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The Greeks in Bactria and India

WILLIAM WOODTHORPE TARN

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To

MY BEST CRITIC

CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

As circumstances have made it impossible for me, cut off from libraries, to prepare a full revision of the text of this book, and as a simple reprint would have been unfair to readers, I have added some notes (*Addenda* 1950) to the reprint, in order, as far as I could, to indicate the advance of knowledge; some are really revisions of the text. They represent, not what I would, but what I could; and in two subjects at least, the peoples of the nomad invasion of Bactria and new coin-finds, my knowledge is sadly deficient. To friends who have helped me I am most grateful. One new book has recently appeared which covers the whole field and a good deal more, Professor Franz Altheim's *Weltgeschichte Asiens im griechischen Zeitalter* (2 vols., 1947, 1948), a book of vast learning that is not always matched by the use made of it; for my preliminary chapters on the Seleucid Empire Professor M. Rostovtzeff's great work *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (3 vols., 1941) is now indispensable. My best thanks are due to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for reprinting this book and permitting me to include the 1950 *Addenda*, and to the Staff of the Press for the way in which it has been carried out.

W. W. TARN

MUIRTOWN HOUSE
INVERNESS

January 1950

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

I HAVE dreamt of this book for forty years; it is fortunate for me that I had no opportunity of taking it up earlier. No Greek historian has yet attempted to handle the subject as a connected whole or to put it in its right place as a lost chapter of Hellenistic history. What needs saying about the book itself and its plan is given in the Introduction, which is meant to be read first; but I may here anticipate two obvious criticisms. I am aware that it is very reprehensible to write a book where you have to depend in part on second-hand information, as I have had to do on the Oriental side. But it is time that somebody with some knowledge of the Hellenistic world tried to get the more important Greek side into order, for one sees how often the Orientalist is hampered by not knowing what there is; and it is no use waiting for a scholar who shall have a proper and *critical* knowledge of both sides, or rather of all the sides, for he has not yet been born. And even in using a translation one need not entirely abandon one's common sense. I am also aware that history should be written impersonally. But to write this book impersonally was not possible; much of it is spade-work, and it had to get written as best it could, other considerations being subordinated to an effort to make the bearings of the rather complex collection of little details clear to the reader. I hope that the numerous cross-references may be of use here, for often it has been necessary to refer forward for the evidence for some statement, sometimes even on a large scale; for example, Chapter VIII presupposes a knowledge of Appendix 16, and the attempt in Chapter II to get the outline of the lost work of the historian whom I have had to call 'Trogus' source' presupposes a knowledge of the whole book.

My manifold debts to the published work of others are acknowledged in the notes, but one thing calls for special mention—the brilliant chapters in volume I of the Cambridge History of India (1922) in which, for the first time, Sir George Macdonald and the late Professor E. J. Rapson got the subject into a shape which one could understand and which offered a basis for future progress. If, as I venture to hope, I have been able to take the matter further than they left it, it must largely be because I have had the privilege, in Bentley's phrase, of standing on their shoulders.

To acknowledge all my more personal obligations is almost impossible, for so many people have kindly helped me in one way or another; some are mentioned in the notes. I desire here to thank Monsieur Jean Babelon of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for particulars of the Indo-Greek coins in the unpublished Hackin collection; Dr L. D. Barnett of the British Museum for the translation used in Appendix 4; Professor E. H. Minns for procuring and making for me a synopsis of the Russian study mentioned in Appendix 10; Mr J. Allan of the British Museum for a cast of the coin which is no. 7 on the Plate, and also for giving me a proof of the Introduction to his *Indian Coins* many months in advance of publication, which saved me a great deal of trouble; and also, for help of various kinds, Sir Aurel Stein, Professors H. W. Bailey, Fr. Cumont, E. Herzfeld, and F. W. Thomas, and Messrs E. J. Gadd, H. Mattingly, E. S. G. Robinson, and Sidney Smith, of the British Museum. To three of my friends I owe a very special debt. Professors H. M. Last and A. D. Nock each read a good deal of the book in MS. and gave me not only numerous references and suggestions but also (a thing which meant much more to me) some greatly needed encouragement at a critical time. Professor F. E. Adcock read most of the book in MS. and gave me the benefit of his great editorial knowledge, beside much other help; he also most generously undertook the thankless but beneficent task of reading a proof. I desire to thank the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press both for undertaking the publication of the book and also for permitting me to use again the beautiful reproductions of the Bactrian coin-portraits made for the Cambridge History of India, and to thank the staff of the Press for the way in which the publication has been carried out. Lastly, I would take this opportunity to pay a tribute of gratitude, long overdue, to my daughter, to whom this book is dedicated, and whose critical sense and clear judgment have been my unfailing help in everything I have written for many years.

W. W. TARN

MUIRTOWN HOUSE
INVERNESS

ABBREVIATIONS

(It has not seemed necessary to list the ordinary abbreviations of classical periodicals and collections. In general, I follow those given in the Cambridge Ancient History.)

ASI *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India.* (For some years there is a preliminary volume entitled Part I, which is so cited.)

BEFEO *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient.*

Berlin SB *Sitzungsberichte d. preuss. Akademie d. Wissenschaften zu Berlin.*

Berthelot A. Berthelot, *L'Asie ancienne centrale et sud-orientale, d'après Ptolémée.* 1930.

BMC *Catalogue of coins in the British Museum: Greek and Scythic kings of Bactria and India*, by P. Gardner. 1886.

BMC India Ditto: *Coins of Ancient India*, by J. Allan. 1936.

BMC Parthia Ditto: *Parthia*, by W. Wroth. 1903.

BMC Sel. Ditto: *The Seleucid kings of Syria*, by P. Gardner. 1878.

BSOS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies.*

CAH *Cambridge Ancient History.*

CHI *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I. 1922.

CII *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. II, 1: *The Kharoshthi Inscriptions, with the exception of those of Açoka*, by Sten Konow. 1929.

Cumont, *Fouilles* Fr. Cumont, *Les fouilles de Doura-Europos*, 1922–3. 1926.

Cunningham, *Geog.* General Sir Alexander Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India* (1871), edited by S. N. Majumdar (Surendranath Majumdar Sastri). 1924.

de Groot J. J. M. de Groot, *Chinesische Urkunden zur Geschichte Asiens*: zweiter Teil, *Die Westlande Chinas in der vorchristlichen Zeit.* 1926. (Published after the author's death by O. Franke.)

de la Vallée-Poussin L. de la Vallée-Poussin, *L'Inde aux temps des Mauryas et des barbares, Grecs, Scythes, Parthes et Yue-tchi.* 1930. (*Histoire du Monde*, vol. VI, 1.)

Demiéville Paul Demiéville, *Les versions chinoises du Milindapañha. BEFEO* XXIV, 1924 (pub. 1925), p. 1.

Ep. Ind. *Epigraphia Indica.*

Foucher A. Foucher, *L'Art gréco-bouddhique de Gandhāra.* Vol. I, 1905; vol. II, 1918 and 1922.

Foucher, *Afghanistan* A. Foucher, *Notes sur l'itinéraire de Hiun-Tsang en Afghanistan*, in *Études asiatiques publiées à l'occasion du 25e anniversaire de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. I, 1925, p. 257.

Foucher, *Gandhāra* A. Foucher, *Notes sur la géographie ancienne du Gandhāra.* 1902. (English trans. by H. Hargreaves, *Notes on the Ancient Geography of Gandhāra*, 1915.)

Franke O. Franke, *Beiträge aus chinesischen Quellen zur Kenntniss der Türkvölker und Skythen Zentralasiens. Abhandlungen d. preuss. Akad. zu Berlin*, 1904, no. 1.

Griffith G. T. Griffith, *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World.* 1935.

Grousset R. Grousset, *Histoire de l'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 1. 1929.

Gutschmid A. von Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans.* 1888.

Herzfeld, *Sakastan* E. Herzfeld, *Sakastan: Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, IV, 1931–2.

Hirth Fr. Hirth, *The story of Chang K'ien.* Translation of chapter 123 of the Shi-ki of Ssu-ma Ch'ien. *JAOS* XXXVII, 1917, p. 89.

IHQ *Indian Historical Quarterly.*

Ind. Ant. *Indian Antiquary.*

Isidore Isidoros of Charax, *Παρθικοὶ Σταθμοί.*

JA *Journal Asiatique.*

JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society.*

JASB *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.*

JBORS *Journal of the Bengal and Orissa Research Society.*

JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.*

JIH *Journal of Indian History.*

JRAS *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.*

Lahore Cat. *Catalogue of the coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore*, by R. B. Whitehead, vol. 1. 1914.

Lassen Chr. Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, 1847–61.

Lévi, *Quid de Graecis* *Quid de Graecis veterum Indorum monumenta tradiderint theseim . . . proponebat Sylvain Lévi.* 1890.

McDowell, *Stamped objects* R. H. McDowell, *Stamped and inscribed objects from Seleucia on the Tigris.* 1935.

McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia* R. H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris.* 1935.

MDP *Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse.*

NC *Numismatic Chronicle.*

NNM *Numismatic Notes and Monographs.*

Otto, *Zeit d. 6. Ptolemäers* W. Otto, *Zur Geschichte der Zeit des 6. Ptolemäers, Abhandlungen d. bayerischen Akad. d. Wissenschaften*, 1934.

Pliny C. Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia.*

Przyluski, *Açoka* J. Przyluski, *La légende de l'empereur Açoka (Açoka-Avadāna) dans les textes Indiens et Chinois.* 1923.

Rhys Davids T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda.* Translation of the Pali text of the Milindapañha, in *Sacred Books of the East*, vols. XXXV, XXXVI (1890, 1894).

Rostovtzeff, *Seleucid Babylonia* M. Rostovtzeff, *Seleucid Babylonia: Bullae and Seals of Clay with Greek Inscriptions. Yale Classical Studies* III, 1932, p. 1.

Sav. Z. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung, Romanistische Abteilung.*

Susemihl Fr. Susemihl, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur in der Alexandriner-zeit*, 2 vols. 1891, 1892.

Tarn, *Hell. Civ.*[2] W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 2nd ed. 1930.

Tarn, *Military Developments* W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Military and Naval Developments*. 1930.

Tarn, *SP Stud.* W. W. Tarn, *Seleucid-Parthian Studies. Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1930, p. 105.

Tscherikower V. Tscherikower, *Die hellenistischen Städtegründungen von Alexander dem Grossen bis auf die Römerzeit. Philologus*, Supp. Band XIX, 1, 1927.

V. A. Smith[4] V. A. Smith, *Early History of India*, 4th edition after his death by S. M. Edwardes, 1924.

Warmington E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*. 1928.

Whitehead, *NC* R. B. Whitehead, *Notes on Indo-Greek Numismatics. NC* 1923, p. 294.

Whitehead, *NNM* R. B. Whitehead, *Pre-Mohammedan Coinage of North-Western India. NNM* 13, 1922.

Wien SB *Sitzungsberichte d. Akad. d. Wissenschaften in Wien.*

Winternitz M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, 3 vols. Vol. II, 1920; vol. III, 1922.

Winternitz, Eng. trans. M. Winternitz, *A history of Indian Literature*, trans. by Mrs S. Ketkar, with the author's revisions. (Practically a second edition. Vol. II, 1933; vol. III not yet published.)

Wylie A. Wylie, *Notes on the Western Regions*: translation of chapter 96 part 1 and chapter 61 fols. 1–6 of the Ch'ien-han-shu (Annals of the Former Han) of Pan-ku. *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. X, 1881, p. 20.

Wylie, part 2 Translation of chapter 96 part 2 of the above. *Ib.* vol. XI, 1881, p. 83.

Z. *Zeitschrift.*

ADDITIONAL ABBREVIATIONS (1950)

Altheim I, II Franz Altheim, *Weltgeschichte Asiens in griechischen Zeitalter*, vol. I, 1947, vol. II, 1948.

Bailey 1948 H. W. Bailey, *Recent Work in 'Tokharian'. Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1948, pp. 126–53.

Bikerman, *Inst.* E. Bikerman (formerly Bickermann), *Institutions des Séleucides*, 1938.

Newell, *ESM* E. T. Newell, *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III*, 1938.

Rostovtzeff, *SEH* M. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 3 vols. 1941 (consecutive paging).

Tarn, *Alexander* I, II W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, vol. I Narrative, vol. II Sources and Studies, 1948.

Tarn, *Tarmita* *Two Seleucid Studies: II, Tarmita*. *JHS* LX, 1940, p. 89.

Whitehead, *NC* 1940 R. B. Whitehead, *Notes on the Indo-Greeks*. *NC*, 5th series, XX, 1940, p. 1.

Whitehead, *NC* 1947 R. B. Whitehead, *Notes on the Indo-Greeks* Part II. *NC*, 6th series, VII, 1947 (pub. later), p. 28 [1].

INTRODUCTION

It may be well to begin with a statement of the plan of this book.[1]

Asia under Greek rule, as matter of political history and not of distinctions of race or civilisation, may be divided into three parts. The first division consists of the countries west of the Euphrates and of the Syrian desert, Asia Minor and Syria, which were to become Roman and were for centuries to be dominated by Graeco-Roman civilisation before they ultimately returned to the East; with this division this book has nothing to do except by way of an occasional illustration. The second division, roughly speaking, consists of the countries between the Euphrates and the Persian desert, which were subsequently to form the kingdom of the Arsacids, known to Greeks and Romans as Parthia; from the Greek point of view it may be called the Middle East. The third division, which I call the Farther East, comprises Iran east of the Persian desert and India so far as it was under Greek rule. This division by the Persian desert is a real one, and very old; it is found in one of Darius' lists of the provinces of his empire.[2] This book is really concerned only with the Farther East, the story of eastern Iran and northern India under Greek rule; it is an attempt to recover what can be recovered of the history of a lost dynasty and of a rather extraordinary experiment. This story begins with Chapter III, and from that chapter to the end the book (except for art) is meant to be as complete as I can make it.

But every story has a background, and the background to mine is the Middle East; it has seemed advisable therefore to add to the book

[1] In this book, the name Demetrius alone always means Demetrius of Bactria, and Demetrius II alone always means his son; every other Demetrius, including the Seleucids Demetrius I and II, always has some distinguishing word unless the context renders the meaning unmistakable. Seleuceia alone always means Seleuceia on the Tigris. The word 'Greeks', east of the Euphrates, includes Macedonians, unless the latter are particularised; probably by the second century B.C. the two were indistinguishable, and anyhow there are no means of distinguishing them. The term 'Indian scholar' (on the analogy of 'Greek scholar') means one engaged in Indian studies and has nothing to do with nationality.

[2] Persepolis e §2 (F. H. Weissbach, *Die Keilinschriften der Achaemeniden* 1911), which after the western provinces gives specifically 'the lands in the East', those east of the desert.

an introductory part, Chapters I and II, which shall sketch certain aspects of that background and will, I hope, make it easier to see the connections between the story of the Farther East and that of the Seleucids. This introductory part has not, and is not meant to have, any claim to completeness, except perhaps as regards the account of the Greek literature in Chapter II. It is not an account of the Seleucid realm; it is a sketch only, designed to bring out certain points which bear upon facts utilised later, and may be a help to the understanding of them; these points are, chiefly, the Seleucid administrative divisions, the nature of the Seleucid settlement, the Greek literature of the Middle East (which is important on the question of our sources), and the relations between Greeks and Asiatics.

The world east of the Euphrates was the scene of the interaction of Greek civilisation with three other civilisations, those of Babylonia, Iran, and India. Of these, India, and Iran in part, belong to my subject. But Babylonia does not, and I am not giving an account of Babylonia under Greek rule, which would call for a separate study and special qualifications. I use Babylonia to illustrate certain matters; that is all.

It is unfortunate that in Britain, and I think everywhere, the story of the Greeks in India has been treated as part of the history of India alone. For in the history of India the episode of Greek rule has no meaning; it is really part of the history of Hellenism, and that is where its meaning resides. It is one of the misfortunes of ancient history that we become hypnotised into writing as though the importance of a thing were somehow proportionate to the amount of information about it which has survived; the papyri, for instance, tend to make the Ptolemies seem more important than the Seleucids. If we can manage to avoid this perversion of thinking, we shall recognise that any history of the Hellenistic states with the Farther East omitted is a sadly mutilated history; for there were not four Hellenistic dynasties—Seleucids, Ptolemies, Antigonids, Attalids—but five, and on any showing the Euthydemids, both in the extent of their rule and in what they tried to do, were vastly more important than the Attalids, the protégés successively of Egypt and of Rome. The Greek empire of Bactria and India was a Hellenistic state, with many of the usual characteristics of such states but with one very important one of its own, and its history was a branch of Seleucid history, just as the Euthydemid dynasty was on the distaff side a branch of the Seleucid line; as a Hellenistic state it

must be treated, and I hope that this book may do something towards bringing it back into the sphere to which it belongs.

This book does not go beyond the end of the Hellenistic period. The conventional end of that period in the West is the occupation of Alexandria by Augustus in 30 B.C., and by a curious coincidence the last Greek kingdoms in India fell about the same time; and anything later than the Christian Era is only noticed for its possible bearing on what goes before. But the period which I have sought primarily to reconstruct is comparatively a short one; it comprises about two and a half generations, from 206 B.C., the year in which Antiochus III quitted the East, to somewhere between 150 and 145 B.C., the death of Menander; one may call it the first half of the second century B.C., and it is covered by three reigns, the latter part of that of Euthydemus and those of his son Demetrius and of Demetrius' son-in-law Menander. That half-century is the important matter, and on the success or otherwise of my reconstruction of those years everything else must depend.

A word must be said here about the sources, though they will sufficiently appear as the book proceeds. They are of course very scrappy. But they were not always scrappy. There was once a Greek history which covered the Farther East generally, apparently down to 87 B.C. (pp. 45 *sqq.*), and there was another Greek history which also dealt with the Farther East, though seemingly only as an appendage to the history of Parthia (pp. 44 *sq.*); and the same thing has happened with regard to the Farther East as has happened with regard to another story whose historians have perished, that of the early third century in the Greek world about the Aegean: the scraps tend to combine, not into other scraps, but into at least the outline of a whole. There will be something to be said about this later (p. 46), but, as there was once a tradition, it is somebody's business to attempt to recover the outline of it; one is not labouring in a vacuum. Our evidence is of many different kinds. On the Greek side, there are fragments of the lost historians preserved in several later writers, notably Strabo, Trogus-Justin, Plutarch, and Ptolemy the geographer (on whom see Chapter VI); various notices and indications in extant Greek and Latin writers, book VI of Pliny's Naturalis Historia in particular containing much valuable Hellenistic material; and in place of the third-century inscriptions an almost unique wealth of coins, which give much more historical information than is usually the case with Greek coins. On the

Indian side, there are some inscriptions and a little numismatic material, a bit of perhaps contemporary chronicle embedded in a later work (App. 4), indications of various sorts in literature (including Chinese and Thibetan translations of lost Indian writings), the excavations at Taxila, and the Milindapañha, which does not look quite the same to the Greek as to the Indian scholar and to which I have had to give a long Excursus. Towards the end we get a little real history, a rare blessing, in the Chinese historians Ssu-ma Chien and Pan-ku (App. 20); had China made the acquaintance of the 'western countries' a couple of generations earlier than she did, how thankful we should be.

At present, coins apart, it seems to be only from the Indian side that fresh information can be looked for, and I must bear grateful testimony to the fact that (so far as I can see) the Indian material has been far better prepared for the Greek historian than the Greek material has ever been for the Indian; I can only hope that I have not missed too much of it, but the main task is to get the Greek side into some sort of order and to try to establish a framework which may be of use to others. The coins of course are all-important, and one cannot overpraise the work done on them by generations of numismatists; it seems to me one of the wonders of scholarship. But the numismatist as such has sometimes been unable to place or explain the facts which he has elicited; naturally so, for he is not expected to be a Hellenistic historian. Again I can only hope that I have not missed too much; with one or two exceptions, my knowledge of the coins has, of necessity, been confined to printed publications and the unrivalled collection in the British Museum; one is never safe from the unpublished coin in private hands, and it has proved impossible to ascertain what, if anything, there may be at Tashkent. Naturally I am not concerned with the coins as coins, but only as material for history.

It is no part of my purpose to write about art; I am not qualified, and the book is long enough as it is. Artistic material is only treated where, as in the case of the Buddha-statue in Chapter IX, it has some definite bearing on Greeks and their activities. Much has been written of late years, and much more will be written, about those mixed arts of the East which originated in the Hellenistic period and especially about 'Parthian' art, the art which grew up in Iran under the rule of the Parthian military aristocracy; we are meeting names unknown a few years ago, like 'Graeco-Bactrian' and 'Graeco-Sacan' art. All

these phenomena, except the art of Gandhāra (which stands on a different footing), appear to have one common characteristic: they are native arts which borrowed, and sometimes misapplied, a certain modicum of Greek form and ornamentation.[1] They furnish a subject of very great interest in itself; but they have little to do with the history of the Greeks of the Farther East, and even less with the Greek spirit.

[1] This theme runs through Professor Herzfeld's *Archaeological History of Iran* 1934; see *e.g.* p. 50, 'only the most superficial features of foreign' (*i.e.* Greek) 'art are taken over; the essential ones are missed'; and p. 75, 'it neither really understands nor assimilates the spirit of Hellenism'.