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The Hellenistic period as conventionally understood is framed by two military conquests: the first, the Macedonian invasion of the Persian Empire under Alexander, rapid and deliberate (334–323 BC), the second, the Roman take-over of much of the Hellenistic world, hardly deliberate but a long-drawn process, which started in the late third century BC but was not complete till 30 BC with the overthrow of the Ptolemaic dynasty after the battle of Actium. War in this period was a constant presence which shaped the history of the times in many ways. Conquest and empire are the leading themes: they have had a long and varied life from antiquity to the present day, and are unlikely to lose their relevance in the foreseeable future.

Hellenistic studies are at present in a thriving condition, as a glance at any bibliography will show.¹ When the first edition of this book was written only one general survey of the Hellenistic age in English was available (Tarn and Griffith (1953)), but since then they have multiplied and there has been a profusion of specialist studies.² What George Grote once wrote in the Preface to his great *History of Greece* (12 volumes, first published 1846–56) now seems an outdated curiosity: ‘After the generation of Alexander, the political action of Greece becomes cramped and degraded – no longer interesting to the reader, or operative on the destinies of the world [. . .] As a whole, the period between 300 BC and the absorption of Greece by the Romans is of no interest in itself, and is only so far of value as it helps us to understand the preceding centuries.’ Grote’s Athens-centred view of Greek history was being undermined even as he was writing, thanks to the work of the German historian J. G. Droysen, the modern inventor of Hellenistic history, who published successively histories of Alexander (1833), of the Successors (the *Diadochi*, 1836), and of subsequent rulers down to 220 BC (the *Epigoni*, 1843). Droysen’s impact was initially limited, but a second edition of the work issued as a single study was much more influential (1877), and the great upsurge of epigraphic and papyrological studies at the end of the nineteenth century brought the Hellenistic period to the forefront of scholarly research.

Yet historians of the Hellenistic world still have to reckon with the initial problem of its identity. The ‘Hellenistic period’ is in practice a modern invention and the word ‘Hellenistic’ an artificial coinage designed to provide a label for it. The word is loaded with presuppositions inherited from earlier

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scholarship, and though convenient its continued use creates a presumption of distinctiveness which should not be taken for granted. Much attention has rightly been devoted to this question of late, and the identity of the Hellenistic period has been the subject of extensive debate.³ Greek writers might not have understood the difficulty. For Polybius, writing in the second century, the decisive turning point in world history was not the Macedonian conquest of the Persian empire, though he was aware of its importance (cf. p. 62), but the rise of Roman power, which in his view gave to history a coherence it had previously lacked. He therefore selected as his starting point the 140th Olympiad, that is the years 220–216 BC (I.3):

In earlier times the history of the world had been so to speak a series of fragmented episodes, which lacked unity of purpose, result, and place. But from this point onwards history becomes an organic whole: events in Italy and Africa connect with those in Asia and Greece, and everything converges towards a single goal.

The nearest ancient writers came to a recognition of the separate identity of the Hellenistic period was in the adaptation of the concept of the 'succession of empires', first used in the fifth century by Herodotus in relation to the ancient Near East. The notion was subsequently applied to the contemporary world of Alexander and his successors: the Macedonian empire succeeded the Persian empire, and was in its turn overthrown by the Roman (25).⁴ The formulation is neat but deceptively simple. There was in reality no single 'Macedonian empire'; after the death of Alexander it soon became an abstraction as it fragmented into several rival dynasties (Ptolemies, Seleucids, Antigonids), whose leaders came from the Macedonian élite that had participated in the original conquest. Other monarchies, of non-Macedonian origin, also developed: in Anatolia the rulers of Bithynia, Pontus, Cappadocia, and the Attalids of Pergamum, in the far east the rulers of Bactria. The backbone of the major monarchies – the officers, governors, administrators, political and cultural figures, who made them functioning entities – was not specifically Macedonian but was drawn for the most part from an enlarged Greek world. Underneath or side by side with the monarchies were other units that formed the building blocks of the Hellenistic world – numerous different ethnic groups, cities whether of Greek type or indigenous, local rulers of non-royal status, leagues of various kinds, independent sanctuaries – who all had a role to play, whether subservient to the monarchies or with room for independent action in the interstices of monarchical power, rarely as effective in practice as it may have been absolute in theory.

The present book is not a history of the Hellenistic world but a source-book, and its coverage is therefore selective. It is based primarily on

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texts – literary, epigraphic, and papyri – not on material and visual evidence, with the partial exception of coinage (see below). It does not therefore claim to give an all-round presentation of the different types of evidence that can be adduced in the study of this period. To do so would require more than one volume by more than one author.⁵ Only a small proportion of the available evidence can be reproduced, and any selection is bound to be arbitrary. Translations furthermore are only approximations and no substitute for the originals.⁶ The annotation seeks to put the passages cited in context, clarify details, and provide cross-references to related texts. But it is not possible to provide a full commentary and take a position on every controversial point, whether of detail or of general interpretation. Bibliographical references are selective and generally give preference to works in English. It is assumed that the chronological table and the detailed analytical index will be used by the reader to access and utilise all the diverse information that is scattered throughout the book.

The Hellenistic world covers a vast geographical area: even if defined primarily by reference to the Greeks, its dominant component, it would include both the ‘old Greek world’ of the centuries before Alexander, itself far flung, and the ‘new Greek world’ which developed in the east in the wake of the Macedonian conquest. The history of this world covers some three centuries, but for reasons of space only part of it can be included. The starting point is the reign of Alexander (and not, as often, the time after his death). Ideally the coverage should extend at least to the Mithridatic wars in the early first century, a turning point in Rome’s relations with the east. In practice the terminal date has been set earlier, in the mid or late second century, the precise lower limit depending on the region concerned – earlier in the case of Macedon and mainland Greece, later for the Attalids, and later still for the Seleucids and Ptolemies. Geographically the coverage concentrates mainly on Macedon and the mainland of Greece, the Aegean, western Asia and Egypt. The Black Sea regions receive some attention (**114–16**, **120**), but the west (Carthage, Sicily, Italy) is largely sacrificed except for a few passing references (**33**, **41**, **59**, **131**).

No attempt will be made here to provide a general characterisation of the period covered or sketch its major themes, which can rather be introduced as the story progresses from chapter to chapter. Readers of this volume will see for themselves how complex the Hellenistic world was. Emphasis could equally be placed on its common features, or on its diversity. Taken as a whole it combined elements of stability (for example in the many links that connected widely scattered Greek communities; cf. **111**, **189**, **190**) as well as of instability (for example in its political fragmentation and the prevalence of war). The variety of the available evidence allows focus on a multiplicity of different themes. It is thus inappropriate to impose on it any single interpretative framework,

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and it is not clear that it should even be considered a single world. Where Droysen once saw the ‘fusion of cultures’ as the leading characteristic of the period, which he saw as a transitional phase between the classical world and the coming of Christianity, present-day historians are constructing a much more varied picture which emphasises diversity rather than unity and leaves the field wide open to debate.⁷

The ancient sources⁸

‘It is difficult to resist the first impression that there is something wrong with an age which has left an insufficient account of itself’ (A. Momigliano, *History and Theory* 9 (1970), 141): one initial problem in the study of the Hellenistic period is the lack of a good literary source to serve as a guide for most of the third century until the beginning of Polybius’ account (contrast the availability of e.g. Thucydides for the fifth century, Cicero for the late Roman Republic, or Tacitus for the early Empire). But there are other problems as well. First, the extant written sources for the Hellenistic age are but a fraction of what once existed. Not a single historian of the period has survived complete; many known to have existed are mere names, and many more have perhaps disappeared without trace. The inscriptions and papyri that have survived are a random and possibly unrepresentative selection from a much larger corpus of lost evidence. The history of the Hellenistic age is thus riddled with gaps and uncertainties. Second, our view of the Hellenistic world is largely one-sided. The world conquered by the Macedonians was one of many races and cultures, in which the Greeks and Macedonians, though dominant in political and social life, were nonetheless only a minority. But the evidence for that world is largely of Greek origin; it therefore reflects Greek points of view and characteristically shows only limited interest in the non-Greek world. Greek society was unusually articulate; historical and other forms of literary writing by self-consciously independent authors had a long history before Alexander. Political institutions also played a part; Greek cities functioned on the basis of decision-making by vote in an assembly of citizens after public debate. By the time of Alexander the setting up of inscribed public records was an established practice, and the habit spread together with the multiplication of Greek-style cities in the east. Furthermore Greek was predominantly the language of administration in the new monarchies, which were largely run by a Greek-speaking governing class.

The historian is therefore confronted with a largely Greek view of a world that was only partly Greek and never became fully hellenised, and this limitation can only be partly overcome. The oriental evidence from Mesopotamia,

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abundant in previous Near Eastern history, is relatively scanty in the Hellenistic period, though it does open up different perspectives as regards the Seleucid empire (cf. **158, 163, 166**). The principal exceptions otherwise are the Jews and the Egyptians. The Jews had a literary tradition of their own which antedated the Hellenistic age and continued in this period; despite strong Greek influence, the Jews successfully asserted their separate identity (cf. **214–17, 221, 261, 280**). In Egypt writing had a long past. The native temples possessed great wealth and influence, and from the time of Ptolemy III the priesthood met in synods which passed resolutions, a few of which, inscribed in Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphs and demotic, are extant (**271, 276, 283**). More generally, the evidence of published papyri from Egypt, in Greek but also in Egyptian demotic, yields much information about life in the countryside that would otherwise have largely disappeared. This is an exceptional case; elsewhere in Asia it is only rarely that the voice of the indigenous population is heard (cf. **168**; contrast in Egypt **212, 302, 307, 308, 324**).

1 Alexander The achievements and personality of Alexander the Great stimulated more historical writing, in his time and after, than any other single figure in antiquity, though quantity was not matched by quality (cf. *FGrH* 117–53).⁹ Of all this literature, only four principal accounts are now extant, all of them written well after Alexander, and so ultimately dependent on earlier writers, whether these were used directly or not. DIODORUS of Sicily (1st century BC) devoted Book XVII of his *Library of History* to the reign of Alexander; the account is preserved except for an important gap between chapters 83 and 84, from 330/29 to 327.¹⁰ QUINTUS CURTIUS (1st century AD?) wrote a history of Alexander in ten books, the first two of which are lost (down to early 333).¹¹ Similarities between Diodorus and Quintus Curtius indicate that they drew, in part at least, on a common source, often identified as Clitarchus (*FGrH* 137), a contemporary of Alexander and a widely read author. PLUTARCH of Chaeronea (2nd half of 1st century AD – early 2nd century) included Alexander in his *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman statesmen; he draws on a wide variety of sources of varying value, many of which are named.¹² ARRIAN of Nicomedia (2nd century AD) wrote an account of Alexander's expedition in seven books, and also a separate account of India and Nearchus' journey by sea from the Indus to the Persian Gulf.¹³ The account of Alexander is based primarily, as Arrian indicates (I, Preface), on two writers, Ptolemy the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty (*FGrH* 138) and Aristobulus of Cassandrea (*FGrH* 139), both of them contemporaries of Alexander and regarded by Arrian as trustworthy sources, though perhaps for the wrong reasons. Arrian's account is the fullest and most detailed available for Alexander, though it tends towards blandness and apologia, as did both

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Ptolemy and Aristobulus; it omits or distorts important aspects and episodes of Alexander's career, as comparison with the other sources shows (cf. **10**, **15**, **16**, **19**). In practice most of the central questions concerning Alexander remain a matter of controversy and speculation, and separating the historical person from the figure of legend is a probably impossible task. As the deliberate creator of his own legend Alexander himself is partly responsible for this.

2 The Hellenistic world after Alexander For the history of the Hellenistic period as a whole, only one continuous source has survived, the *Epitome* by JUSTIN (Roman Empire) of the *Philippic Histories* of Pompeius Trogus (time of Augustus), a sensationalising and mediocre work which can hardly be used as a trustworthy guide (for the flavour cf. **223**, **291**).¹⁴ Otherwise the coverage of Hellenistic history in the extant sources is very uneven: some periods and areas are known in relative detail, others hardly at all.

For the first two decades after Alexander (down to 302), the survival of Books XVIII–XX of DIODORUS provides a basic narrative of political and military events which can serve as a framework.¹⁵ For this period Diodorus is thought to have relied, not necessarily directly nor exclusively, on a contemporary account, that of Hieronymus of Cardia (*FGrH* 154), who moved in the circles of the Macedonian leaders and thus had access to good information; his narrative covered the period from 323 to (perhaps) 272 (cf. **26** n. 3). Thereafter Diodorus' text is lost, apart from brief excerpts.

This period, and parts of later Hellenistic history, are also partially covered in some of the Lives of PLUTARCH,¹⁶ namely those of Demosthenes, Phocion, Eumenes of Cardia, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Pyrrhus of Epirus, the Spartan kings Agis IV and Cleomenes III, and the Achaean statesmen Aratus of Sicyon and Philopoemen; there is also some material in the Lives of the Roman commanders T. Quinctius Flamininus and L. Aemilius Paullus. Plutarch's Greek Lives for the Hellenistic period are notably fewer than for previous Greek history, and Hellenistic rulers are not represented except for Alexander, Demetrius Poliorcetes and Pyrrhus. This is no accident. Plutarch, in spirit a man of the *polis* though living under the Roman Empire, looked back at past Greek history through Athenian eyes: he regarded the death of Demosthenes as marking the end of free Athens (*Demosthenes* 3; cf. the Athenian viewpoint in e.g. **32**, **54**, **55**, **61**). His perspective has exercised a strong influence on later generations. He had a pronounced aversion for Hellenistic kings and their courts (cf. **44**, **52**, **70**, **71**), and his preferences went to statesmen from Greek cities of the mainland (the Spartan kings; the Achaean statesmen), whose actions seemed to him to recall something of the spirit of the classical *polis*.¹⁷ A series of royal biographies of the Hellenistic rulers would have been invaluable, and its absence leaves a major gap: far too little is known and understood of

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the personality of the kings who were the leading actors in this period (cf. **209**, **233**, **243**, **274**; contrast the continuous sequence of biographies available for Roman emperors).

Diodorus' history and Plutarch's *Lives* were derivative sources written long after the event. The history of POLYBIUS of Megalopolis (c.200–after 118 BC) is in a different class altogether; it is to the Hellenistic world of his time (the late 3rd and 2nd centuries) what Thucydides is to the fifth century.¹⁸ Polybius was both a witness and to some extent an agent in many of the events he narrates. An Achaean statesman who was deported to Rome as a hostage in 167, and formed there friendships with important Roman statesmen, Polybius had a deep knowledge and understanding of the Mediterranean world of his time, though his strong likes and dislikes affected his judgement (cf. e.g. **67**, **79**, **82**, **274**, **323**). The theme of his history was the rise of Rome to the status of a world power; it was covered in detail from 220 to 145, with (in the first two books) an outline of the First Punic War (264–241) and a summary of events prior to his main starting point. Of the whole massive work in 40 books, only Books I–V survive intact (down to 216); thereafter only excerpts of varying length are preserved. The gap is filled in part (down to 167) by Books XXI–XLV of the Roman annalist LIVY (time of Augustus), who drew extensively on Polybius for the sections of his narrative that dealt with Greek affairs, though his perspective was purely Roman.¹⁹

Other sources may be mentioned briefly. The *Geography* of STRABO (time of Augustus), in 17 books, contains a number of valuable descriptions of cities and regions (e.g. **160**, **292**), as well as frequent historical digressions (e.g. **188**, **224**).²⁰ The same is true of the *Description of Greece* (mainland only) in ten books by PAUSANIAS (2nd century AD; cf. **28**, **56**, **100**, and esp. **254**).²¹ Mention should be also made of the Jewish sources alluded to above, notably I and II MACCABEES (**216**, **217**) and Books XII–XIII of *The Jewish Antiquities* by JOSEPHUS (1st century AD);²² these provide evidence on the Jews in the Hellenistic world and especially on their relations with the declining Seleucids in the second century from a different perspective than the Greek sources.

*3 Inscriptions*²³ Characteristic of the Greek world was what has been called the 'epigraphic habit' – the practice of inscribing on durable material (stone, sometimes metal) and setting up for permanent display many kinds of texts that were felt to be of public interest. The habit originated long before Alexander and spread considerably in the post-classical period. Nearly half of the texts included in this selection are Greek inscriptions, an illustration of the ever increasing importance of inscriptions for the study of the Hellenistic world, as new texts are constantly discovered. The texts selected give emphasis to public

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affairs and do not by any means fully convey the range and variety of material available (epitaphs, for example, are not represented). Inscriptions are found widely in the Hellenistic world, but with considerable variations by region or by site. Generally speaking, finds are most abundant in the heartlands of the Greek world, especially the mainland, the Aegean, and western Asia Minor, a particularly rich area,²⁴ and become scarcer as one moves further to the east, though even remoter regions are occasionally represented (cf. e.g. **186, 268**). Inscriptions were commonly displayed in public buildings and areas, and in sanctuaries, as the provisions for their engraving and publication reveal (cf. e.g. **55** (end), **134, 137** Side A, **138** §7, **173** (a), etc.). The great sanctuaries of panhellenic renown – Delphi, Delos, and others – thus became storehouses of inscribed texts displayed for public scrutiny. Among the profusion and variety of texts certain categories stand out: official letters of kings to cities or to officials (numerous examples, e.g. **6, 38, 48, 74**, etc.);²⁵ decrees of cities, or leagues, or even private associations, on a wide range of subjects, one very important category being the honorific decrees passed in praise of rulers, magistrates, or individuals for services performed (very numerous examples, e.g. **32, 39, 54, 55, 115, 191** etc.); treaties and alliances of various kinds (e.g. **40, 61, 107, 152** etc.); constitutions (**29, 50**); laws and regulations, on civil or religious matters (e.g. **90, 126, 149, 253**); dedications and offerings to gods (e.g. **141, 231, 281**); lists and accounts (e.g. **122, 207, 294**), etc. Inscriptions, like all other types of evidence, do not of course speak for themselves but need interpretation; they are usually formulaic in character, and there is a constant difficulty in divining the reality behind the words. For instance, decrees of Greek cities invariably convey an impression of unanimity which conceals any divisions there may have been in the community concerned. Where epigraphic and literary evidence are both available they can provide a counterpoint to each other (cf. e.g. **192, 240**). But it is often the case that on many aspects of Greek history inscriptions are the principal or indeed the sole source of information available, with resulting difficulties in interpretation (cf. e.g. **147, 150, 155, 256**).²⁶

4 *Papyri*²⁷ Papyri differ from inscriptions in several ways. Inscribed texts were intended to be publicly visible and permanent; texts on papyrus normally were not, and have survived because they were discarded. Furthermore, while Greek inscriptions are found in most parts of the Hellenistic world, the evidence of papyri is confined almost exclusively to Egypt. Papyrus, though only produced in Egypt, was the standard writing material for everyday use in the Hellenistic world, but Egypt provided climatic conditions suitable for the long-term preservation of papyri in large quantities which were not easily

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replicated elsewhere (cf. **161**). Ptolemaic Egypt therefore enjoys a prominent place in accounts of the Hellenistic world. But the survival of papyri is an even more haphazard process than that of inscriptions. Within Egypt itself there are considerable regional variations: parts of the countryside are represented, above all the Fayum (cf. **254** n. 10), but not the populous Delta region (because of its humidity), nor the capital city Alexandria. Chronologically the distribution of finds is also uneven. Very few texts survive from the reign of Ptolemy I, hence the early stages in the development of the Ptolemaic administration are little known. Finds suddenly multiply in the reign of Ptolemy II, and his reign therefore acquires special prominence (cf. e.g. **296, 297**). But this is the result of chance; it was in his time that the practice developed of stuffing human or animal mummies with discarded paper (cartonnage). Generally speaking the evidence of papyri has a parochial perspective and betrays little awareness of the world outside Egypt (though cf. **266, 278** for exceptions). With these restrictions the range of extant papyri is considerable. Comparison of the chapter on the Ptolemies with that on the Seleucids will show how much information has been preserved for Ptolemaic Egypt which elsewhere has almost completely vanished. Apart from literary texts, largely unrepresented in this selection (though cf. **104**), papyri are often classified for convenience into private and public documents, though each category covers a great variety of texts, and the dividing line between the categories is not always clear-cut (for example **326** belongs to neither).²⁸ As with inscriptions the emphasis in this book is on texts that illustrate the official level and the workings of a government which relied extensively on written documentation for its functioning: for example regulations and edicts issued by the rulers or in their name (**260, 290, 296, 297, 312**), correspondence to or from officials (**299, 311, 314**), petitions (**301, 302, 318**, cf. **212**), and records of many kinds (**309, 313**). Special mention should be made of collections of papers, sometimes misleadingly referred to as ‘archives’, that belonged to individuals in positions of authority. Two of these illustrate contrasting facets of Ptolemaic Egypt at different stages in its history – the papers of Zenon, the personal agent of Apollonius, *dioiketes* of Ptolemy II, which comprise many different texts and reveal the dynamism of the ruling circles at the time (**298–9** and **301–8**), and the papers of Menches, village scribe of Kerkeosiris in the Fayum in the late second century (**325**, cf. from them **290**).

5 *Coinage*²⁹ (See Plates 1–4.) Both inscriptions and papyri existed for the most part only in single copies. Coins, by contrast, though struck individually by hand from hand-made dies, were produced in large quantities; each die could be used to make several thousand copies of the same

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Plate 1: Alexander, the Successors, the Antigonids