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Edited by Glenn R. Bugh

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INTRODUCTION

Glenn R. Bugh

In 1836, the German scholar J. G. Droysen coined a new term in his three-volume history of the period from the time of Alexander the Great to the coming of Christianity, *Geschichte des Hellenismus*. Because the German word *Hellenismus* cannot be translated into English as “Hellenism” (which has a different meaning), it has become customary to apply its adjectival form “Hellenistic” to this period. For Droysen, *Hellenismus* signified a fusion of Greek and Eastern cultures that supplied the fertile soil from which Christianity emerged. It was a grand and formative period leading to a revolutionary universal religion. However, over the intervening 170 years or so, Droysen’s positivist outlook did not win over many academics, who continued to view the Classical period of the fifth and fourth centuries as the “golden age” of Greek achievement. Much of the literature produced after Alexander the Great (d. 323) was dismissed as derivative, decadent, and quite frankly, inferior. The scholars of the great Library of Hellenistic Alexandria must accept some blame for this. They are credited with compiling canonical lists of the “greats” in various literary genres, all of whom lived in the Archaic or Classical periods, and these “best” works were more likely to be copied (and thus survive) and to form the basis of the educational curriculum in antiquity and beyond. Who could presume to compete with the masters? A quick glance at Green (1990) attests the enduring power of this negative legacy.

According to one school of thought, it was inevitable that the Romans would conquer the intemperate and feckless Hellenistic Greeks on the battlefield, even as they co-opted and transmitted the legacy of their illustrious *Classical* past to Western civilization and the world. The Roman poet Horace said it succinctly, *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit* (“captured Greece captured its fierce conqueror”). The denigration of the Hellenistic achievement could be discounted as hyperbolic and

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old-fashioned, but scholarly books on Greece continue to be published with little or no serious discussion of the Hellenistic period and with no shame attached to rounding out surveys of Greek history with the battle of Chaironeia in 338 or the death of Alexander in 323, as if Greek history had ended and the nearly 1,500 documented *poleis* (see Hansen & Nielsen, 2004) sprinkled throughout the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Asia had mysteriously vanished.

In addition, trying to determine what constituted the appropriate chronological parameters of the Hellenistic world was, and still is, problematic. In an influential book by M. Cary, *A History of the Greek World 323–146 B.C.*, 2nd edn. (London, 1951), it is clear that the creation of the province of Macedonia and the destruction of Corinth in the Achaian War marked the natural political and military end of the Hellenistic period, and what followed belonged more properly to the history of the Roman Republic. Even the learned and balanced synthesis by F. W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, MA, 1992) – which I used profitably for years as the main text for my own undergraduate course, “Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World” – concludes with a brief chapter, “The Coming of Rome,” which does not carry the story beyond the mid-second century B.C. Most scholars today, receptive to political and military precision, are inclined to end the story of the Hellenistic world with the death of Kleopatra VII of Egypt in 30 B.C., the last in the royal line of Macedonian Ptolemaic kings and the last ruler of Alexander’s successor kingdoms. The transformation of Egypt into a Roman province by Octavian (Augustus) therefore marked the end of a long process of conquest and annexation that began in the late third century with the Illyrian and Macedonian wars.

For this volume, I, too, have adopted the traditional bookends of Alexander the Great and Kleopatra, the beginning and end of a 300-year period of Macedonian rule. But it is a choice of convenience and custom. The many and diverse aspects covered in the following chapters cannot all be inserted into a timeline, any more than thinking that the Greeks woke up on June 11, 323 B.C., with the e-news of Alexander’s death and pulled out their “New Era” calendars or that the Greeks living across thousands of miles of Alexander’s mighty empire thought that their world had come to a close with the passing of a colorful and gifted queen in distant Egypt. History does not happen this way, and part of the task of this collection of essays has been to identify and explain what was new and different about the Hellenistic world and what was more properly a continuation of ideas, customs, institutions, and so forth, already evident in the Classical period. To understand change,

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we are obliged to cast our glance back over the whole period and, after examining all the evidence available to us, try to pinpoint the moment when it is first observed and follow its consequences over time. A great battle can serve as a signpost for change if its results lead to a more permanent rearrangement of political and military power, but this will not be adequate to explain new literary, economic, artistic, religious, or philosophical ideas or even a new ceramic shape. In the end, why do we insist on using the term Hellenistic, “Greek-like,” rather than, for example, “late classical” or even “post-classical”? Do the conquests of Alexander and the world created by them justify the adoption of a new periodic term? The answer must inevitably be both “yes” and “no.”

