by Cornelius Nepos, a contemporary of Cicero in the first century B.C.; but they are of small historical value.

The most important source after Polybius is Diodorus of Agyrium¹¹ in Sicily, who wrote his world history, the *Bibliotheca Historica*, at the time of Caesar and Augustus. Books XVIII–XXI deal with the century down to 217, but the full text goes only to the end of Book XX (the battle of Ipsus), the later books being made up of excerpts from the collection of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (tenth century A.D.), quotations from other authors including Photius, and passages taken from a now lost set of excerpts published in the seventeenth century (the *Eclogae Hoeschelianae*). Apart from occasional remarks, mainly of a moralizing nature, Diodorus is normally content to reproduce his sources, keeping to one author for a long period (with an occasional cross-reference to a divergent view in a second source). Hence the value of any passage in Diodorus is limited to that of its source (if known). As we have seen, for the period here being considered Diodorus reproduced Hieronymus, Duris and Timaeus, and his text provides our main access to those writers. The influence of Hieronymus is evident from the attention which Diodorus gives to Eumenes, Antigonus I and Cassander among the early kings. Whether Diodorus used these sources directly is not certain, though likely. A theory that Agatharchides was an intermediary has gained some popularity, but cannot be proved – though the use of Agatharchides has been demonstrated in some parts of Diodorus. From Book XXI onward the surviving fragments are taken mainly from the parts dealing with Roman history; here Diodorus' main sources were Philinus of Acragas, a pro-Carthaginian historian, for the First Punic War and after that Polybius and Posidonius. Diodorus' chronological scheme marks a retrograde step after Polybius' use of Olympiad years; he employs a framework based on Roman consul years and Athenian archon years (available only as far as Book XX, where the full text stops); but his dates are often inconsistent and must be treated with caution.

Another historian who used Hieronymus (and, for the West, Timaeus) is Trogius Pompeius,¹² a Vocontian Gaul from Vasio, who wrote a universal history in forty-four books entitled *Historiae Philip-*

¹¹ For bibliography see Will 1967, II.472–3; (A 67); cf. Bizière 1974; (B 4). On Diodorus' chronological scheme see L. C. Smith 1961; (C 66): Olympiad years are mentioned occasionally in Books XIX and XX.

¹² See Will 1967, II.493–4; (A 67); for Timagenes as Trogius' main source see Schwab 1834; (B 33); cf. von Gutschmid 1882; (B 19); also Walbank 1981, 351–6; (B 40).

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picae (a title perhaps derived from Theopompus' *Philippica*, and certainly indicating a non-Roman slant to the work). Of this there survive only the *prologi* (list of contents) and an epitome made by M. Junianus Justinus, who wrote at some date before or during the lifetime of St Augustine, who mentioned him. The books of Trogus relevant to the period 323–217 are XIII–XVII and XXII–XXIX (Books XVIII–XXI being devoted to the Roman war against Pyrrhus, the early history of Carthage and events in Sicily down to Agathocles' rise to power). Whether Trogus used his sources direct or drew on some sort of compilation has been much debated. His account of the Diadochi clearly goes back directly or indirectly to Hieronymus; but who lies behind his history of the later decades of the century is obscure. One view makes Trogus' main source the *History of Kings* by the Alexandrian Timagenes, who came to Rome in the mid first century, quarrelled with Augustus and became an associate of Asinius Pollio. This hypothesis, which has won some support, encounters serious obstacles, not least Timagenes' attested hostility to Rome, which is not evident in Trogus. But whatever his source or sources and despite the garbled character in which his work has reached us in Justinus' abridgement, Trogus is important as the only authority for many otherwise unknown events.

The importance of Plutarch (c. A.D. 50–c. 120)¹³ as a source is not easily over-valued. This philosopher and polymath, who passed his life moving mainly between his home city of Chaeronea in Boeotia and the sacred shrine of Delphi, where he held a priesthood, was no genius but he was immensely learned, and he had an eye for what was significant. His *Parallel Lives of Greeks and Romans* were intended to exemplify virtue and stigmatize vice in the characters portrayed, and to assist in the promotion of partnership between the two races in the running of a common empire. The *Lives* are not history but they are full of the stuff of history, and where they are available they bring life and personality to all the main actors upon the stage of history. The characters of the Diadochi as we believe we know them – of Antigonus, Ptolemy, Seleucus, Perdikkas, Eumenes and Demetrius Poliorcetes – are largely transmitted, perhaps in part created, by Plutarch. His *Lives* draw on a large number of sources, not always identifiable. Those of *Phocion*, *Eumenes*, *Demetrius* and *Pyrrhus* are relevant to the period of the Diadochi. As we saw, they make great use of Hieronymus and Duris. For the second half of the century those of *Agis* and *Cleomenes* were based mainly on Phylarchus, who was sympathetic to the revolutionary kings, while the *Aratus* draws largely on its hero's own *Memoirs*. The *Philopoemen*, only marginally relevant for this period, was derived mainly from Polybius,

¹³ Cf. Russell 1973: (B 31); on the *Philopoemen* see Walbank 1979, III.780–1 (B 37).

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but whether from the *Histories* (additions in that case being due to elaboration by Plutarch himself) or from the historian's independent biography of his predecessor, is uncertain.

Arrian (L. Flavius Arrianus) (c. A.D. 89–after 146),¹⁴ a Bithynian from Nicomedia, was like Plutarch interested in both philosophy and history; but, unlike Plutarch, he followed an active career in the imperial service, holding a consulship, provincial governorship and military commands, thus exemplifying the partnership which Plutarch sought to promote from the seclusion of his study. Eventually he retired to Athens, where he held the eponymous archonship in 145/6. Arrian's most important historical work was his *Anabasis of Alexander*, but the one which concerns the period under consideration, and that only for its first few years, is his *Events after Alexander*. This history, in ten books, has survived only as a summary in Photius, reinforced by two tenth-century palimpsests containing part of Book VII and an Oxyrhynchus papyrus (PSI XII.1284) describing part of a battle of 320 between Eumenes and Neoptolemus. A comparison with Diodorus renders it virtually certain that for this work, which covered only the brief years from Alexander's death to Antipater's crossing into Europe in 320 (following the agreement at Triparadisus), Arrian used Hieronymus, though he probably supplemented him from some other unidentified source.

Appian of Alexandria (late first century A.D.–before A.D. 165),¹⁵ roughly Arrian's contemporary, composed a history of the Roman empire on a novel plan, describing in twenty-four books the history of each separate people down to the time it was brought within the controlling power of Rome. His merits, like those of Diodorus, are very much those of his sources; and for the century down to 217 B.C. what survives has little to offer the historian, except that his *Syrian History* (51–70) contains a version of the early years of the Seleucid kingdom from the time of Alexander onwards. Appian's sources are obscure, Hieronymus and perhaps Timagenes' *History of Kings* being among the more important.

Apart from these more substantial sources, information of various kinds (and weight) can be gleaned from a number of other writers. The negotiations at Babylon which followed Alexander's death are most fully described by Q. Curtius Rufus (x. 5ff.); his rhetorically elaborated account probably draws on Cleitarchus, but he also uses Hieronymus. For the Lamian War at the very outset of the period there is evidence in

¹⁴ See Stadter, 1980: (B 35). The *Bithyniaca* contains only one anecdote from the pre-Roman period and the *Parthica* a brief account of the Parthian break away from the Seleucids under Antiochus II. For the *Events after Alexander* see FGrH 156 F1–11 and the reconstruction in Stadter, *ibid.* 144–52, 235 n.46. Stadter, *ibid.* 148–9, suggests that the source used to supplement Hieronymus was Ptolemy, if his work was published soon after 320 (so Errington 1969, 233–42: (D 54)).

¹⁵ Cf. Will 1967, 11.469–71: (A 67); Gabba 1958, 1–40: (B 14).

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the *Funeral Speech* of Hyperides and the *Lives* of *Demosthenes* and *Hyperides* which have come down among Plutarch's works. Pausanias is invaluable for information on sites and localities and has some useful passages dealing with the Diadochi, Ptolemy, Lysimachus and Seleucus, and with Pyrrhus. Pliny's *Natural History* and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* contain several valuable accounts, for example Athenaeus' description (v. 196a–203b; from Callixeinus) of the great procession held in Alexandria (probably in 271/70) to celebrate the *Ptolemaieia* festival. Photius gives résumés of Books ix to xvi of a local history by Memnon of Heraclea, a work based partly on the third-century history of his compatriot Nymphis (c. 310–after 245), which contributes substantially to the history of the area around the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, especially during the years between Corupedium (281/80) and Antiochus I's accession.¹⁶ Memnon's own date is somewhere between Julius Caesar and the emperor Hadrian. The lexicographers Stephanus of Byzantium and the *Suda* also make a contribution of value; the latter, for example, is our sole source for an alliance made between Ptolemy I, Antigonus I and Demetrius Poliorcetes against Cassander, probably in 309/8. For military matters the writers on stratagems are a useful supplementary source. The consular Sex. Julius Frontinus, writing under Domitian, records stratagems of Antigonus I, Antigonus II, Antigonus III, Eumenes of Cardia, Ptolemy I, Ptolemy Ceraunus and Pyrrhus, and the Macedonian rhetorician Polyaeus, in a hasty compilation made for L. Verus, included a number of examples relevant to this period, of which a dozen (probably taken from Duris and Timaeus) concern Agathocles alone. Often, however, it is not possible to be sure which Antiochus or Seleucus Polyaeus is writing about.

Diogenes Laertius' compendium on the lives and doctrines of the philosophers (probably composed in the first half of the third century of our era) is also useful for political history, since many philosophers (e.g. Demetrius of Phalerum, Menedemus of Eretria) followed political careers either within the kingdoms or in their shadow. Finally, for the chronology of the period mention should be made of the verse *Chronica* compiled by Apollodorus of Athens (b. c. 180 B.C.) and dedicated to Attalus II of Pergamum and of the *Chronicles* of Porphyry (A.D. 234–early 4th century), who was Plotinus' successor as head of the Neoplatonic school at Athens. This study was utilized by his younger contemporary, Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Chronica*, a work of which Part I has survived in an Armenian translation and Part II in the Latin version of St Jerome.¹⁷

These works exemplify the wide variety of sources, not in themselves

¹⁶ *FGH* 434 (Memnon); 432 (Nymphis).

¹⁷ On Eusebius see Helm 1956: (B 20).

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histories, which can be tapped for historical information. As regards histories proper, some six hundred monographs on cities and peoples are known; not all but many of these contain material relevant to the period 323–217. There are also sources of special relevance to particular fields of study such as the progress of science, and these are listed and discussed in their appropriate place. Naturally, too, contemporary literature contains references to contemporary events. Theocritus' seventeenth idyll is a eulogy of Ptolemy II and his fifteenth gives a vivid picture of life in Alexandria on the occasion of the festival of Adonis.

III. OTHER SOURCES

Only the literary sources can furnish a consecutive narrative. But this is often flat and jejune; nor does a mere sequence of events round off the historian's interests. It is therefore to other fields that he must turn for fresh evidence if he hopes to revise and amplify the literary record and to deepen our ideas about why events happened as they did. Such new evidence is fortunately available and it is constantly increasing in quantity. It falls into one or other of the following categories: inscriptions, papyri and ostraca, coins, excavation records and material remains.¹⁸ They will be discussed here in that order.

(a) *Inscriptions*

From the mid seventh century onwards Greek cities had used durable material, in particular stone and marble, to record information which for whatever reason they needed to publish and keep available. In the Hellenistic period, with the widespread development of new cities, the areas where inscriptions were set up grew in number and came to embrace (as well as continental Greece and the West) north-west Greece and Macedonia, Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria, the Black Sea coast, Mesopotamia, and places further east as far as Bactria and Parapamisadae – though the number of finds remains uneven and depends to a considerable extent on the zeal for their recovery shown in the various modern states in which those areas are now situated.

The use of inscriptions is subject to several limitations. First, one cannot always establish the date and provenance of an inscription. A stone may have been moved, or its contents may give no indication of its

¹⁸ Particular mention should be made of the vast amount of archaeological work, including the discovery and publication of important inscriptions, from the Greek cities of the Black Sea in modern Bulgaria, Rumania and the Soviet Union, if only because most of it is still inaccessible to scholars unfamiliar with Bulgarian, Rumanian and Russian. For a survey and references down to 1958 see Danoff 1962: (D 156). See also the Bibliography D (h).