

Introduction: Hellenistic art and the temperament of the Hellenistic age

The Greeks and Macedonians who shaped Hellenistic culture played out their lives in a world which was much vaster than the one that most of their ancestors had known. Most Greeks of the Classical period developed their view of life within the confines of a single, small city-state. This had been an intensely group-oriented experience, one in which an individual's ideals, aspirations, and prejudices were normally so thoroughly merged with those of the community that the possibility of leaving that community permanently in order to live a more idiosyncratic or exotic life in another country was seldom considered, except under duress. A Classical Greek might voluntarily wander away for adventure, but once that adventure was experienced he was intent on coming home to the small, familiar, and reassuring society where his identity was established.¹

The conquests of Alexander and the founding of the Hellenistic kingdoms set off a series of migrations and political realignments that broke open the relatively sealed world of the Classical *polis*. Thousands of Greeks flocked to the new cities, great and small, of the Hellenistic East to seek their fortunes. In these new communities there must inevitably have been a certain feeling of strangeness and rootlessness that provoked anxiety. One did not always know, for example, who one's fellow citizens were or what to expect from them, since many of them were migrants from unfamiliar cities and even, in some cases, unfamiliar cultures. Nor could one be certain what one's role in the community would turn out to be. There was always the thought that one might experience a spectacular turn of fortune. With a little luck one might become a royal favorite and see a door open to immense wealth and power; but there was also always the possibility that one's city might be overrun by some other king's army of Greek mercenaries or foreigners and that one would be completely destitute or even sold into slavery. Kings, the ultimate source of authority even in cities which were self-governing in their day-to-day affairs, were also a source of anxiety because for most people they were remote and uncontrollable. Royal patronage, as the age of the Diadochoi, the Successors of

Alexander, proved, was transient and unpredictable. In the space of just a few years, for example, one's dependence on Lysimachos could shift to Seleukos, and then to Ptolemy Keraunos.

Even in old Greece, where the city-states had firmer foundations, horizons expanded in the Hellenistic age, and the world became less stable. Cities that once treasured a querulous independence now united into federal leagues. Bastions of social rigidity, like Sparta, were swept by social revolution. Areas that had seemed almost primitive, like Aetolia, became powers to be reckoned with. And even cities that held on to a semblance of their ancient autonomy and importance, like Athens, had to wend their way cautiously through the power struggles of kings and larger states.

Some people no doubt felt excited and challenged by the opportunities and tumult of the Hellenistic age, but many others, as the preoccupations of Hellenistic philosophy make clear, felt acutely insecure when they contemplated the unstable and unpredictable nature of the times. But whether one embraced or shrank from the social and political changes of the Hellenistic world, they compelled those who experienced them to adopt attitudes toward life that were markedly different from the group-oriented values of the Classical period. These new attitudes color Hellenistic literature and philosophy in many obvious ways, and in the following chapters it will be suggested that they also color, even if it is in a less obvious and explicit way, its art. Five attitudes, or states of mind, are particularly characteristic of the Hellenistic age: an *obsession with fortune*, a *theatrical mentality*, a *scholarly mentality*, *individualism*, and a *cosmopolitan outlook*. For the sake of clarity, each of these will be discussed separately, but it will become obvious that they are all interdependent and together constitute something like a Hellenistic *Zeitgeist*.

An obsession with fortune

After describing the defeat of King Perseus and the collapse of the kingdom of Macedonia (see p. 151),

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Polybios pauses in his narrative to meditate on the meaning of the events that he has just described. As he does so, he calls to mind a treatise on Fortune, *Tyche*,² written by one of the chief intellectuals of the Hellenistic age, Demetrios of Phaleron. 'In his treatise on Fortune,' Polybios observes, 'wishing to provide men with a vivid reminder of her mutability, he fixed upon the time when Alexander destroyed the Persian Empire and made the following observations:

'For if you take into account not an endless expanse of time nor even many generations, but rather only the last fifty years, you should be able to understand from them the harshness of Fortune. For do you think that the Persians, or the King of the Persians, or the Macedonians, or the King of the Macedonians, even if one of the gods had prophesied the future for them, would ever have believed that the very name of the Persians would have vanished utterly – they who were the masters of the whole world – and that the Macedonians, whose name was scarcely known earlier, would now rule over all? But since this is the case, it seems to me now that *Tyche*, who makes no treaties with this human life of ours, who devises all sorts of new twists to confound our calculations, and who shows her power in completely unexpected ways, is demonstrating to all men, by settling on the Macedonians the prosperity that had once belonged to the Persians, that she has merely lent them these blessings until such time as she decides to do something else with them.' (Polybios 29.21.3–6)

After quoting Demetrios, Polybios then turns his attention to King Eumenes of Pergamon, who, after years of political success, was about to lose favor with the Romans and to see his kingdom invaded by yet another tribe of Gauls, and adds: 'For Fortune is quite capable of wiping out reasonable expectations with unforeseeable turns of events, and if she gives aid to anyone and tips her balance in his favor, she will eventually, as if she regretted the help, tip the scale against him and instantly ruin his successes' (29.22.2–3).

What Demetrios, the Peripatetic philosopher, expressed in the context of history and philosophy, his friend the playwright Menander, who often presented Peripatetic ideas in a popular form in his plays, expressed time and again in a general way:

Fortune observes no rules by which she decides human affairs. Nor is it possible, while still alive, to say, 'I will not suffer this fate.' (fragment 355 K)

Menander's lines could serve as something like a motto for Hellenistic society. Every individual and every social group no doubt feels anxiety at one time or another when faced with the uncertainties of life, but social conditions in the Hellenistic age seem to have made this anxiety so intense that its personified source, Fortune, became an obsession. *Tyche* became a virtual goddess, the deity whom most men feared, because she seemed to be not only unpredictable but usually, in the long run, malign. Men like Perseus were seen to rise to exalted positions only to end up in humiliating captivity. Whole countries,

like Epirus under Pyrrhos, were seen to flourish in one century only to be devastated by the Romans in the next.

Various opinions existed about just what the nature of *Tyche* was. Some saw her as pure chance, but others, perhaps most others, felt that there was a design, however inscrutable, in her workings and that she was, in effect, not just Fortune but also Fate. On a philosophical level only the Epicureans seem really to have believed that existence involved simply a series of random happenings. The Stoics were probably closer to expressing what most men felt when they described the universe as an unalterable process guided by something like a cosmic mind. But whether they believed in random fortune or inscrutable fate, men devoted a good deal of thought to ways in which the potential inflictions of *Tyche* might be coped with or, if one believed it possible, controlled. Hellenistic philosophers sought to arrive at invulnerability through the cultivation of detachment; the devotees of Hellenistic mystery religions took refuge in deities who, they felt, had the power to take them beyond the confines of fate; and other people looked to magical charms and images to protect them and bring them good luck.

One very important corollary of the concept of predetermined fortune or fate was the belief that particular individuals and communities had their own particular destiny within the grand scheme of things. A man had his own individual *tyche* and so did the city in which he lived. This belief in turn led to the conviction that, while most men's fortunes were mixed and disquieting, there were a few instances in which a particular person's fortune was so favorable that he was virtually irresistible. The fortune of such an individual became almost indistinguishable from his personal nature, his *daimon* or 'spirit' as the Greeks called it. A particularly powerful *daimon* was nearly equivalent to *Tyche* herself, and the wisest thing for an ordinary man to do was to defer to such personalities and try to absorb some of their beneficent influence. Hence for centuries one swore by the *tyche* of Alexander the Great. Other kings too could be felt, or hoped, to have powerful, favorable fortunes, and since most men's fortunes were bound up with those of a king, the royal *tyche* was taken seriously. Clear evidence of this is the fact that official oaths were frequently solemnized by invoking the fortunes of rulers like Ptolemy Soter.³

The influence of this preoccupation with Fortune on Hellenistic art is detectable in a number of forms. The most obvious is the popularity of images of *Tyche*. A few sculptured figures of *Tyche* personified are known to have existed in earlier periods, and there is some indication that they may have begun to become increasingly popular in the fourth century B.C., which often anticipated major developments of the Hellenistic period. Praxiteles, for example, made a statue of *Tyche* for a temple in Megara (Pausanias 1.43.6) and also a figure of

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1 Tyche of Antioch. Roman copy. Marble. 300 B.C. Rome, Vatican Museums. H. 0.895 m.

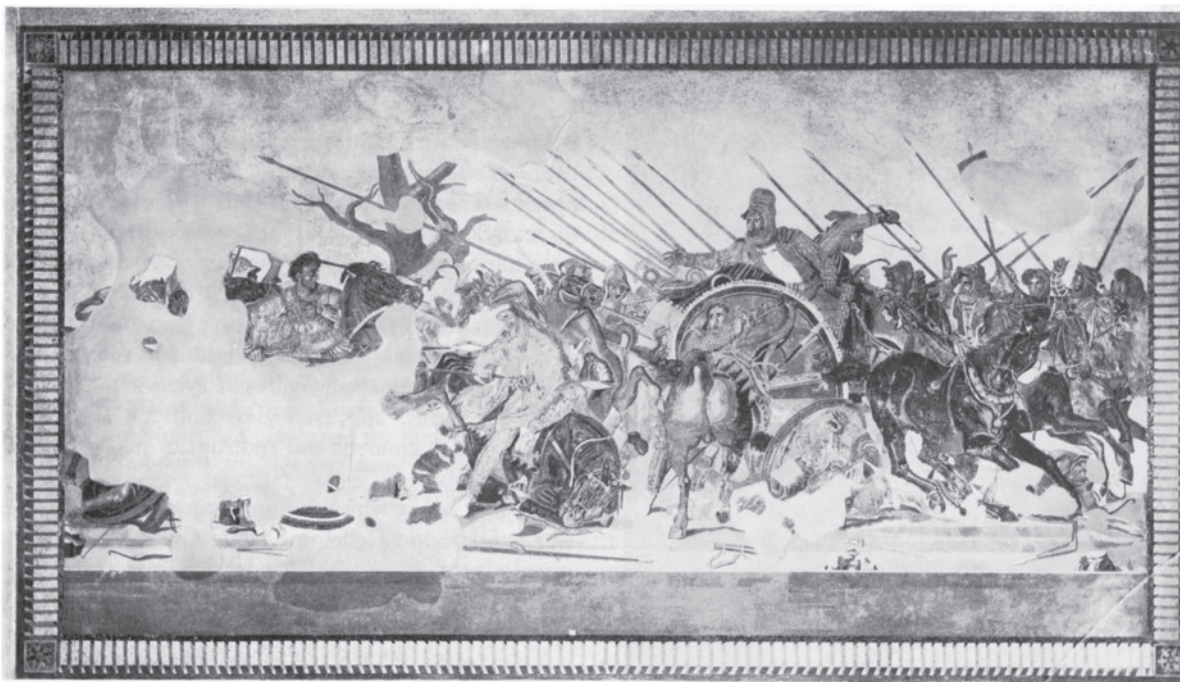
Agathe Tyche, 'Good Fortune,' which once stood in Athens and was later taken to Rome (Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 9.39; Pliny, *NH* 36.23).⁴ It was in one of the first great public sculptures of the Hellenistic period, however, the Tyche of Antioch by Eutychides [1], that a standard format for images of Tyche was arrived at. The personification of cities and countries as females wearing 'city wall' crowns was a type already established for use on coinage in the fourth century B.C.⁵ In his image of Tyche, which is known from a variety of copies dating from the Roman period and from representations on coins, Eutychides extended the expressive potential of this earlier type by adding new attributes to it and by using the many-sided composition which was characteristic of the Lysippan school (a composition which in this case was perhaps thought to suggest the complexity and variability of Fortune) for its overall design (see p. 55). In time a version of Eutychides' creation seems to have graced most Hellenistic cities, even remote border towns like Dura-Europos. It is important to emphasize that while these Tyche figures had an allegorical content that was typical of their age, and that while they probably

served the same function that flags and state seals do in our own time, they were not simply symbols. In most cities Tyche was the recipient of a cult, and the fortune of a city was understood as something very real, even if unknown. People's prosperity, their hopes, their very lives were seen to depend on it. In fact, far from being purely learned creations, figures of Tyche may have taken on a kind of magical quality, like good luck charms. In propitiating and glorifying the image in which one's future was hidden, there was always the possibility that one might actually be able to charm a benign fortune out of it. Perhaps it was an attitude of this sort that inspired the creation of miniature figures of Tyche in the form of statuettes, gems, and even glass bottles.⁶ They were probably both amuletic and apotropaic, images both of hope and anxiety.

Another way in which this preoccupation with fortune was expressed in Hellenistic art was in the continuing popularity of images of Alexander the Great (see pp. 20–31). The attraction which Alexander's image had in later times clearly sprang from something more than simply a nostalgic sense of history. Alexander had always seemed to be favored by good fortune, and there was a belief, best expressed in Plutarch's essay *On the Fortune versus the Virtue of Alexander the Great*, that when ill fortune menaced him, he was able to master it and turn adversity into success. Almost everyone aspired to have a fortune like Alexander's. Athenaios records that a flatterer, in trying to win the favor of the Macedonian King Antigonos Dason, sought to please the king by assuring him that the royal fortune was clearly 'Alexandriized' (251D). Aristotle may have been taking the high philosophical road when he advised Apelles to paint the deeds of Alexander 'because of their undying quality' (*propter aeternitatem rerum*; Pliny, *NH* 35.106), but for most people, royal as well as humble, images of Alexander seem to have been treasured in the hope that some of his good fortune would 'rub off' on them.

Still another, and quite different, element in Hellenistic art that might have been stimulated by the period's preoccupation with fortune is an interest in depicting dramatic reversals of fortune. Scenes of dramatic crisis abound in Hellenistic art and, as I shall suggest, were influenced by other concerns besides this preoccupation with fortune. There are a number of works, however, in which a sudden reversal of fortune, and the pathos that accompanied it, seems to have been the artist's central theme and primary focus. One renowned example is the Alexander Mosaic from the House of the Faun at Pompeii [2]. It is a curious fact that, although the mosaic (and the painting on which it was based) ostensibly celebrated one of the great victories of Alexander (see p. 46), its dominant figure, both from the standpoint of composition and dramatic interest, is not Alexander but rather the Persian ruler Darius. It is the harried figure of

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2 Alexander Mosaic. 2nd century B.C. Naples, Archaeological Museum. H. 3.42 m.

the Great King, torn between the need to save himself on the one hand and compassion for his fallen comrades on the other, which most stirred the imagination of the artist who created the picture. Perhaps this was because it was Darius whose fortune had reached a crisis and a point of incipient collapse, while Alexander's irresistible *daimon* pressed steadily onward. Whatever the magical appeal of Alexander's image, it was Darius's that struck a note of anxiety in the minds of most viewers and provoked both sympathy and understanding.

Less grandiose in its subject matter but even more explicit in its depiction of a sudden and devastating turnabout of fortune is the painted grave stele of Hediste from Demetrias-Pagasai (modern Volos; see p. 194) [3]. Hediste, whose grave the stele marked, died in childbirth, as did her infant. The painted scene on the stele shows the immediate aftermath of this tragedy. Hediste's pain-wracked body still lies on the bed and is contemplated by her grief-stricken husband. In the background of the bed-chamber an old woman holds the body of the dead child. It is not just the sadness of the death but its suddenness that interested the painter of the stele, and the poignant epitaph carved at its base leaves no doubt that it was Tyche who was seen as the author of this suddenness:

A painful thread for Hediste did the Fates weave from their spindles when, as a young wife, she came to the throes of childbirth.

Ah wretched one! For it was not fated that she should

cradle the infant in her arms, nor moisten the lips of her new-born child at her breast.

One light looks upon both and Fortune has brought both to a single tomb, making no distinction when she came upon them.

The theatrical mentality

The theater in all ages has always served to provide a reflection of, or analogue of, life, but in the Hellenistic period one gets the impression that life was sometimes seen as a reflection of the theater.

A comparison of 'New Comedy,' the characteristic product of the Hellenistic theater developed by the Athenian playwright Menander (ca. 342–289 B.C.) and by others whose work has not survived, with the 'Old Comedy' of Classical Athens is instructive. The plays of Aristophanes were quasi-religious choral rites in which the role of the audience was more that of a participant than a witness. They dealt with contemporary public issues – war, peace, social change, women's rights, new intellectual trends – that were of immediate and vital concern to the community as a whole, and they abounded in 'inside jokes' that only members of the community could understand. In order fully to appreciate the comedies of Aristophanes one had to be a citizen of the Athenian *polis*. By contrast, the 'comedies' of Menander are highly generalized melodramas dealing with situa-

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3 Stele of Hediste. Ca. 200 B.C. Volos, Archaeological Museum. H. 0.73 m.

tions and emotions which are personal and universal (in the sense that little or no cultural conditioning is required in order to understand them) rather than communal. Stock themes such as misunderstandings in love, the discovery of long lost children, and cases of mistaken identity provided the plots for New Comedy, and common human types – querulous fathers, aggressive sons, shy daughters, scheming servants, braggarts – served as its characters. Further, like much of the population of the Hellenistic world, these characters are often represented

as being in transit, about to depart for another city on business or for mercenary military service. The substance of New Comedy, in short, reflected experience that was as familiar at Alexandria or Antioch, or anywhere that urban life existed, as it was in Athens.

Menander was admired in Antiquity as an extremely realistic playwright.⁷ This judgment may at first seem surprising because, while the types of characters that he portrayed undoubtedly seemed familiar and ‘real’ in their time, the complicated plots of his plays, with their extra-

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ordinary coincidences, could not have been a matter of everyday experience for most people. It was probably not in the details of his plots, however, but rather in his depiction of the force which seemed to create and resolve human problems, Tyche, that he seemed realistic. Time and again the characters of Menander propound the view that Fortune, either in the form of chance or an inscrutable fate, rather than human will and reason dictates the events of life. Even though many of Menander's lines about Tyche occur in fragments for which a context is lacking, the sheer number of them makes it reasonably certain that they present, if not his own view of the world, at least a common view of his time.

In the plays of Menander many characters see life as a kind of performance put on by Fortune, a spectacle over which they have no control and which they can hence view with a certain distance and objectivity. Now since Menander's depiction of life was generally felt to be highly realistic, one is drawn to conclude that many people in the Hellenistic age thought of their own lives as roles in a great 'fortune play' and adjusted their outlook accordingly. That is to say, they thought of themselves at times as actors who were playing a part and at times as members of an audience who expected to be entertained with remarkable, wondrous, novel events.

It is undoubtedly both significant and symptomatic that the man who was probably the most influential popular philosopher of the Hellenistic age, Bion of Borysthenes, chose to illustrate his version of the doctrine that peace of mind was to be found in detachment with images of the playwright and the actor. One did not have to reject the world in order to be detached from it, Bion argued; one simply played one's assigned part. Bion's image is epitomized vividly in one of the brief sermons of the Cynic Teles:

Fortune is like a playwright who designs a number of parts – the shipwrecked man, the poor man, the exile, the king, the beggar. What the good man has to do is to play well any part which Fortune assigns to him. You have been shipwrecked. Very well, give a fine rendering of the part of the shipwrecked man. You were rich and have become poor. Play the part of the 'Poor Man' as it ought to be played. (ed. Hense, p. 40. lines 1–6)

To live the life of a detached actor in the sense that Bion and Teles meant it required an intellectual self-control and depth of philosophical conviction that were beyond the capability of the average person. On a more popular level the theatrical mentality of the Hellenistic period expressed itself not so much through the outlook of an actor as through the attitude of a spectator, with its expectation of being dazzled by a good show. Many of the political leaders of the period grasped this fact and learned how to manipulate the theatrical mentality to their own advantage with the sort of festivals, parades, and displays that are recorded in literary descriptions of public events in Alexandria and Antioch (see pp. 280–3).

Some political leaders, however, did not need festivals and parades to appeal to the theatrical mentality of the age. They made their very lives a dramatic performance. Perhaps the most theatrical of all such leaders was King Demetrios Poliorcetes of Macedonia. Plutarch clearly felt this to be the case. Theatrical images and phrases recur with the regularity of a *leitmotiv* in his skillfully composed *Life of Demetrios*. It was an appropriate way to deal with the life of Demetrios, since Demetrios himself had used theaters and theatrical costumes to influence his friends and his enemies. When, for example, his army forced its way into Athens in 297 B.C., after the city which had once adored him had subsequently shut its gates to him, the following scene, as recorded by Plutarch, occurred:

... Demetrios, upon coming into the city and ordering all the Athenians to assemble in the theater, packed the stage building with a guard of armed men and surrounded the stage with spear-bearers; then he himself came down onto the stage from one of the upper passageways, just as tragic actors do. All this made the Athenians even more terrified. But with the beginning of his speech he put their fears to rest, for he avoided sharpness in his tone of voice and in his choice of words, and he effected a reconciliation with them while chiding them softly, in a friendly spirit ... (*Demetrios* 34.3–4)

Later, in 289 B.C., when Demetrios had established himself as king of Macedonia and had come into conflict with Pyrrhos of Epirus, Plutarch relates that some of the Macedonian soldiers, who had grown weary of the king's flamboyance, were thinking of defecting to Pyrrhos. To these soldiers Pyrrhos, because of his heroic personality, was a true successor of Alexander the Great, 'whereas others,' Plutarch observes, 'and especially Demetrios, would simply impersonate Alexander's gravity and dignity, as if they were on stage.'

And, to tell the truth, there was a good deal of the tragic actor in Demetrios. Not only did he extravagantly crown himself with double-mitred hats and wrap himself in purple robes with hems of gold but he also adorned his feet with gold-embroidered shoes of the purest purple felt. Further, there was a certain cloak which was woven for him over a long period, a remarkable work, showing images of the cosmos and of the celestial bodies in the sky. This was left half-finished when Demetrios met with reversals in his affairs ... (*Demetrios* 41.3–5)

When the defection from Demetrios to Pyrrhos began to reach disastrous proportions, a delegation of his soldiers came to him and urged him to flee before it was too late.

And so, going to his tent, and behaving not as a king but as an actor, he put on a gray cloak in place of that usual theatrical costume, and stole away unnoticed. (*Demetrios* 44.6)

Even in death, with the help of his son Antigonos Gonatas, Demetrios managed to put on a good performance. After he had drunk himself to death in refined captivity, Seleukos, his captor, agreed to send his body back to Macedonia for burial. Plutarch finishes the story:

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There was, moreover, a certain dramatic and theatrical quality even about his funeral. For when Antigonos learned that the remains were being sent home, he put out with all his ships and met them in the islands. After receiving the remains, which were in a golden urn, he put them on the largest of his flagships. Of the cities at which the fleet put in to shore, some decorated the urn with garlands and others sent men in mourning costume to escort the urn and assist in the burial. When the fleet sailed in to Corinth the urn was displayed in a prominent position on the stern of the ship draped in royal purple and decorated with a royal diadem. Seated near the urn was the most noteworthy flute player of the time, Xenophantos, who played a sacred melody. To this melody the beat of the oars kept time, like a lament, following the cadences of the sound of the flute. (*Demetrios* 53.1–3)

Why was theatrical display so prominent and seemingly so necessary in the life of Demetrios? Plutarch's insight probably provides the right answer:

In the case of no other king does Fortune seem to have taken such great and sudden turns, nor in the careers of others was she ever at one time so small, at another so great, passing from splendor to humiliation, and again from lowliness to great power. (*Demetrios* 35.2)

In this intellectual climate, and with patrons like Demetrios, the Hellenistic artist became a kind of playwright, actor, and stage director in one. He was obliged to put on a good show. The artist who first sensed this keenly was the sculptor Lysippos, the prescient genius of the Hellenistic age. Along with his pupils he developed and added to the Greek artistic tradition several new genres, each of which took into account the theatrical mentality – dramatic portraiture, expressing an inner drama of the spirit, as in his famous portraits of Alexander; large historical groups capturing the fortune and trials of heroes in moments of crisis, as in his Granikos Monument; and works which were designed to dazzle viewers through their sheer technical virtuosity, particularly colossal statues (see Chaps. 1 and 2).

A certain theatrical sense, most evident in a fondness for dramatic settings and for surprising, mysterious inner spaces, was also a distinctive feature of Hellenistic architecture (see Chap. 11), but it was in the sculptural style known as 'Hellenistic baroque' (see Chaps. 4 and 5) that the theatrical mentality of the age left what is probably its most familiar legacy. The typical features of this style – exaggeratedly massive, tension-filled bodily forms and pathetic facial expressions that seem to echo the masks of tragic drama – were used to convey a sense of dramatic crisis in such diverse monuments as portraits [122 and 123]; architectural sculpture with traditional subject matter, like the Gigantomachy on the great Altar of Zeus at Pergamon [99–109]; and propagandistic commemorative monuments, like the victory monuments of the Attalids [85–94].

In a more literal way, the theatrical mentality can also be said to account for the popularity and omnipresence of

theatrical imagery in the decorative arts of the Hellenistic period, particularly in domestic mosaics where masks, actors, and theatrical scenes were often the principal motifs (see Chap. 10). Actors, it might be noted, were mostly professionals in the Hellenistic period. In Athens, the Peloponnesos, and Asia Minor they were organized into influential guilds which were so powerful that they could wring concessions from governments (such as exemption from military service and taxation). There is evidence that these guilds were patrons of the visual arts,⁸ and their influence probably played a role in making images of the theater, as well as its spirit, popular.

Individualism

As life in the Hellenistic age became less intensely identified with, and less controlled by, small ancestral communities, men and women began to look elsewhere for a sense of belonging and for standards by which to guide their lives. Their search went in two distinct directions: one inward, into the private recesses of the human mind and personality, and the other outward, into what came to be called the *oikoumene*, all the regions of the world inhabited by human beings. Of these two directions the turn inward was probably the more intense and fundamental. In the Hellenistic world no standard of society, even of a utopian society, was more important than what the individual did, thought, and experienced.

The atmosphere of Hellenistic individualism was most vividly embodied by the Cynic philosophers who, following the model of their founder, Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 400–325 B.C.), 'dropped out' of society and took up the life of mendicant wanderers. Their goal was to achieve *autarkeia*, 'self-sufficiency,' through a life of austerity and self-discipline, and to do this they not only rejected but openly ridiculed the values that were prized by most members of society.

Although the renunciation and austerity of true Cynics like Diogenes and his disciple Krates of Thebes were too extreme to serve as models for the average person in the Hellenistic age, their individualistic outlook and spirit came to permeate many aspects of Hellenistic life and thought. The Cynic advocacy of the virtues of mendicancy and rootlessness, for example, may have had a reassuring effect on the minds of those who did not think of themselves as philosophers but found their lives in continual flux. The most conspicuous and familiar exemplars of this type of life in the Hellenistic world were mercenary soldiers, who moved from commander to commander and from country to country in search of fortune and adventure. Such mercenaries became so familiar in the Hellenistic age that even in a relatively conservative place like Athens they could be caricatured. Comic poets like Menander were able to forge a stock character out of boisterous and socially disruptive pro-

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fessional soldiers who passed through the city.⁹ Wandering mercenaries were in a way political and military analogues of the Cynic philosopher, and they cultivated their own variety of *autarkeia*. Even the kings whom such soldiers served were at times forced to fall back on something like Cynic self-sufficiency. Several of the Diadochoi, Demetrios Poliorctes, Antigonos Gonatas, and Seleukos, for example, were at one time wandering adventurers who followed their individual standards of conduct and in the end created their own homelands and societies.

Although the Cynics were the most outspoken, flamboyant, and notorious spokesmen for Hellenistic individualism, their commitment to it was no more intense than that of another prominent group of Hellenistic philosophers, the Epicureans. Epicureanism, in that it elaborated theories of cosmology and epistemology, was a more formally complete philosophy than Cynicism, but it was, like Cynicism, above all a philosophy of behavior designed to meet the problems and crises of daily living.

The goal of life, Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) maintained, is personal happiness, and personal happiness is a result of the cultivation of *hedone*, ‘pleasure.’ In spite of the fundamental importance that Epicurus assigned to pleasure, however, the type of life that he prescribed was more ascetic than hedonistic. True pleasure meant, he argued, the absence of pain, or at least the minimizing of pain. Hence, in order to experience personal happiness one should live one’s life in such a way that one experienced only those pleasures that do not bring pain in their wake. Pain comes from unsatisfied desires. Hence, one should avoid those pleasures that are not easily satisfied – e.g. the pleasure that comes from political power or great wealth – and cultivate only those that are easily fulfilled, natural, and necessary – e.g. simple food, friendship, a quiet home. In this way one could find *ataraxia*, ‘imperturbability,’ the Epicureans’ version of the Cynic’s *autarkeia*, and be insulated as much as possible against the uncertainties of life.

The Epicureans maintained that the universe was a temporary, random aggregation of atoms, and that there existed in it no cosmic god, no soul, and no life after death. This may have been satisfying to tough-minded philosophers bent on attaining *ataraxia*, but it gave little consolation to the average person, who found it difficult to shed the hope that his individual self might amount to something more than a meaningless, mechanical accident. People who felt this way had yet another vision of the cosmos in which they could take refuge when confronted by the vicissitudes of Tyche, the vision contained in the mystery religions of the Hellenistic age.

Mystery religions were not new in Greece in the Hellenistic age, but their great expansion and diversification during the period is closely connected with both its

individualism and its cosmopolitanism. The essential feature of mystery religions, and the basis of their appeal, was that, as a result of a secret initiation ceremony administered by the priesthood of a particular deity, an individual initiate came under the protection of that deity both in this world and in a life to come. These cults offered their devotees, in other words, personal salvation.

Although most of the early mystery cults of Greece had been connected with a particular city and were normally reserved for the citizens of that city (like the Athenian cult at Eleusis¹⁰), the mystery cults of the Hellenistic period that originated in Egypt and the East – Serapis, Isis, Atargatis (= Dea Syria), Cybele (= Magna Mater), and others – were international in character. As their votaries migrated from place to place, they spread to Italy, Greece, and other hellenized regions of the Mediterranean, and men and women with diverse backgrounds were initiated into them. The same was true of at least one of the native Greek cults, the mysteries of Dionysos.

To assess the appeal of a mystery cult to its devotees, we are compelled to turn to literary sources about the cult of Isis that date from the Roman period. These cannot be proved to represent thoughts that were current in the Hellenistic period, but it is extremely likely, given the conservatism and continuity of cults in the Graeco-Roman period, that they do. There are two principal sources which document the atmosphere of the cult of the Egyptian gods: a group of inscriptions recording hymns recited in praise of Isis, and the description of the initiation of Lucius contained in Book XI of the *Metamorphoses* (the proper name of the work often popularly called ‘The Golden Ass’) of Apuleius (written ca. 150–80 A.C.). The hymns in question are in the form of aretalogies, recitations in the first person, of the powers and qualities of the goddess. In their present form they date from the first or second centuries A.C., but the original text of which they seem to be variants was probably Hellenistic. In the following lines, excerpted from one version of the hymn found at Cyme in Asia Minor, it becomes clear how expressly and precisely the virtues of Isis were geared to the temperament and the anxieties of the Hellenistic age:

I am Isis, the Ruler of every land . . .
 I established laws for men, and ordained statutes that
 no one is able to change . . .
 I separated the earth from the heaven,
 I showed the path of the stars.
 I ordered the course of the sun and the moon . . .
 I revealed mysteries unto men . . .
 I assigned to Greeks and non-Greeks their
 languages . . .
 I established punishments for those who commit unjust
 acts.
 I decreed mercy to suppliants . . .
 With me justice prevails . . .

Individualism

I am in the rays of the sun.
 I attend to the course of the sun.
 Whatever I conceive of, this too shall be accomplished.
 With me everything is reasonable.
 I set free those in bonds . . .
 I conquer Fate.
 Fate harkens to me.¹¹

Isis, in short, protected men from the great nemesis of the Hellenistic world, Tyche. She ordered the cosmos and gave it reason. She protected men from fortune both in the form of random, inscrutable disaster and in the form of irrevocable fate.

Many of the phenomena from which the Hellenistic mystery religions offered salvation were basic tenets of Greek philosophy (the Epicureans preached the randomness of nature, the Stoics pre-ordination), and it would thus be surprising to find the mystical spirit of these cults penetrating into Hellenistic philosophy. Yet, whatever its sources, the spirit is unexpectedly there. The most renowned expression of it is in the *Hymn to Zeus* of the Stoic philosopher Kleantes (331–233 B.C.), in which the *logos* of the Stoic cosmos is praised with a rapture anticipating that of St Francis. In Kleantes' hymn, in fact, the Stoic conception of an all-knowing providence, which Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, had probably intended to be understood in an impersonal sense, is transmuted into a vision of a caring, personal God.

The concern for the inner state of mind of the individual that was at the basis of Hellenistic philosophy and religion also pervaded much of the secular, non-philosophical literature of the age. In this literature, however, it is usually not so much prescriptions for peace of mind as it is descriptions of perturbation of mind that are typical. Hellenistic poets, like, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, Hellenistic painters and sculptors, were fascinated by the actions and expressions which accompany the changing psychological states of people who are excited by some strong stimulus (e.g. the description of the young and love-struck Medea in the third book of the *Argonautica* of Apollonios of Rhodes).

These attempts to probe the inner workings of the psyche reflect a strong feeling in the Hellenistic world that what the individual experienced was more interesting than what society as a whole experienced. It is therefore not surprising that biography, the form of literature which is most concerned with the nature of the individual, first became a recognized genre in the Hellenistic age. The earliest biographies dealt with the lives of particular philosophers and seem to have been inspired by the Peripatetic school's interest in collecting and organizing essential data about important fields of human thought and activity. Aristotle's pupil Aristoxenos of Tarentum, the eminent theoretician of music, seems to have inaugurated this tradition with a series of lives of earlier philosophers. Later Antigonos of

Karystos, the versatile artist, critic, and writer who was also one of the sculptors who worked on the Attalid dedication at Pergamon, composed sketches of the lives of contemporary philosophers. Once the idea of writing biographies became established other writers broadened its scope and began to write about prominent figures in government, military affairs, and literature. Although only small fragments of the work of these early biographers survive, we can derive some idea of the character of the genre from the *Lives* of Plutarch, who knew and used their work.

Not only biography but also what is probably the most individualistic of all literary genres, the intimate personal autobiographical reminiscence, seems first to have come into its own during the Hellenistic period. There are, of course, autobiographical elements in the works of many Archaic and Classical Greek authors,¹² but if one looks for autobiographical memoirs which contained a wealth of details, including trivial details, that only the author could have known and which made it possible for the reader to become an intimate participant in the author's experience by giving him an 'eyewitness' account of that experience, one must look to works of the Hellenistic period.¹³ Unfortunately all of the autobiographical memoirs of the Hellenistic period are known only through fragments or through allusions to them in the works of later writers, and it is impossible to determine what any single work was like *in toto*. Nevertheless in the few fragments that remain it is possible to detect a vivid intimacy of detail previously unknown in Greek literature. There is, for example, an excerpt from a reminiscence by Eratosthenes of a casual meeting with Queen Arsinoe III at the court in Alexandria which gives one the sort of 'inside view' of a public figure that one would expect to find today in the 'people' section or the gossip column of a magazine or newspaper. The fragment seems to refer to a time late in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator when the king's debauchery had provoked a melancholy repulsion in Arsinoe. The scene is in the royal palace of Alexandria. Eratosthenes and Arsinoe are conversing when a man passes them carrying a bundle of branches to a rustic festival which Ptolemy has arranged to be held within the royal dwelling. Arsinoe stops the man and asks him what sort of festival it is that he is celebrating. He explains that it is called the *Lagynophoria* (Flagon-bearing), and that in it each celebrant eats whatever is brought to him while sitting on a bed of rushes and drinking from his own wine jug. The aristocratic queen, accustomed to servants and the elegance of state dinners, is appalled by this. 'When the man had passed,' Eratosthenes records, 'she looked at us and said, "What an utterly uncouth get-together! A gathering that has set before it such a stale feast and in such an unseemly way can only be that of a motley mob."' ¹⁴ The reader is given an intimate glimpse of both the personal

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life and the psyche of the Ptolemaic queen. It is a new sort of insight, one that could only come into being in an age that puts a high value on individual experience.

Another lost work in which the personal experience of an important figure in Hellenistic politics was recorded in order to be shared with others was the *Hypomnematismoi*, or 'Memoirs,' of Aratos of Sikyon. In this highly unusual document Aratos seems to have recounted his personal reminiscences about the course of his political career, presumably from his days as a youthful revolutionary to his days as the elder statesman of the Achaean League. He apparently did so, moreover, in a straightforward, businesslike style which, unlike most of the prose of his time, avoided rhetorical embellishment.¹⁵ In Plutarch's *Life of Aratos* there are two vivid, seemingly 'eyewitness' accounts of commando raids led by Aratos in his early years, which have an immediacy about them that could only have come from Aratos' own reminiscences.

The existence of still other autobiographical memoirs in the third and second centuries B.C. is known from passing references.¹⁶ What probably would have been the most colorful and engaging of these works, had it survived, was the *Hypomnemata* in twenty-four books of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, whose nickname, significantly, was 'pot belly.' The references to this work in Athenaios suggest that much of it had to do with food. It contained memories about the menus offered at dinner parties by fellow kings (Athenaios 229D), about fish and artichokes in Libya (71B), about the pheasants and other birds which were kept on the palace grounds at Alexandria (645D), and about the size of a pig which had been sacrificed, and presumably eaten, in Assos. The work also seems to have contained gossip about other Hellenistic monarchs (518F, 438D). It may have been the most personal, and hence the most individualistic, of all Hellenistic writings.

As subsequent chapters will show, this prevailing individualism of the Hellenistic age also permeated the visual arts. As with Hellenistic philosophy and literature, much of the distinct character of Hellenistic art stemmed from an interest among Hellenistic sculptors, painters, and even architects in exploring the inner experience and inner nature of the individual.

Perhaps the most striking development in this direction was the veritable revolution which took place in the art of portraiture (see Chap. 3). Hellenistic portrait sculptors produced not only some of the most brilliant works of the period but also, looked at in broad perspective, one of the most impressive genres in the whole of Greek art.¹⁷ What makes the works of the best Hellenistic portrait sculptors so effective is the vividness with which they expressed not only the public role of individuals (as portrait sculptors had done in earlier periods) but also their inner character, temperament, and mental complexity. This emphasis on

individual natures can be seen as an expression of the same sensibility that led to the popularity of biography and memoirs as genres of Hellenistic prose and that led the Cynics and Epicureans to make the private state of mind of the individual the principal focus of philosophical thought. (It is probably significant that among the earliest works in the new style was a portrait of Epicurus [60].)

Not only personalities but also familiar, yet individually experienced emotions and states of mind fascinated Hellenistic artists, as they did Hellenistic poets. The idealism and emotional restraint of Classical Greek art had already begun to yield in the fourth century B.C. to a growing interest in the expression of personal emotions—love, humor, even religious yearning—and this trend was intensified and expanded in the Hellenistic period. Not only personal emotions of the dramatic sort like pain and fear but also varieties of states of consciousness such as sleep and drunkenness became particularly popular among the artists who created the 'Hellenistic baroque' style (Chaps. 4 and 5). Even in the relatively conservative medium of Greek architecture the appeal to personal emotions, through such features as dramatic settings and mysterious inner spaces, made itself felt (Chap. 11).

Eventually this concentration on personal experience rather than cultural ideals as the principal subject of art led to a fundamental change in the nature of the Greek artistic tradition. The exalted themes and traditional subjects of the culture of the *polis* were increasingly abandoned in favor of works which permitted a 'hard look' at contemporary social conditions or indulged a private, domestically oriented sense of amusement (see Chap. 6).

The cosmopolitan outlook

As already noted, the expanded horizons and mobile population of the Hellenistic age brought the Greeks into close contact with a greater variety of peoples and social conditions than they had known in the Classical period. Once they had lived at close quarters with non-Greeks and shared a social setting with them, it became more difficult for a Greek simply to dismiss all non-Greeks as 'barbarians.' There had always been traces in Greek thought of a cosmopolitan outlook that vied with traditional Greek chauvinism, and in the Hellenistic period this outlook for the first time began to play a dominant role in Greek thinking about the nature of society.

The cosmopolitan outlook, or what is sometimes referred to as the 'universalism' of the Hellenistic period, has an integral relationship to the individualism just discussed. As Hellenistic thinkers began to look within themselves for qualities which were fundamental and natural, rather than conventional, it was quite natural that they should seek to find these same qualities in their