One reason that has discouraged Classicists from studying the Hellenistic period seriously is the daunting array of eastern languages necessary to decipher the primary documents. The world created by Alexander’s conquests encompassed, after all, millions of non-Greek-speaking peoples from Egypt to India. It seems so heterogeneous, so vast and diffuse, compared with the relative simplicity and accessibility of the world of Archaic and Classical Greek city-states. Most western Classicists are trained to read Greek and Latin, along with German, French, and often Italian and modern Greek, but feel uncomfortable, if not totally lost, in the rich archives of the ancient Near East. I count myself among them. It is very difficult for a single scholar to know all the languages spoken and written in the Hellenistic world, and even the most intrepid has to turn to the kindness of collaborators.

Even the study of the “Greek” part of the Hellenistic world is not without its obstacles. The Archaic and Classical periods can be reconstructed through the narratives of the “great” historians, Herodotos, Thucydides, and Xenophon, and through the speeches and dialogues of the orators and philosophers of the fourth century B.C., but the Hellenistic world has no comparable historian or orator to tell its story, no contemporary voice to articulate its importance, with the exception of Polybios of Megalopolis in the second century B.C. (see Chapter 6 and the many works of F. W. Walbank in the bibliography). But Polybios’ histories (264–146 B.C.) are not preserved in full, and his thematic goal was to explain the rise of the Roman Empire from 220 to 167 B.C. (Second Punic War to the fall of the Antigonid dynasty), not to provide a narrative history of the Hellenistic world. We can recover some of his history from the Roman historian Livy, but his adaptation will never be equal to the original. Not only would we dearly love to have all of Polybios’ history, but also that of the Stoic philosopher and polymath, Poseidonios of Apameia (Syria), who continued Polybios’ narrative

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down to 88 B.C. Almost nothing of Poseidonios' universal history has survived. So, it is not that there weren't contemporary historians of the Hellenistic world, it is the sad fact that most of their works have perished. In the first century, Diodorus of Sicily composed a universal history from the mythological past to 60 B.C. that included the Hellenistic period. He borrowed extensive passages from fourth-century and Hellenistic historians, like Ephoros of Kyme, Hieronymos of Kardia, Timaios of Tauromenion (on Sicily), Polybios, and Poseidonios of Apameia, but our text of Diodorus breaks off after the battle of Ipsos in 301 B.C. We are perhaps more fortunate with Alexander the Great because the second-century-A.D. biographer Plutarch of Chaironeia and the historian Arrian of Nikomedia [for commentary, see Bosworth, (1980b) and (1995)] preserved important contemporary but now-lost sources, for example, Ptolemy I Soter, the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and Nearchos, Alexander's admiral.

If we do not have direct access to a contemporary narrative, how can we know anything about the Hellenistic world? To be sure, there are hundreds of fragments of Hellenistic historians preserved as citations in later sources – these texts are available in F. Jacoby's monumental *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin, 1923–1958); a new edition and commentary of Parts I, II, and III, *Brill's New Jacoby*, is being prepared under the editorship of Ian Worthington, assisted by a team of over ninety scholars in sixteen countries – but these give us only disconnected snapshots. A viable alternative has been to turn to subdisciplines within the broad field of ancient history, and here is where an exciting new world continues to unfold before our eyes. The advent of scientific archaeology in the late nineteenth century has not only added to a greater assemblage of artistic and architectural artifacts from the Hellenistic period (see Chapter 8), but has also generated a huge supply of pottery from excavations throughout the Greek world. This body of evidence has allowed scholars to refine or establish a more secure Hellenistic chronology and given us a more fulsome sense of material culture (see Chapter 7).

Archaeology has also led to an exponential increase in the numbers of inscriptions (epigraphy) that give us immediate and direct access to the Hellenistic landscape, that allows us to step into the minds of kings [see Welles (1934)] and citizens of the Greek *poleis* at a precise moment in time. It is not an exaggeration to claim that a history of Hellenistic Athens could not have been written save for the bounty of inscriptions coming from excavations – see Habicht (1997a), and the same could be said for Delphi and Delos. In addition to the great corpus of Greek

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inscriptions, *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873–) – a new edition is in press for fourth-century Attic inscriptions – there are helpful select collections, like W. Dittenberger, *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1903–1905) and his *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edn., 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1915–1924); L. Moretti, *Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche*, 2 vols. (Firenze, 1967–1976); and P. J. Rhodes & R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404–323 BC* (Oxford, 2003). New inscriptions can be found in *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (SEG), 1923–. To make sense of these inscriptions, one can turn to B. H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.–A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2002).

Equally important is the study of coins (numismatics); for example, what can the iconography of Alexander on his coins tell us about his claims of divinity or, for that matter, his Successors?; what prompted the Seleukids to put an elephant on their coins, and what would we know about the Greeks in Bactria and India during the third to the first centuries B.C. without the stunning coinage of their rulers and excavations at Ai Khanum in Afghanistan (see Holt, 1999)? No less spectacular has been the recovery of papyri from Egypt (papyrology) that has given us, to name but a few notable examples, the *Athenaion Politeia* attributed to Aristotle (the only Greek city-state constitution preserved of the hundreds he wrote); a complete play (*Dyskolos*) and substantial portions of six others by the New Comedy poet Menander of Athens; and recently, a third-century B.C. papyrus roll containing 100 epigrams of Poseidippos of Pella, a relatively unknown but important Hellenistic poet (see Gutzwiller, 2005 and Chapter 9). But papyri also provide priceless information on the mundane daily lives of the Greeks, Macedonians, and Egyptians during the Ptolemaic period; see, for example, A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar, and D. L. Page, *Select Papyri*, 4 vols. (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, 1950) and the work of Dorothy J. Thompson in Chapter 5. One can write a social and economic history of Ptolemaic Egypt in ways not possible for the other Hellenistic kingdoms. There are hundreds of papyrus rolls that still await conservation and decipherment in museum archives throughout the world, and laser technology has revolutionized our ability to read texts no longer visible to the unaided eye.

Understanding the Hellenistic world requires persistence and patience, but the problems are not insurmountable (collections of primary documents and all of the principal authors are available in English; see following discussion), and the dividends are well worth the time

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invested. This view is confirmed by the increase of interest in the Hellenistic world in the last twenty-five years or so. It can no longer be called a neglected or discredited field, certainly not among the increasing numbers of scholars who have taken up the cause of that Edinburgh savant, W. W. Tarn (and G. T. Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 3rd edn., London, 1952). There have been numerous international conferences since the 1990s on various aspects of the Hellenistic world, for example, economy (Liverpool), pottery (Greece), sculpture and architecture (Athens), Macedonians in Athens (Athens); military and civic institutions of Greek cities of Anatolia (Lyon); and multiauthored anthologies of papers and essays have appeared in rapid succession, as in Cartledge et al. (1997), Ogden (2002), and Erskine (2003).

This volume continues in this robust tradition. As the title implies, *Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World*, it is intended to be a “companion,” to complement and supplement general histories of the period (see the Bibliographical Note at the end of the Introduction). Each chapter can stand alone and treats a specific area of interest, for example, economy, philosophy, art and architecture, religion, and so forth, and directs the reader to the latest and most useful publications on the subject. In my initial invitation, I challenged the contributors to think “outside of the box” and not to let convention or precedent dictate the form or content of their chapters. This has led to some intriguing approaches. Each chapter invariably reflects the interests, idiosyncrasies, and specialization “comfort zone” of the contributor, but the creative process insists on such intellectual freedom. In the final analysis, the goal was to add to the growing body of knowledge of the Hellenistic world and to communicate it to an audience that thirsts for more substance than a Hollywood movie on Alexander the Great.

A note on style. There are at least three models available to Classicists: letter-for-letter transliteration, Latinizing, and some form of Anglicizing. In the spelling of Greek names and places, I have chosen to adhere as closely to the original Greek as possible (in the German classical tradition), for example, employing “os” and “on” endings instead of the Latin “us” and “um” (thus, Antigonos, not Antigonus), and “ai” instead of “ae” (Achaian, not Achaean), and “k” instead of “c” (Poliorketes, not Poliorcetes), but dogmatic uniformity leaves us with some very strange-looking and unsightly words. So, like all other Classicists, I have chosen to compromise on certain famous names, preferring to retain Philip, not Philippos; Alexander, not Alexandros; Ptolemy, not Ptolemaios; Epicurus, not Epikouros; Corinth, not Korinthos; Cyprus,

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not Kupros; and so forth. As long as there is no confusion as to the identity of the individual or the place, I am content with my aesthetic choices.

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The bibliography on Alexander the Great is too vast to list here and is ever expanding. It is sufficient (and efficient) to refer the reader to the learned article (with earlier literature) by A. B. Bosworth in the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (see following), s.v. Alexander III (pp. 57–9) and to Chapter 1 of this volume.

For a quick read on the Hellenistic world, see S. M. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Period in World History* (American Historical Association, Washington, DC, 1996). Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (1992; see earlier mention) is an admirable little book by the foremost authority on Polybios, but the most in-depth single volume on the period is now G. Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander 323–30 BC* (London & New York, 2000). Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (1990) is a breathtaking monument to the author's erudition. F. Chamoux, *Hellenistic Civilization*, translated from French by M. Roussel (London, 2003), is a worthy replacement for Tarn's classic work of the same title (see previous mention). Standard for the field is the multivolume, multiauthored *Cambridge Ancient History*; the relevant volumes are VI, 2nd edn. (1994); VII.1, 2nd edn. (1984); VII.1, 2nd edn. (1984: Plates to Vol. VII.1); VII.2, 2nd edn. (1990); VIII, 2nd edn. (1989); and IX, 2nd edn. (1994). For the best one-volume dictionary in English on the ancient world, see S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary (OCD)*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1996). For geographical reference, the standard work is now R. J. A. Talbert, ed. (with many collaborators), *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton & Oxford, 2000).

Two of the most learned works on the Hellenistic period are in French, Préaux (1978) and Will (1979–1982), the latter dealing primarily with political history, the former with culture and society. The magisterial three-volume work by M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 1953) still holds its own, even as J. K. Davies and colleagues in Liverpool critique and refine his ideas through the venue of international conferences (see Archibald et al., 2001).

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There are a number of useful collections of documents in translation that cover the Hellenistic period: Austin (1981, a new edition is in preparation); Bagnall and Derow (2nd edn., 2004); Burstein (1985); and Sherk (1984). Bagnall and Derow are particularly strong on the papyrus documents of Egypt. All of them include a large selection of Hellenistic inscriptions. English translations of the major authors can be found in the Loeb Classical Library, with facing Greek or Latin text (Cambridge, MA) and in the paperback Penguin Classics series, which is a popular choice for college-level courses.

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I: ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE CREATION OF THE HELLENISTIC AGE

A. B. Bosworth



“The name of Alexander marks the end of one age of the world, the beginning of another.” This lapidary and much-quoted apophthegm is the starting point of Johann Gustav Droysen’s revised *Geschichte des Hellenismus*. It appeared in 1877, when Droysen was in his seventieth year, at the peak of his powers and reputation, and the republication was a tribute to the notoriety that his work had achieved at the time of Germany’s unification. His vision of the Macedonia of Philip and Alexander was not intended as a political manifesto for the present, but it was eagerly seized upon as foreshadowing what could be achieved by the German states united under the leadership of the Prussian monarchy.¹ An autocratic regime, based on enlightened cultural and political principles, had first conquered and then civilized the world, and the process might be repeated in the modern era. Under those circumstances, it was easy to accept the picture of Alexander as the inaugurator of a new age, and Droysen’s conceptual model, despite some protests, has been almost universally accepted. Alexander, consciously or unconsciously, created a new world informed by Greek culture and absolute monarchy, which lasted until the dominance of Rome as a world power, and Droysen termed the process “Hellenismus.” This was not entirely novel, for the term had been in vogue as a label for the Greek *koine* as spoken and written by non-Greeks in the eastern Mediterranean after Alexander,² but Droysen extended it from a merely philological concept to encapsulate what he saw as the essence of a whole epoch.

Droysen’s view of Alexander took shape early in his life. In 1833, at the tender age of 25,³ he published his *Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen*. This is a highly rhetorical portrait, which explicitly presents Alexander as

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an Aristotelian superman, a prime example of living law.⁴ But Alexander is not autonomous. He is an instrument of history and of God himself. His conquests inculturate the barbarian east, but at the same time, they hasten the degeneration of the native inspiration of the Greek world. A levelling process takes place, a fusion (“Verschmelzung”) of east and west encouraged by the overarching monarchy of Alexander and his Successors. The crucial aspect of the fusion was religious syncretism, the tendency to see all divinities as related manifestations of a single godhead.⁵ It was a process that created a predisposition to monotheism, but at the same time there was a universal loneliness and desperation, a yearning for a redeemer. Hence, the spread of Christianity was the result of the general levelling that Alexander had inaugurated. He was a tool in the hands of a personified history, pursuing predetermined ends beyond his comprehension. In this model, Rome is an irrelevancy, except insofar as the Romans absorbed Greek culture and promoted its international dissemination. The culmination of the process is not Augustus and the end of the Ptolemaic regime but the ministry of Jesus.

This general vision is strongly influenced by Hegelian idealism and reflects Droysen’s student years in Berlin, but he remained true to it in his old age and retained the key passages in the second edition. In particular, he did not tone down the denigratory references to the eastern peoples under Persian domination⁶ and continued to represent Athens’ history in the fourth century as progressive degeneration. Neither view is acceptable in current thinking, nor would many scholars accept the religious determinism that underlies Droysen’s model. Yet, Alexander remains entrenched as the inaugurator of a new age. One might query the utility of the blanket label. It encourages a dangerous disregard of political and cultural continuity, and underestimates the reaction against Alexander after his death.

Reaction there certainly was. That can be seen in the sphere that Alexander made most his own: military conquest. Alexander’s reign witnessed a practically unlimited series of campaigns, which saw the annexation of the Persian Empire as it existed at his accession and then the conquest of the old Persian satrapies in the Indus valley. He planned to advance east to the Ganges plain and the outer ocean, but was frustrated by his men who wished to enjoy the benefits of conquest rather than fight endlessly in the monsoon rains. On his return to the west, he turned his energies to expansion to the south and west, preparing a naval expedition against the spice lands of Arabia and constructing a vast arsenal on the Cilician coast in anticipation of a major offensive