Introduction

Stoicism as a philosophical school and movement lasted for several hundred years. Our understanding of it is limited by the fact that virtually none of the works written by the early members of the school has survived for us to read today. Because critics in later antiquity, such as Plutarch, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus and Simplicius, seem to have had access to many important early works, perhaps especially those of Chrysippus, we can do a reasonable job of reconstructing the doctrines and even many of the arguments of the early school. And this is what most contemporary scholarly treatments of Stoicism attempt to do. But the accidents of history have preserved for us substantial texts from later phases of the school’s history, especially the perennially influential works of Seneca the Younger, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. These authors, and other later Stoics about whom we know a good deal, often developed the philosophy of their school in new directions that reflected their own intellectual environments and their own individual interests. It would be both surprising and disappointing if any philosophical movement were stagnant over a history that spanned more than 500 years. Stoicism certainly wasn’t.

The present book aims to provide a representative selection of the evidence we have for Stoicism in its later phases, that is for the period from the middle of the second century BCE to the threshold of the third century CE. That it is a selection is inevitable given the constraints of space and time. That it should be representative is a major challenge, one that I have tried to meet as best I could. In general, treatments, both scholarly and popular, of later Stoicism have been dominated by a focus on Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus, and also by a tendency to emphasize those aspects of later Stoicism that differentiate it from the early school. The result has been a picture of later Stoicism that tends to overestimate the place of ethics and plays down its engagement with logic, physics, metaphysics and epistemology. Though the works of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus still take up the majority of this book, the aim throughout has been to redress the balance in two ways. First, this book includes extensive selections from many Stoics whose works are less well known, indeed often known only to specialists. Second, in each chapter the selections are presented in an arrangement that is as close to uniform as possible without unduly distorting the evidence we have for each thinker. Logic, physics and ethics, with sub-topics where available, are the headings under which the thought
of even Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus are presented, and every attempt has been made to extract from their differently organized works the contribution they made to these standard divisions of philosophy. This runs the risk of misrepresenting these thinkers by cutting up their works into artificial, even procrustean, categories; but anyone who wants an integral version of their thought will have no difficulty in finding it, since their important works have survived intact and can be read and studied in good modern translations. The fragmentation imposed on their work is intended to make it easier to assess their contributions to the development of Stoicism in later centuries in line with what we know of the earlier history of the school.

Another aspect of this book’s organization needs to be explained: the decision to make “later Stoicism” begin in the middle of the second century BCE. Inevitably, this rests on decisions and assumptions about the history of the school. Ancient sources do not demarcate the school for us – there is no ancient evidence that would support dividing the school into early, middle and late (or Roman or Imperial Stoicism). Hence, any periodization of the school risks appearing arbitrary and certainly requires explanation. Let’s ask first how one might in principle divide up the school’s history.

One possible approach would be to make the end of the Hellenistic historical era the boundary, conventionally in 31 BCE with the battle of Actium that brought the decisive end of all resistance to Rome’s expansion in the Mediterranean basin. Another dividing line could be drawn with the sack of Athens by the Roman general Sulla in 86 BCE, a critical moment in the first Mithridatic War, which was a key phase in the resistance to Roman expansion by the kingdom of Pontus in Asia Minor and its allies. Though these wars dragged on past 85 BCE when the first war ended, the capture and partial destruction of Athens as a consequence of its support for the forces of Mithridates had significant impact on the practice of philosophy. From the fourth century BCE onwards, Athens had been the de facto home for philosophy as an intellectual and social practice. The major schools, with their libraries and other resources, were all centred in Athens; the important philosophers of the day gravitated to Athens; and it was in Athens that philosophers debated with and learned from each other in the intense way that face-to-face contact made possible. All of that ended when Athens fell and the philosophers, for the most part, scattered to other urban centres such as Alexandria and Rome. With its significant impact on the schools, the fall of Athens would be another and more plausible demarcation. David Sedley (2003) has, however, argued that for Stoicism at least centrifugal forces were already building in the second century BCE, with cities such as Rhodes playing an increasingly important role even as the influence of Platonic thought became more important within the school. There is a great deal of merit in Sedley’s argument. There have also been arguments for choosing 100 BCE as the relevant transition point for all of Hellenistic philosophy, including Stoicism (Frede 1999).
Yet another demarcation point in the history of Stoicism, traditional since the late nineteenth century, is with the leadership in the school of Panaetius of Rhodes, still regarded by many as the founder of a phase of Stoicism distinct enough to need its own label, “middle Stoicism” (Schmekel 1892). This too, like Sedley’s case, would put the dividing line in the latter half of the second century BCE. The idea driving this periodization is that Panaetius, like his student in the first century BCE, Posidonius, adopted Platonic and even Aristotelian doctrines as part of the school’s teaching, even as other Stoics stayed much closer to the traditional doctrines of Chrysippus. This is the conception of the school’s history that underlies the monumental collection of evidence for earlier Stoicism by Hans von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. Von Arnim omits Panaetius and Posidonius but includes evidence for many Stoics who were their contemporaries or worked even later in the first century BCE. The rationale for the division was a particular theory about the doctrinal innovation of Panaetius and Posidonius rather than any clear, historically based criterion. Now that modern scholarship has put into question the degree and character of many of the innovations manifested in their philosophy, the work of Panaetius no longer seems to be an obvious place to draw the line. And even if one does still think that a dramatic change occurred at that point, it would be a mistake to deprive his work of the intellectual context needed for an appreciation of its significance.

