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J. J. Pollitt
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J. J. POLLITT

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History of Art, Yale University



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PREFACE

The chapters of this book have two aims. One is to explore the ways in which Hellenistic art is an expression of the cultural experience and aspirations of the Hellenistic age, to create, in other words, something like a cultural portrait of the period with particular emphasis on art. The other is to present a selective history of the formal development of this art organized around those genres, schools, or styles which seem to me to have been of particular importance. In each chapter I have tried to emphasize what was original, or when not original at least distinctive, about the art of the Hellenistic period, and have hence concentrated on areas where Hellenistic artists went beyond, or modified, or, in the end, revived the achievements of their Archaic and Classical predecessors.

Because a number of important developments in Hellenistic art were closely bound up with prominent political leaders, their policies, the places where their policies were put into effect, and the military consequences of their policies, I have included general historical introductions to two chapters (on Pergamene sculpture and on the rise of Rome as a center of Hellenistic art). Five appendices deal with scholarly and historical problems, literary sources, and some unusual monuments, all of which are alluded to in the preceding chapters but not discussed in detail.

The bibliographical references given in the notes are directed to specific points of interpretation, controversy, or documentation. General bibliography, arranged chapter by chapter and topic by topic, is given at the end of the book. When full citation of a particular work appears in the bibliography, it is often given in shortened form in the notes. Frequently cited works have been given standard abbreviations (see p. 291).

The translations of passages from Classical authors, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

In the spelling of Greek proper names I have for the most part used the Greek spelling, but I have not

hesitated to use Latinized forms when they seemed more natural and familiar.

The time has probably long passed when any serious, informed student of Hellenistic art would refer to it as decadent. Who can deny the power of works like the Nike of Samothrace or the bronze boxer in the Terme, even if they do lack the idealism and restraint of the greatest works of Classical Greek art? The best reason to study Hellenistic art is for its own sake. I would suggest, however, that there is an additional quality that should make the art of the Hellenistic age of particular interest to modern audiences: the fact that in background and content it was the product of an age in many ways similar to our own. Like the art of the twentieth century, but unlike the art of Classical Greece or Pharaonic Egypt, Hellenistic art was not tied to a single country or ethnic group; rather, like Hellenistic culture as a whole, it was both adopted and produced by diverse peoples in widely separated geographical areas. Further, it thrived in a world where many of the familiar figures of the modern 'art world' – private patrons, collectors, and even dealers – made their first appearance. The Hellenistic age also seems to have been the first epoch in western art in which an intense sense of 'art history' influenced art itself. Systematic histories of art were first written during the period; artists revived the styles of earlier centuries; sculptors' workshops began to specialize in the reproduction of 'old masters'; different styles came into simultaneous use. The result of these historical conditions was an art which, like much modern art, was heterogeneous, often cosmopolitan, increasingly individualistic, and frequently elitist in its appeal. The question of whether or not there is a message in this, i.e. that certain types of cultures inevitably produce an art with certain characteristics, is one which I leave the reader to contemplate.

J.J.P.

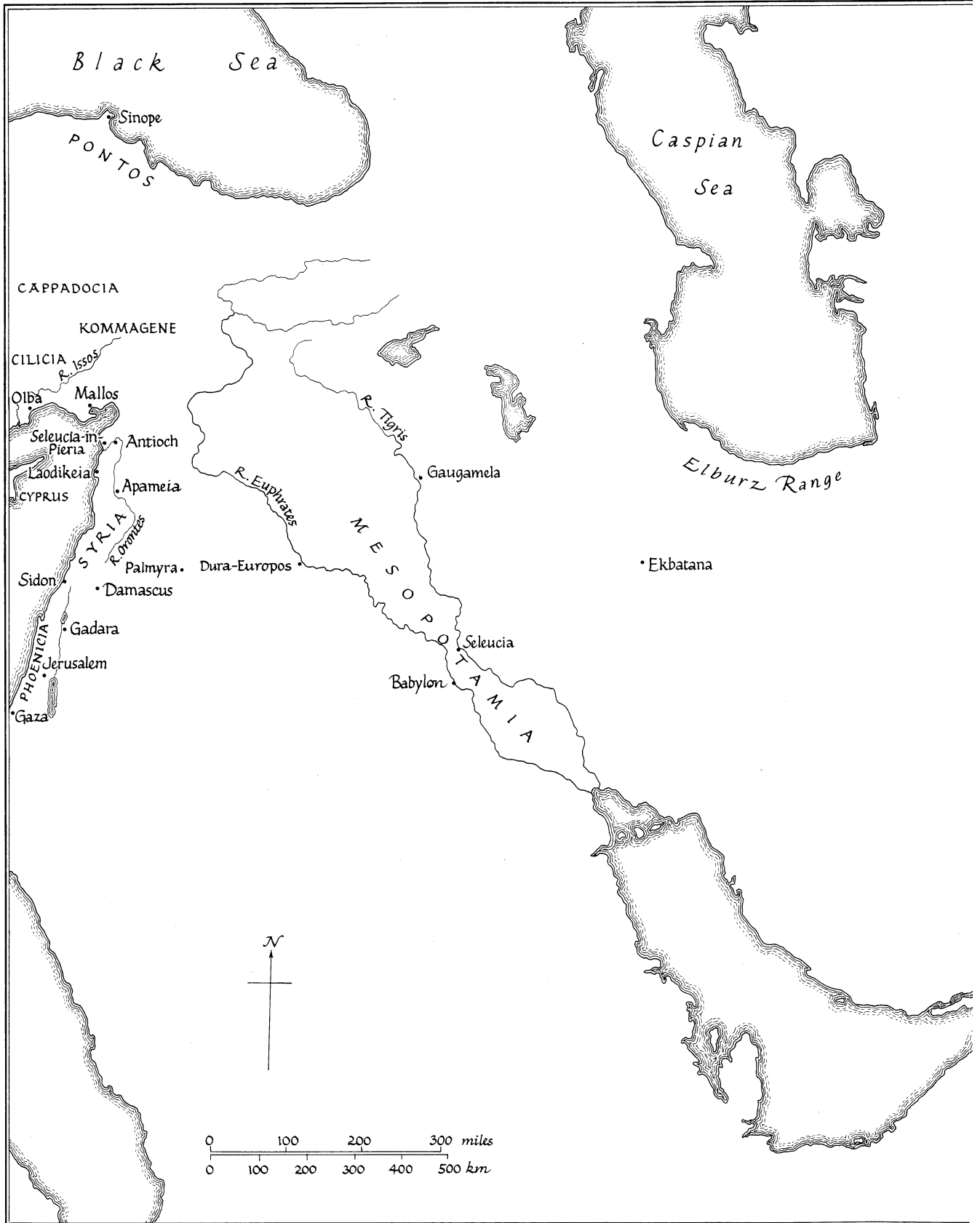
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1 The Hellenistic



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