Consequently, this book, which aims to present evidence for the context and content of later Stoic philosophy, will start even earlier, in the middle of the second century BCE. A little more historical context will help to explain why. Zeno of Citium founded the Stoic school around 300 BCE, and it is generally held to have reached its creative peak with Chrysippus, who headed the school from around 230 to 207 BCE; for the next fifty years or so, it continued to be dominated by his students. It was in the middle of the second century BCE that major changes got under way in the school, during the leadership of Diogenes of Babylon. In what follows we will see clear evidence of that. And undoubtedly the main driver of those changes was the critique mounted against the school’s doctrines by the brilliant Academic Carneades, a native of Cyrene in North Africa who had moved to Athens to become a philosopher. Though his impact on philosophy was long-lasting and widespread, there was one particularly important focal moment. In 155 BCE Athens sent those it regarded as its three leading intellectuals to Rome on a diplomatic mission: Carneades, the Peripatetic Critolaus, and Diogenes of Babylon, head of the Stoic school in Athens. Diogenes was already an old man (he died a few years later) and had himself studied with Chrysippus in his youth. He was the last of Chrysippus’ students to lead the school, a transitional figure who represents the end of an era.

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1 For an up-to-date and sober assessment of Panaetius’ relationship to earlier Stoics and to other schools, see Tieleman (2007).
Carneades was a brilliant philosopher and a devastating dialectical opponent, certainly the most important critic of Stoicism since its founding. As an Academic sceptic, he directed his arguments in a very public way against Stoicism in all three of its ‘parts,’ logic, physics and ethics. The school’s need to respond to these challenges was a major catalyst for change and development, though, as has long been recognized, in the late second century Stoics also began to grapple with the philosophical legacy of Plato and Aristotle more directly than they had in previous decades. Our sources don’t say much about Diogenes’ reaction to Carneades, but his student and successor as head of the school, Antipater of Tarsus, clearly dealt with Carneades’ critique extensively, though perhaps not always effectively. It is his intense response to Carneades which makes it appropriate to regard Antipater (and his students and successors) as a significant turning point in the history of the Stoic school. His resistance to Carneades is well documented, and his engagement with Plato’s legacy seems to have included a kind of counterattack, as he argued that on key issues Plato had actually held Stoic doctrines *avant la lettre*; he wrote a work in three books arguing that Plato already held a key Stoic doctrine: that only what is honourable (*kalon*) is a genuine good.

Hence the premise of this collection of evidence is that Antipater marks the genuine beginning of later Stoicism. Of course, changes of direction seldom come in dramatic singular moments. Things began to shift with Antipater, but there is no one moment when the school entered a whole new phase. In the century after Antipater took over leadership of the school, shortly before 150 BCE, there was a mixture of old and new in the school, a variety of philosophical activity and doctrine that needs to be seen in its full context. The first chapter of this sourcebook, then, presents a generous selection of material bearing on the development and variety of views within the school from about 155 BCE up until the time of Posidonius. Posidonius himself is an important and well-documented figure, indeed, someone whom the Stoics who came after him often looked back to as the creator of a fresh synthesis of the school’s doctrines. Consequently, he has his own chapter. Chapter I includes a limited selection of evidence about Diogenes of Babylon, where it seems he may be reacting to Carneades, but concentrates more on the work of Stoics from Antipater onwards. Because of the nature of our often quite fragmentary evidence, it isn’t feasible to devote separate sections to each of the philosophers active in this period. The organization is primarily thematic;
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within each topic material about any of the Stoics active in this period will be set out, with only minimal attention to chronology.

The thematic organization of the first chapter is a template for later chapters as well. Material is presented in four divisions. First, general information about the philosopher or philosophers in question; second, material on logic, dialectic and related topics; third, physics and cosmology; fourth, ethics and, where relevant, political themes. (Subdivisions within each of the three sections are not uniform across the chapters simply because the texts and evidence available vary with different authors.) The order, logic, physics, ethics, is only one of the attested orderings of the standard three parts of philosophy, and for some philosophers we know that this wasn’t the order they themselves advocated. But imposing the same order on all six chapters will, I hope, make it easier for readers who want to track a particular theme across the otherwise historically organized chapters.

Chapter 1, then, deals with the period from 155 to the mid-first century BCE. Chapter 2 is devoted to the work of Posidonius. Lesser figures from the period following Posidonius are dealt with in Chapter 3. Seneca the Younger (Ch. 4) and Epictetus (Ch. 5) are our best-preserved Stoic authors and each gets his own chapter. The final chapter is devoted to other important Stoics from the second century CE, culminating with generous selections from the philosophical diary of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Chapters 3 and 6 include several important Stoic philosophers less well known to non-specialists, including Cornutus, Cleomedes and Hierocles. Their work is too often neglected or treated in isolation from their contemporaries, and I hope that their inclusion here will both raise their profile and provide valuable context for the works of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus.