

## Alexander's India: The Perception of India, by the Greeks, prior to Alexander's campaign to India

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## **John Cabot University**

Department of History and Humanities

Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies

**Alexander's India:**  
The Perception of India, by the Greeks, prior to Alexander's campaign to India

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## **Abstract**

This thesis began with the question: What did Alexander believe he would find in India? Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, a variety of potential answers to this question have been found. Alexander may have believed in the fantastical, as the Greeks did not distinguish mythology as such, the mythological was as real as the sciences. It seems Alexander did believe in Dragons, but he may not have believed in the Pygmies. Alexander may have had a more realistic view, of the subcontinent, as after conquering Persia, he obtained access to the Persian records of the province. Alexander may have believed that beyond India was a wasteland, a desert, and earth encircling ocean, or the edge of the world. The answer to this question may not be possible to discover, but the rhetorical exercise can illuminate much about not just the man and his conquests, but of Greek society and their understanding of the world. This thesis also addresses the connections between ancient Greek and Indian society, primarily the connection between philosophical developments. This philosophical connection may have been through trade, through Persia, or from an older Dionysian conqueror; the method by which this was established remains unknown, but the existence of this connection is near certain. The most interesting development in the answer to this question came out of this philosophical connection, coming from the comparison of belief in death and the afterlife from these two cultures. When Alexander conquered Egypt he styled himself a Pharaoh, and when he had conquered Persia, he adopted the Persian Empire and the structure of the Empire. In the Orient, Alexander used the beliefs of the cultures he conquered to present himself as a god-king. The god-king model did not sit well with the Greek part of his empire, so Alexander followed the models of Dionysus and Herakles for his own deification. Alexander would present a story of his demi-god nature and a path toward deification. By incorporating the Indian philosophy, when Alexander conquered India, he conquered death.

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# 1. Introduction

One of the oldest civilizations of humanity, the aspiration of Alexander's world conquest, it is astounding how little we know about ancient India. The country of India owes its etymological record to the Greek transcription of a Persian name for a river, the Indos in Greek, and the Hindush in Persian; the Persian likely deriving from local names that once transcribed in Sanskrit were written as Sindhu, though record of Persian accounts predate the Sanskrit. From this name the country India, language Hindi, and a whole variety of regional names derive; Hindustan, Sindh, Indore, etc. The accounts of Indians, one of the earliest found in Herodotus, describe the Indoi, people of the Indus. These descriptions of the people of the Indus range from the mythologically fantastical, men with dogs faces or the pygmy men who fought a never-ending war with the cranes, to the very real relation the twentieth satrapy, the twentieth province of the Achaemenid Empire, had with their Persian Subjugators. These descriptions noticeably change following Alexander, as the onset of the Hellenic world would change not just the perceptions of India, but the course of history for the subcontinent.

Specifically focused on Alexander, in many of the classical accounts of the end of his conquest, there is a tendency to depict a conflict between the king and his troops. While Alexander wished to expand to the edges of the earth, his men wished only to return home. Beyond the poetic explanation for the 'necessary' end to the Alexandrian campaign, this sentiment of continued conquest is significant in understanding the psyche of the figure. If Alexander indeed wished to pursue more conquest beyond the Hydaspes and the Indus; what was it he expected to find? Beyond the territorial expansion, beyond the fame and fortune that is the case for any conquest; why

specifically eastward toward India? In the centuries following Alexander, the Roman Senate and then Roman Empire would expand over the Mediterranean, and establish a more lasting imperial structure, managing to profit greatly, and establishing an enduring legacy. Should Alexander have wished to expand in similar fashion, over the Mediterranean, it would have been within his ambition to strive for. While a classical scholar of the twenty-first century would never uncover the specific answer to this question, one may still wonder:

What drove Alexander's desire to continue east?

This undergraduate thesis will attempt to express and uncover the answer to this question through an examination of the perceptions the pre-Alexander Ancient Greeks may have had of India. Through analyzing the bizarre beasts and pseudo-human tribes ancient authors state a belief in the existence in this region, and through an analysis of the geographical knowledge of the region, a potentiality for understanding the assumptions Alexander had over what he would find may be reached. The mythological, while not seen separately as such, was intrinsic to the way in which the Greeks perceived the world around them. While it had been established that the world was not flat, the idea of an edge to the world is more pronounced than the contrary. The cultural upbringing of Alexander would prove tantamount to his understanding of not only the world, but the method in which the world operated; from Herodotus assumption that proximity to the edge of the world conferred items of rarity, opulence, and wealth, to the complicated developments of the Greek understanding of Death and the Afterlife. Alexander may have been driven by desires for the simple territorial expansion, prestige of success, and wealth of plundering, but even such either concludes that Alexander thought that eastward there was more wealth, more people to conquer, or more land to claim, which earlier Greek authors claim the contrary to, or he saw more opportunity in the pursuit of these desires eastward, rather than any other cardinal direction. It may

have been that Alexander desired more than the simple conquest. As was said to have been established before Alexander, Dionysus earned his immortality through his conquest of India. It may very well be that Alexander sought not to conquer India, but that through a conquest of the region, the young king may have been able to conquer death.



## 2. Mythology

*Onesikritos of Astypalaia says that at the time of the expedition of Alexandros [Alexander the Great], the son of Phillipos, there were in India two Drakones (Serpent-Dragons) kept by Abisares the Indian, and that one of them measured a hundred and forty cubits, the other eighty. He says also that Alexandros had a great desire to see them.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

While the ancients, particularly contemporaries of Alexander, did little to distinguish what is now called mythology from their own reality, the category of mythology is rather useful because of the inclusion of the fantastical. Most all of the ancient accounts of India could be called mythological or fantastical. Prior to his campaign, the very idea of Alexander's conquest would have been considered fantastical. This chapter will make an effort not to separate the reality from the fantasy, simply because the record surviving is utterly fantastical, and must be acknowledged as such. At the same time, skepticism was a budding discipline at the time of Alexander's conquest, and as such, one may operate with some leniency in regards to what the ancients may have questioned within their own reality. Altogether, this chapter will attempt to disentangle the popular myths that existed in regards to Indian peoples and fantastical creatures on the part of the pre-Alexandrian, pre-Hellenistic, Hellenic World.

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<sup>1</sup> Aelian, *On Animals* 16. 39

## *Gens Indicum*

Of the inaccuracies of world perception now referred to as mythology, few accounts are so easily proven false as are the tribes of man that were believed to live in or beyond the ‘country’ India. Different authors posit different tribes that have differing dwellings and relations to the region, such as one of the tribes known as Indoi, simply being the ethno-cultural group that occupied the largest territory on the banks of the Indus. The majority of these accounts of mythic & monstrous tribes can be dismissed from their evident lack of reality, that being within the impossibility of the deformities told to have been the existence of these races. Many of these stories have equivalents within Sanskrit written folklore, likely earlier myths from the period of the Aryan invasion, that emphasized the lack of humanity of the indigenous people, those that had resisted their conquest. Many of these tribes names are either translations or transliterations of the Sanskrit texts that are shared. The purpose of this chapter is not to analyze nor prove the consistency of myth between the Sanskrit and Greek iterations, such arguments have been made previously, to varying degrees of success. The purpose for which this collection of quotations is present in this thesis is to illuminate the opposition potentially thought to await a continuation of Alexander’s conquest. Which of these myths could be rationally thought to exist by the armies of Alexander, what would the perceptions of these mythic tribes be, and ultimately why have these tribes’ stories remained, where as the majority of previous Indian history is lost to the passage of time. This chapter will take into account the thought behind these myths by the contemporaries of those that wrote such fabulous accounts, as some of the ancient texts before and during the life of Alexander, question the legitimacy of these accounts. Many of these myths are quoted from post-Alexander sources, but as specified earlier, the shared history of the myths as parts of a Vedic or Sanskrit

tradition suppose some sense of longevity to their tradition. As such, this chapter will briefly take into account the Post-Alexandrian sources, in addition to those skeptics following.

In the mountains where the Indian reed grows there dwells a people about 30,000 in number. Their women only have children once in their life, which are born with beautiful teeth in the upper and lower jaw. Both male and female children have white hair, on the head and eyebrows. Up to the age of thirty the men have white hair all over the body; it then begins to turn black, and at the age of sixty it is quite black. Both men and women have eight fingers and eight toes. They are very warlike, and 5000 of them--bowmen and spearmen--accompany the king of India on his military expeditions. Their ears are so long that their arms are covered with them as far as the elbow, and also their backs, and one ear touches the other.<sup>2</sup>

Seeming to be in utter disregard of simple math and logic, Ktesias suggests that the women of the tribe only have one child each, and yet they have a population numbering 30,000. Within seven generations (about the time of Pliny's retelling of this story, the population would be reduced to below 250, if they continued the practice of one child per woman, and there was a nonexistent infant mortality rate. This particular tribe allows me to introduce each of the elements that will be discussed in this chapter, from why they should be categorized mythologically, to how the examination of myth can be used to examine the development & transition of narratives over time. The specific mentioning of the sole child allows for the account to be dismissed as mythology, irregardless of the size of their ears or their coverage of hair. An amount of scholastic research, particularly on the fantastical beasts suggested to inhabit India, has been done on these mythological accounts, and as I will go in detail further in this paper, suggests that the origin of these mythological accounts is aetiological in the same way as fisherman's tales, as the explanation of firsthand accounts of things otherwise inexplicable to the observer. Particularly in the accounts of Ethiopian "tribes of men" the Greeks describe a variety of "hairy" beast-like men, which have been assumed to be early observations of different apes or monkeys, that the Greeks attribute to

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<sup>2</sup> Ctesias, *Indica* Fragment (from Photius, *Myriobiblon* 72)

mythic humanoid tribes or species, much like the satyr; note that the accounts in the original never use the term “human”, “anthropos”, instead they would describe these tribes as “Indikoi”, “Indians”. The reverse aging phenomenon suggested by the hair of the body originating white but turning black, and thereby more youthful, with age, will be examined further in the accounts of tribes that quite literally go through this process, but interestingly this is recurring in the accounts of different tribes in India, perhaps in some association of India as a location for rejuvenation in reversing the aging process. Likely the best example for why a project that endeavors to extrapolate from accounts after Alexander’s campaign will reveal little of the prior knowledge of India, these accounts lose information with each retelling, which ultimately leads to being retold with novel details, none of which are accounted for in the original text. The mythological conception of India in the Greek mind seems to originate from tall tales that grow taller with each retelling. The following quotation, from Pliny the Elder, is likely the product of more than one retelling, as it removes details and replaces them with the novel, that being their lifetimes, of which no account of surviving recordings from Ctesias seems to suggest. "Ctesias [Greek historian C4th B.C.] says that a tribe among them [the Indians] called the Pandae, dwelling in the mountain valleys, live two hundred years, and have white hair in their youth that grows black in old age."<sup>3</sup> This account does consider the work by Strabo, who instead of quoting Ktesias, quotes these “ridiculous creatures” from Megasthenes, who will be himself taken into account in the chapter that shall focus on the firsthand accounts of travels to the region. In Strabo’s account, he describes a variety of different Indian tribes, of which one is likely the Pandai, which shall be examined in a later portion of this chapter that regards Strabo more intensely. In addition to quoting Ktesias, Pliny also sources the

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<sup>3</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 27 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

Long-Eared Indians from Duris, another earlier Greek Historian, "Duris says that some Indians . . . are entirely covered by their ears."<sup>4</sup>

Of more extreme Tribes, Megasthenes is said to have named a Tribe to the far east of India (thereby the edge of the world), who only live only through breath, as they lack mouths, and instead of consuming food or drink, they inhale scents, calling them the Astomi. When travelling, he says they carry roots, flowers, and wild fruit, so as to not be lacking pleasant scents. He also claims that this tribe can be killed by a foul or strong odour. It is possibly that such a tribe is based on the exaggerations of Indian practices with food, such as that of vegetarianism, or of the Jains; an exaggeration of their limitations of food. He also details that they have body hair all over, a common trait, and that they dress in cottonwool.<sup>5</sup> Similarly nasily deviant, the Skiritae also described by Megasthenes, have holes in the place of noses, similar to snakes, and they are also bandy-legged.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of tribes cited as long-lived, or having properties of rejuvenation; thoughts in some way connecting the lands of India to the idea of rejuvenation and anti-aging. Pliny gives three accounts from different sources, regarding seemingly different Indian tribes, the first being the Cynni, with whom he quotes Isigonus, a Greek writer from the 1st c. bc - ad, who he says live to the age of 140, and compares to the longevity of the lives of the Aethiopes, the Seres, and those that inhabit Mount Athos. The second tribe he does not name, but sources Onesicritus, who describes a tribe that lives in the lands of India where there are no shadows, who grow to eight feet tall, and live for 130 years, and never grow old, instead remaining middle aged until their passing. The description of the location of this tribe is illuminating in regards to the

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<sup>4</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 30 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

<sup>5</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 26 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

<sup>6</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 25 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

Greek perception of the world, as there is an assumption of there being land in India, where the sun casts no shadows, which will be examined in the chapter focusing on geographic understandings of the world. The third and final reference to the long-lived tribe, is named the Makrobi, quite literally the long-lived. First citing Crates of Pergamenus, who exceed a hundred years, that he also names the Gymnetae, and who's women give birth only once. Agatharchides also records this, in addition saying that the Macrobi live off eating locusts, and that they are swift of foot. Clitarchus, a Greek historian from the 3rd c bc, calls them instead Mandi, but describes this long-lived tribe. Megasthenes, says that for the Makrobi, women bear children at the age of seven, and old age comes at forty. Megasthenes seems to contradict the consensus on the Makrobi being long-lived, however Crates also describes a tribe adjoining the Macrobi, who do not exceed forty years.<sup>7</sup>

Crates of Pergamenus [Greek writer C2nd B.C.] tells of Indians who exceed a hundred years, whom he calls Gymnetae, though many call them Macrobi (Long-Livers).<sup>8</sup>

The long lived races speak to an association the Greeks made between the area of India and the idea of rejuvenation, of a cure to age. This idea is incredibly relevant to the argument for immortality, that a reason for which Alexander wished to continue his expanse past India. The promise of secrets to longevity are relevant to his desire for deification, for conquering death, and as such will be covered in more detail in the chapter focusing on this topic. The belief that there were people in India who could ignore age may have been rooted in the *uppanisads*, and thus linked to a Greek understanding of Indian philosophy. Although, any argument for this would have to be speculative. The Greeks believed many people from obscure areas had secrets to their longevity, as Crates addresses quite specifically.

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<sup>7</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 28 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

<sup>8</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7. 27 (trans. Rackham) (Roman encyclopedia C1st A.D.)

Crates of Pergamenus [Greek scholar C2nd B.C.] tells of Indians who . . . do not exceed forty years, this tribe adjoining the Macrobi (Long-Livers), whose women bear children only once. Agatharchides records this as well, and also that they live on locusts, and are very swift-footed. Clitarchus [Greek historian C3rd B.C.] gave them the name of Mandi; and Megasthenes [Greek historian C4th B.C.] also assigns them three hundred village, and says that the women bear children at age of seven and old age comes at forty.<sup>9</sup>

On Onesicritus: One of Alexander's Helmsmen, claimed to have been admiral; accounts of mythological viewings on the expedition, such as Alexander's meeting with the Amazons. One of the few who discusses gymnosophists, will be recounted at the point there, quite likely was not a sailor, as he has little knowledge of things sailors at this point would regard common knowledge (such as curvature of the earth). While it was knowledge, it was far from common knowledge, even potentially for sailors.

On the note of these questionings, the majority of the dismissal of these monstrous tribes is made by Strabo, whom while not a contemporary of Ktesias, agrees with many of the geographic suppositions of the pre-Alexandrian sources, and instead of utilizing quotations from later visitors, or supposed visitors, to the subcontinent, Strabo contents himself with the Pre-Alexandrian and the companions to the conquest of Alexander. Because of this lack in additional quotation utilized on Strabo's part, it can be surmised that Strabo's questioning of the legitimacy is not on account of additional knowledge, but on account of logical reasoning, that could to an extent have been shared by the companions during Alexander's conquest. This speculation of these accounts is to clarify the skeptic approach likely used by the invading army, as there are no accounts of Alexander acknowledging nor denying these myths.

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<sup>9</sup> Pliny the Elder, Natural History 7. 28

## *Theres Indikoi*

While the idea of fantastical tribes of semi-humans from India immediately fell to the skeptics that questioned such even a century after the conquests of Alexander. These same skeptics failed to apply such lines of inquiry to the almost equally ludicrous beasts they also take into consideration. The beasts are seemingly more believable within the Greek mentality, and this poses questions regarding the nature of Alexander's beliefs on the nature of beasts and men in the region. From all accounts, Alexander seemed to believe in what we would now title supernatural creatures and beings, having expressed interest in the sources we have, to see the two dragons claimed to be held in captivity by the king Abisares.

The first of these beasts worth visiting, is a beast so talked about because of the worth of the horde it guarded, that being the Indian ants, *Myrmekes Indikoi*. These ants are described as gigantic, almost always in comparison to the size dogs, and described because of the gold in the sand of the region they inhabit. The idea of gold-guarding mythical beasts is an ancient one, and resurfaces in regards to India. There seems to be some discord in the beliefs of the location of the giant ants that guard troves of gold sand. Philostratus contradicts the accounts we have from Herodotus, and while undoubtedly Herodotus living in the time of question would have a better understanding of the consensus for the location of these creatures, describes the gold guarding insects as being Aethiopian rather than Indian, with the guardians of gold in India being the griffons, or grypes. There is also a great deal of support for these griffons to be Indian, but Philostratus remains the only account of the beasts being of Aethiopian origin; the specificity of Aethiopia rather than an anglicanization is intentional, as will be further examined in the following chapter focused on the geographic knowledge of Pre-Alexander Greeks. Herodotus makes no comparison of the two beasts, but is the primary source for the *Mymekes*, and does briefly mention



Griffons, where he states that they exist in Northern Europe, where they protect the largest troves of gold in the world, and where the Arimaspians, a tribe of one-eyed men, steal this gold. The two mythical beasts share in their protection of gold, but in little else, one protecting the mountain passes that harbor this gold, the other dwelling in the sands that have gold within. The lack of clarity in the origin of the wealth of India may be tied to these two myths, with uncertainty as to what continued beyond India as well, would there be water, deserts, or mountains. The two mythical beasts agree on the Greek thought of the existence of wealth in the region, as will be developed in the physical certainty of wealth in the geography portion, as will it also examine the Greek mentality of wealth in its existence at the edges of the world. Herodotus claims the Indians who go out to find the gold guarded by these ants are of those that dwell near Caspatyrus, a town with a great deal of scholastic uncertainty, which will be further explained in the following chapter regarding geography. The questions in regard to the location of the gold go hand in hand with questions regarding the extraction of gold; Herodotus, the first to explain the method of obtaining gold from the ants, following his detailing of the method, makes the comment, "Gold too is produced there in vast abundance, some dug from the earth, some washed down by the rivers, some carried off in the mode which I have but now described".<sup>10</sup> The suggestion of multiple methods for the acquiring of gold in India suggests a certain lack of clarity and precision, though some ancient accounts disagree, most notably Ktesias, who according to Photius, makes the following argument, "'There is also gold [in India], not found in rivers and washed, as in the river Paktolos (Pactolus) [in Lydia], but in many large mountains which are inhabited by Grypes (Griffins). These are four-footed birds as large as a wolf, their legs and claws resembling those of a lion; their breast feathers are red, those of the rest of the body black. Although there is abundance

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<sup>10</sup> Hdt. III.106

of gold in the mountains, it is difficult to get it because of these birds." The difficulty of acquiring the gold, due to these guardian beasts, is a shared characteristic between these two beasts. Herodotus goes into explicit detail in his accounts of the Myrmekes Indikoi. To summarize Herodotus' account, the Indians tie three camels, the centre of which is a female with a newborn calf they leave behind, and set out when it is warmest, as the ants are underground to escape the heat, when they arrive in the appropriate area, they fill their sacks with sand, as the sand is mixed with the gold, and set back as soon as possible, as the ants almost immediately scent them out and give chase; as the ants are faster than any beast, they would catch the camels if the two males are not released, they release the males as the females race faster, knowing they have young to return to, and they never tire. Herodotus claims this to be the account of which most Persians agree, but makes no claim as to whether this tale originated from Indians. The detail of the story obviously speaks to a degree of development of this myth, instead of off-hand commentary, this ensuring the story had believability in the Greek world. What Herodotus also does, within this account, is make off-hand comments, that open a great deal of the Greek world-view to scrutiny. The first comment is that the King of Persia owns some of these beasts, "In this sandy desert are ants, not as big as dogs but bigger than foxes; the Persian king has some of these, which have been caught there." "ἐν δὴ ὧν τῇ ἐρημίῃ ταύτῃ καὶ τῇ ψάμμῳ γίνονται μύρμηκες μεγάθρα ἔχοντες κυνῶν μὲν ἐλάσσονα ἀλωπέκων δὲ μέζονα: εἰσὶ γὰρ αὐτῶν καὶ παρὰ βασιλείῃ τῶ Περσέων ἐνθεῦτεν θηρευθέντες."<sup>11</sup> The diction of this statement is of particular importance because of the prior statement, the king has some of these does not necessarily mean that the King has caught some of the Myrmekes Indikoi, instead potentially in reference to the dogs or foxes he compares the ants to in size. Θηρευθέντες meaning to be hunted in the aorist nominative, is describing that the king has for himself hence

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<sup>11</sup> Hdt. III. 102 (Translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920.)

hunted these beasts (acquired by Godley’s translation), would be attributed to the nominative of the previous phrase, which would be μύρμηκες. This argument must be explicit, as the translation of κυνῶν has been argued to be a Homeric contraction of a variety of terms, and not the more obvious genitive plural. The dogs are particularly important, however, as it is also quoted by Herodotus that the king of Persia had kept a number of Indian Dogs, of which he made the sole tax for four villages in Babylon, the food for these beasts; “he kept so great a number of Indian dogs that four great villages of the plain were appointed to provide food for the dogs and exempted from all other burdens. Such were the riches of the governor of Babylon.”<sup>12</sup> Now Herodotus is the only ancient source that describes “κυνῶν δὲ Ἰνδικῶν”. Any other accounts of dogs used for war simply state dogs, none detailing the origin of these beasts. Were Indian dogs of any particular value, of greater size, and if so, is Herodotus’ account of the size of these ants using the dogs of India for perspective size, or the size of Greek dogs. These questions are of course, rhetorical, but serve as to illuminate the depth of which knowledge of this time has yet to be uncovered. The second of Herodotus’ off-hand comments is in regards to his tangent about the heat of the sun, as he makes the direct claim that the country is warmer in the morning than at midday. While there may be some evidence for a proposal of this, that being in a greater humidity in the morning, that creating a greater perceived heat, rather than physical heat, this is not all Herodotus says, as he adds that the midday heat in India is comparable to the rest of the world, and that the evening is comparable to the morning sun elsewhere, that being a warmer evening, but that the night is exceedingly cold. This commentary proposes that physics work differently in another region, in more ways than just climate, as this ties directly to the Greek underlying perception of the world; if India is the furthestmost east country, then naturally when Helios rises, his effect on India is

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<sup>12</sup> Hdt. 1.192

greater than elsewhere. This argument functions because it intrinsically ties cultural perceptions of the universe's operations to the perception of said operations, regardless of whether these cultural models are known to be questionable or even false, there is an integral shift toward these understandings in the perceiver's writings.

In size and strength they [Griffons] resemble lions but having this advantage over them that they have wings, they will attack them, and they get the better of elephants and of Drakones (Dragon-Serpents).<sup>13</sup>

As the titular quotation of this chapter notes, it was said that the King Abisares had kept two drakones as pets. While little record exists of the dragons believed to exist in India, that which we have a record of speaks of a magical beast, not only fantastical in its appearance and existence, but having mystical powers. "And they say that in the heads of the mountain Drakones there are stored away stones of flowery colour, which flash out all kinds of hues, and possess a mystical power if set in a ring; like that which they say belonged to Gyges."<sup>14</sup> The ring of Gyges granting invisibility to the man that puts it on, according to Plato. It may have been that Alexander's desire to see these two captive drakones was not only to glimpse the beasts, but to acquire their power.

## Conclusion

The origin of these tales may very well be Indian, and while it would be of great use to analyze these stories as having spread from Indian sources; thus not being necessarily the beliefs that such things exist within India, but that these stories and myths hail from Indian origin, as was examined with the Pygmy example; such a study is tragically not in the scope of this undergraduate thesis. The tales of particularly the tribal groups ascribed to the Indian region, are quite likely

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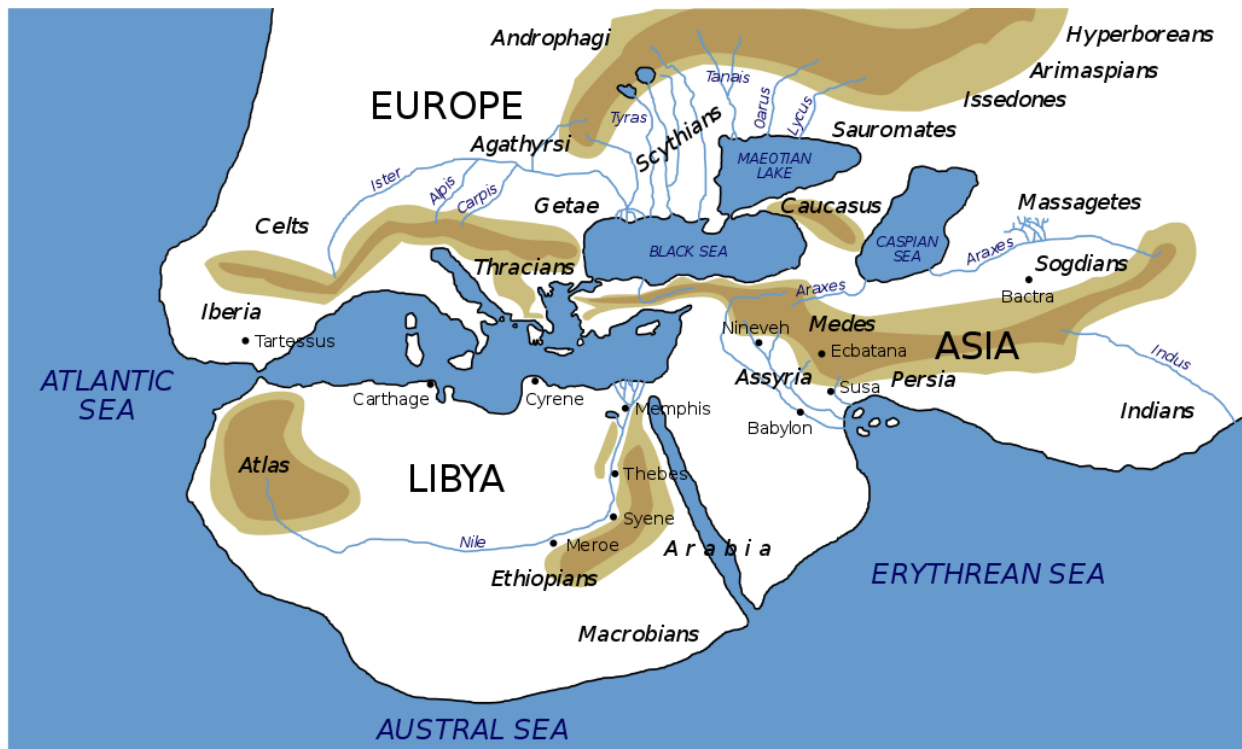
<sup>13</sup> Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3. 48 (trans. Conybeare)

<sup>14</sup> Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3. 8-9

Greek retellings of Aryan tales, which functioned to dehumanize their Dravidian neighbours in order to justifying the Aryan invasion. The potentiality of human displacement of Greek peoples into the Indian region, and the direct connections between the Indian peoples and the Hellenic world will be further examined in the following chapter, focused on the geographical aspects of Alexander's understanding and relation to India. Many of these stories have been retold as regarding to the Dionysian conquests, with the character Dionysus told to have explored the territory of India, and his soldiers and people having spread these myths back to the "Greek" homeland. It's pertinent to reflect on the "Greek" origin of Dionysus, as such was not specifically defined even in the Greek perception; in any case, such will be examined in the chapter focused specifically on the conquests. The fantastical beasts, in contrast to the tribes, have origins of the more natural sort, such as the Unicorn, Monokreta, likely being a traveller's tale of sightings of the Indian Rhino. The Myrmekes Indikoi have been explained as Marmots, as the Persian language utilizes the same word for these rodents as it does for ants. The gold-guarding trope seems to be a pan-Indo-European cultural item. The Indo-European origin of cultural models of conception will be examined in the conquests chapter, as it regards the Aryan Conquests in much the same as would have been seen as the Dionysian conquests; the idea of an ancestor group shared by the people of Nysa in India. Regardless of specific examples, there are undoubtedly shared cultural items within the mythologies of both India and Greece, simple ones such as Zeus (Dyas in PIE) as Deus in Latin became an Epithet of Indrah, Dyas, prior to Alexandrian conquests (if vedic accounts are to be considered unaffected by the campaigns of Alexander); or more subliminal, such as the comparatives of Odysseus and Rama, in the Hero's journey, but more physically present in the idea of a bow that on the hero may bend and string. There is an abundance of mythological comparatives between Indian myth and Greek myth, however, such myth would not necessarily

be understood as similarities of the time. The Greek understanding of the world, as hopefully has been stressed throughout this chapter, was as reality; the myths of gods interventions on earth seen as history and not mythology, and as such similarities between the myths of the Indian peoples and the Greeks would be seen as mutual understandings of reality; more shared than the Persian followers of Zoroaster. The complex understanding of the Greek's perception of the world, and specifically the particular understanding of the functioning and reality of the world, will be the focus of the next chapter.

### 3. Geography



*The tribes of Indians are numerous, and they do not all speak the same language—some are wandering tribes, others not. They who dwell in the marshes along the river live on raw fish, which they take in boats made of reeds, each formed out of a single joint. These Indians wear a dress of sedge, which they cut in the river and bruise; afterwards they weave it into mats, and wear it as we wear a breast-plate. Eastward of these Indians are another tribe, called Padaeans, who are wanderers, and live on raw flesh. [...] There is another set of Indians whose customs are very different. They refuse to put any live animal to death, they sow no corn, and have no dwelling-houses. Vegetables are their only food. [...] All the tribes which I have mentioned live together like the brute beasts: they have also all the same tint of skin, which approaches that of the Ethiopians. [...] Besides these, there are Indians of another tribe, who border on the city of Caspatyrus, and the country of Pactyica; these people dwell northward of all the rest of the Indians, and follow nearly the same mode of life as the Bactrians. They are more warlike than any of the other tribes, and from them the men are sent forth who go to procure the gold. For it is in this part of India that the sandy desert lies. Here, in this desert, there live amid the sand great ants, in size somewhat less than dogs, but bigger than foxes. [...]*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Herodotus. *Histories* 3.89-97, (trans. Rawlinson)

## Introduction

*The most outlying lands, though, as they enclose and wholly surround all the rest of the world, are likely to have those things which we think the finest and the rarest.*<sup>16</sup>

*As far as India, Asia is an inhabited land; but thereafter, all to the east is desolation, nor can anyone say what kind of land is there.*<sup>17</sup>

*The Indians made up the twentieth province. These are more in number than any nation of which we know, and they paid a greater tribute than any other province, namely three hundred and sixty talents of gold dust.*<sup>18</sup>

The physical location of India is so important for the relevance to the Alexander question; why did Alexander pursue the conquest toward India? This chapter will be devoted to the reasons that could be incorporated in the physical, that being the geographic position of the location the Greeks name India, and all the physical features of the location they name, inclusive of the great riches in gold, already detailed to be held by the “county” in the previous chapter. Beginning with the geographic location, in both the poetic description and honest account of the land of India, the most recurring subject of description for India is as it’s association with the ends of the earth. In the Greek mind, the descriptor as the edge of the world, in regard to physical end, by coast, or in the edge being purely metaphorical as the edge of human existence, by being the most eastward expansion of humanity, make no difference to the definition as ‘edge of the world’ as the world only mattered was the occupation of the world of man. Also in the Greek mind, as will be detailed following the examination of the geographic position, is the natural association of the far and the valuable; similar to orientalism of early-modernity, but not in the case of “otherness” itself holding an economic value, rather that being so far away from the centre of the world inherently grants a degree of value to what exists within the region, compared to the rarity of these items in Greece. Separate from the prior chapter’s examination of the gradual “humanity” being lost as one strays further from Greece,

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<sup>16</sup> Hdt. 3.116.3

<sup>17</sup> Hdt. 4.40.2

<sup>18</sup> Hdt. 3.95.2



this chapter will be more focused on human occupancy of the region, and physical/tangible human interaction with those in the region, rather than a preoccupation of the mythic. This chapter will also lean more heavily on the objective accuracy of these claims and statements, as while ludicrous, the mythic stories of fantastical creatures & tribe are less verifiably false than the geographic, as even the shifted meanders of rivers centuries past can be examined with modern scientific technology. The object of this chapter is not to disprove or examine the inaccuracies of the Greek understanding of the Indian subcontinent; if anything, this chapter will begin with the assumption of inaccuracies of the quotations presented. Instead, this chapter will focus on the reasons for such inaccuracies, that being an examination of the mythic visions and their relation to the Greek culture and understanding of their world.

### **Geographical Inaccuracies**

The geographical knowledge of the Greeks, and inaccuracies of geographical placement, is highlighted by the fact that it was a Greek who first explored the region of India, by the patronage of the Persian King Darius. Scylax of Cania, of which we have very little record, sailed a boat down the Indus, and around the Arabian Coast, where he ended in the Red Sea; having reported his findings, Darius made clear his desire to use the Indus to open up new trade, and soon would subjugate a part of India as his newest tributary state. The accounts of Scylax and later pioneers into the region are made complicated by contradictory commentaries, and an overwhelming lack of contemporary accounts, as is much of the knowledge of the area of the time. Only indirect quotations of Scylax's recordings survive, some of which have been called into total question, as will be examined later in this chapter.

As the cynical approach of Strabo deconstructs much of the works we have record of; part of the reason we have a record of such works being the quotation Strabo provides; which was covered in the previous chapter, there remain few works that even the ancient scholars

trusted. One who Strabo quotes, and finds agreeable, is the writings of the Admiral Patrokles, who accompanied Alexander in his campaigns. Patrokles relates that the Achaemenid emperors had collected knowledge of their provinces, kept in the archives of Persepolis, and that once Alexander had taken the city, he made use of these descriptions to learn about India, and that in doing so, he became well informed of the region. The archives were likely written by Persian officials, though the only record of these archive's existence is in the quotations of Patrokles found in Strabo and Pliny. It is important to take into account this source, as much of the Alexandrian Conquest of India is imagined as exploratory, directly opposed to both this and the accounts of Scylax, who's record of India likely found its way into the Persian archive.

The question as to why Alexander pursued eastward is made all the more important by examining what seems to be known of Alexander's beliefs on the geography of India, that being its geographic location comparatively to Aethiopia. Within the Greek tradition, there seems to have been two areas commonly called Aethiopia, written as such to distinguish from modern Ethiopia, which shares territory with neither area named such by the Greeks. The first Aethiopia began in Nubia and continued southward (modern Sudan), and had a multitude of accounts that will be examined later in this chapter, as will the accounts of the other Aethiopia, that which existed to the south of what was called India. Despite most ancient scholarship attributing an ocean between these two regions, often called the south ocean, Alexander likely contested such, "Alexander himself believing that he would find the sources of the Nile in India."<sup>19</sup> To expand:

At first he thought he had discovered the origin of the Nile, when he saw crocodiles in the river Indus, which he had seen in no other river except the Nile,[1] as well as beans growing near the banks of the Acesines of the same kind as those which the Egyptian land produces.[2] This conjecture was confirmed when he heard that the Acesines falls into the Indus. He thought the Nile rises somewhere or other in India, and after flowing through an extensive tract of desert country loses the name of Indus there; but afterwards when it begins to flow again through the inhabited land, it is called Nile both by the Aethiopians of that district and by the Egyptians, and finally empties itself into

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<sup>19</sup> Strab. xv.1.1

the Inner Sea... Accordingly when he wrote to Olympias about the country of India, after mentioning other things, he said that he thought he had discovered the sources of the Nile, forming his conclusions about things so great from such small and trivial premisses. However, when he had made a more careful inquiry into the facts relating to the river Indus, he learned the following details from the natives: — That the Hydaspes unites its water with the Acesines, as the latter does with the Indus, and that they both yield up their names to the Indus; that the last-named river has two mouths, through which it discharges itself into the Great Sea; but that it has no connection with the Egyptian country. He then removed from the letter to his mother the part he had written about the Nile.<sup>20</sup>

The relevancy of this comes out in a dichotomous view of the idea of India, is it an area shrouded in mystery, a location of semi-human tribes of characters whose existence was questioned by contemporary accounts, or is India simply the furthest east province of the Persian Empire, the last of the empire's tributaries for Alexander to take over. The former makes sense for the conquests Alexander did, but flies in the face of the mythologized representation of the man, having desired to further his conquest eastward. To discover whether or not this desire was a man knowing the area he wished to continue his march toward, or a boy wishing to conquer all he could see, depends on the knowledge that Alexander had of the region. The mythologized included with the geographical, as explained previously, Alexander initially did little to distinguish the two from another.

### **The Reality behind the 20<sup>th</sup> Satrapy, the 20<sup>th</sup> Province**

If not stressed strongly enough previously, the Greeks were not blind to the existence of India. The expansion of the Persian Empire connected these two worlds, as both Greeks and Indians became subject to the Achaemenids. Before more known historians broached the subject, Hekataios of Miletus, a Greek historian who wrote in the late 6<sup>th</sup> c bce, wrote about the geography and people of India. Only fragments of Hekataios' work have been found, some of which called into question, most of which give no additions to the more detailed accounts of

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<sup>20</sup> Arr. An. 6.1.1

later writers. Ktesias also wrote in this time, himself being the physician to Artaxerxes II, though as his work was examined earlier, not much of his accounts bare any accurate descriptions of the region, instead relying of folklore and myth. In addition to these two singular accounts of contact with India, there is a record of several large groups of Greeks coming into contact with India, though no record from any of these people. Both Greek and Indian artisans were brought to work on the artistic and architectural design of the palace of Persepolis, Greek masons and Indian weavers foremost. Herodotus tells of a group of Greeks from Cyrenaica who were deported to the Persian penal colony of Bactria, on the border of the province of India. On the note of Herodotus, despite his focus on India being largely rooted in the mythological, Herodotus is one of the few sources that can be accurately believed to have written prior to Alexander. Much like Arrian, however, the accuracy of his statements can be put to question, though not necessarily for being untrustworthy or internally inconsistent, more on the grounds of being inconsistent with reality. Beyond the descriptions Herodotus gives of fantastical tribes of men and fantastical beasts, the very geography of his accounts can be proven inaccurate. In his account of Scylax, Herodotus describes the Greek explorer setting out down the Indus from Pactyike (Identified with Gandhara), and sailing “down the river towards the East and sunrise to the sea”<sup>21</sup> while the Indus, after fully emerging from the Hindu Kush, flows southward. The accuracy of the physical within Herodotus’ accounts is significant because he remains the key source of legitimate information on the reality of Indian existence. “The Indians made up the twentieth province. These are more in number than any nation of which we know, and they paid a greater tribute than any other province, namely three hundred and sixty talents of gold dust; this was the twentieth division.”<sup>22</sup> Can the population size of this “country” be trusted when the author is including tribes of men with one foot or with the faces

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<sup>21</sup> Hdt. IV.44

<sup>22</sup> Herodotus, Histories 3.94.2

of dogs. To what extent are the figures of tribute accurate? Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus while the city was incorporated within the Persian Empire, so the amount of tribute that would be taken by the Persians should hopefully be accurate. Herodotus gives a comparison by which we can make a modern equivalent in wealth, "... the gold-dust is found to be worth four thousand six hundred and eighty Euboic talents."<sup>23</sup> Which was in comparison to " a yearly tribute of fourteen thousand five hundred and sixty talent"<sup>24</sup> roughly a quarter of the Persian tributary income coming from the last of their provinces. When Alexander made his way to the province, no comparable wealth was acquired as the conquest of Persia itself. This leaves three potential situations available, that the Persians had depleted the country's wealth, that Alexander had not conquered the location within the province that originated this wealth, or that Herodotus grossly miscalculated these figures.

Later more poetic authors would carry on the Greek tradition, this being the reason that many earlier records have survived, through Roman and later quotations. The most significant author to continue the Greek literary and mythological tradition is Ovid, who explains India quite aptly, considering the Greek mentality of India's geographical position. In his description of the story of Phaethon, Ovid describes a geographic positioning of India reminiscent of Alexander's mistake of the Nile, that being placing Aethiopia beside India. "Phaethon through his own Aethiopes (Ethiopians) and the lands of India beneath their burning skies, quickly reached his father's rising place. The palace of Sol (the Sun) [Helios] rose high aloft on soaring columns"<sup>25</sup> Ovid describes India as a land beneath burning skies, this eastern association in relation to its eastward position. Nonnus also describes India in similar methods, though this will be taken with a grain of salt, Nonnus seems to continue this tradition. Nonnus in *Dionysica* introduces Dionysus' pillars in India, which like the Pillars of Hercules, marked the edge of

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<sup>23</sup> Herodotus, Histories 3.95.2

<sup>24</sup> Hdt. III.95

<sup>25</sup> Ovid, Metamorphoses 2. 1 ff (trans. Melville)

the world, and were meant to sustain the heavens. As Nonnus is a questionable source, a comparative can be found in Strabo, “In India, too, there are no Pillars, it is said, either of Herakles or of Dionysos to be seen standing, and, of course, when certain of the places there were spoken of or pointed out to the Macedonians, they believed to be the Pillars those places only in which they found some sign of the stories told about Dionysos or of those about Herakles.”<sup>26</sup> Following other supposed traditions of Herakles creating these pillars in his time in India, also thought to have travelled India, and to have been the father of all of the Dynasties of the Kingdoms of India. Diodorus Siculus also brings scrutiny to this aspect, as he claims the Herakles that fathered these dynasties was born in India, “with regard to Heracles they say that he was born among them and they assign to him, in common with the Greeks, both the club and the lion's skin.”<sup>27</sup> This “Indian Heracles” born among them but also identified with the traits and features of the Greek hero.

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<sup>26</sup> Strabo, Geography 3. 5. 6 (trans. Jones)

<sup>27</sup> Diodorus Siculus, II. 39

## 4. Conquest

*The expedition of Dionysos and Herakles to the country of the Indians looks like a mythical story of later date.*<sup>28</sup>

*“And Alexander wept, for there were no more worlds left to conquer”*

*- Hans Gruber, Die Hard, written by Jeb Stuart & Steven de Souza*

### Introduction

The most famous quotation attributed to Alexander has almost no trace to his saying it, the quotation supposedly made by Plutarch emerged in the 19th century, likely from misquotation of Plutarch's account of Alexander and Anaxarchus, in his *On Tranquility of Mind*, having heard that there were an infinite number of worlds, Alexander wept that he had not yet conquered one. This idea of conquest of more than just this earth, more than the material, is as Plutarch, an antiquated idea, far more in line with the thoughts of Alexander. The interesting thing about this misquote, however, is in its timing; two millennia following his death, Alexander wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer. Alexander achieved the ultimate aspiration of the Greek/Hellenic society of his time, he has achieved immortality; he has conquered death.

### Conquest of Death, a poetic trope

The conquest of death is a literary trope that reappears in many examinations of ancient Greek texts and myths, with reappearing motifs and tropes. The traditional motif of the hero who

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<sup>28</sup> Strab. 11.5.5

conquers death was attributed to take place westward, the prime example being Herakles, who visits the underworld after having thrown the Pillars of Hercules and taken the burden of the sky off of Atlas' shoulders, Atlas being supposed to have lived in present Morocco. It's become recognized that this perception of the world has the entrance to the Underworld to the far east of the known world. The more epic literary accounts, such as Homer, do not detail with such explicitly, however, as is the case with Virgo upon writing the Aeneid, the visit to the underworld comes after travels westward. This mentality of a westward underworld flies in the face of assumptions of Alexander's campaigns having purposes beyond the physical, at least to some extent. While the stories of Herakles and Odysseus had been ingrained in Greek culture, Alexander also had to contend with new ideas concerning death, many of which likely originated in India. The import of the ideas of an everlasting soul, reincarnation, are more complicated afterlives (with a plurality),

As the first chapter focused on the Greek understanding of the Men and Beasts of India, and in a greater extent, the Greek understanding of the condition of Man; the second chapter focused on the physical understanding of the Geography of India, and in extrapolation, the Greek understanding of the nature of the world; this chapter, while focused on the Greek perceptions of death, the trope of the conquest of death, and the Greek knowledge of 'historical' conquests of India, this chapter will endeavour to extrapolate the Greek understanding of the History of their people, of India, and of the world at large, in addition to through the conquest of death trope, the Greek understanding of not just their lives and their world, but the understanding and attempt to understand that which lies beyond this world and beyond their lives.



## The Afterlife in Ancient Greek Thought

Firstly, to understand Alexander's perception of the afterlife, one must cover the subject of Greek perceptions of the afterlife. Alexander's education by Aristotle is particularly important, as will be discussed in regards to the section dedicated toward the Indian influence of Ideas. A brief account of the Greek underworld must begin with the first account of it, Homer. Under Homer's accounts of the underworld and the afterlife, only a grim, joyless, and tedious existence awaits even the heroes. Patroklus refers to these souls of the dead as “ψυχὰι εἶδωλα καμόντων” meaning phantoms of the worn out.<sup>29</sup> This perception is fundamental to the Early Greek ideas of an afterlife, to their ideas of existence and “the good life” as only in life does choice have any meaning, only in life can heroes like Achilles achieve immortality.<sup>30</sup> The afterlife is not so simple as this, as there is a notable exception to grim meaninglessness, for those who anger the gods may have been found deserving of more viscous treatment found themselves repeating tortures that fit the crimes of their lives; examples of this found with Tantalos, Tityos, and Sisyphus. In addition to the punished, the position occupied by Minos in the underworld demonstrates a social hierarchy in the underworld, with the gods' favourites finding special treatment. While the “lives” of the dead were perceived as meaningless and dreary, as Patroklus suggests that the heroic life has no place in Hades, there quite obviously is and underlying belief of deserved rewards and punishment in the afterlife. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, by the time of Alexander, these thoughts would have evolved greatly.

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<sup>29</sup> Homer. *Iliad* 23.72

<sup>30</sup> Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, « A Lively Afterlife and Beyond : The Soul in Plato, Homer, and the Orphica », *Études platoniciennes* [En ligne], 11 | 2014, mis en ligne le 15 avril 2015, consulté le 28 avril 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesplatoniciennes/517> ; DOI : 10.4000/etudesplatoniciennes.517

## Nysa and the Conquest of Dionysus

While Arrian may not be the most trustworthy of sources, as will be discussed in the following section, he remains the primary source for all knowledge concerning Alexander. There's a particular account from *Anabasis Alexandri* that details Alexander's visit to the city of Nisa, in India, that opens a tremendous amount of speculation toward the Greek understanding of their world. Between the river Cophen and the Indus, Arrian introduces Nysa as having been founded by Dionysus. Unlike later writers, who assume that this Dionysus was the god himself, who conquered the region of India, instead making the remark, "One should not inquire closely where ancient legend about the gods are concerned; many things which reason rejects acquire some color of probability once you bring a god into the story."<sup>31</sup> Arrian confirms that the territories that Alexander explored were unknown to the Greeks of that date, a contested point that will be explored further in this focus on Arrian's account. Arrian introduces the figure of Acuphis, the chief of Nysa, who along with thirty distinguished men, approach Alexander with requests; particularly, to leave the city of Nysa in the possession of the god Dionysus.<sup>32</sup> Arrian, avoiding describing the reality of the city, supposes what Acuphis said, that being an explanation of the city's origin. Acuphis explains that Dionysus had built the city on his way home, to Greece, after he had conquered the Indians. The city was built as a memorial of his long voyage, and victory over the Indian people, and that Dionysus had left behind the men who were no longer able to serve in his army. He explains that Nysa was the name in memory of Nysaea, Dionysus' nurse, and that the mountain the city was built by was named Meru, or thigh, in honor of his father who birthed him from the thigh. He explains how the city has been free since, and offers the evidence

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<sup>31</sup> Arr. An. 5.1.2

<sup>32</sup> Arr. An. 5.1.3

of Dionysus as the founder of the city in the form of ivy, sacred to the god, and only found in India in the region of Nysa.<sup>33</sup> Alexander finds what Acuphis has requested to be agreeable, and expresses his desire to believe the tale of Dionysus' journey to India, and his satisfaction in knowing that he had come as far Dionysus had. He expresses his belief that the Macedonian troops would be willing to endure hardship longer if they believed they were now competing with Dionysus.<sup>34</sup> This comparison of Alexander to Dionysus is consistent with the image presented of Alexander, but not yet made so explicit as was the case with Arrian. Arrian took it even further than such, in a prior passage, with Acuphis, when Acuphis was explaining the founding of the city Nysa, he compares how Dionysus founding a city is much like Alexander establishing Alexandria and Alexandria in the Caucasus. Acuphis doesn't stop with just this, continuing to say, "as you will yet found more cities hereafter, in that you will have surpassed the achievements of Dionysus."<sup>35</sup> Regardless of whether or not Alexander's intention of pursuing his conquest was to outdo the accomplishments of Dionysus, he most certainly intended in some regard, for the

Before abandoning the subject of Arrian, it would be pertinent to take into account the inaccuracies likely to be held by the text. The implicit issue in regarding Arrian is the lack of information on the subject, and Arrian being one of the best surviving authors of the subject. Through analysis of Arrian's own works, by examining internal contradictions, and contradictions from specific episodes with other classical authors, Bosworth concludes his research on the subject with, "As it is, it is clear that Arrian's primary sources were not extracts from the archives of Alexander but political histories with all the propaganda and distortion one would expect from first-generation authors with their own axes to grind. Above all, Arrian is too fallible in his

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<sup>33</sup> Arr. An. 5.1.5-6

<sup>34</sup> Arr. An. 5.2.1

<sup>35</sup> Arr. An. 5.1.6

handling cross-examination. He may still be the most detailed extant source, but he requires constant assessment against the rest of the tradition.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the potential issues in taking Arrian at his word for these quotations analyzed, it is undeniable that Arrian would be preferred than Nonnus.

### **Conquest of Death**

The choice of Dionysus as a model for Alexander’s divine ascent could easily be examined as intentional. Whereas for Egypt and Persia, there are long standing traditions of association of a ruler to the divine, taking more direct forms, such an association was foreign to Greek politics. The idea of a man, or rather of a demigod, achieving immortality and divinity on earth was far from foreign to Greek thought. Herakles would have presented a difficult figure to replicate, as his labors and tasks placed him subservient to another figure, which Alexander would be far from doing, in addition to performing “miracles” in not only the extremities of the world, but within Greece, as was the case for Herakles in Nemea. Other figures who had achieved immortality often do so through amorous relations with one of the gods, as is the case for Ganymede, Ariadne, or Endymion. As attracting the attention of a deity was far from a guarantee, immortality would only be in Alexander’s reach through a set of examples, each with varied degrees of immortality, as the Greek thought differed drastically from the modern conception of immortality. The Dionysian and Herculean examples are of a deification, a physical and spiritual immortality; the Achillean or Homeric are of only a spiritual, an undying memory. The Dionysian ‘archetype’ taken over the Herculean for one of various factors, the Olympian status of one god being grander than the other, the association with an eastward expansion that more conveniently fit the empire, the pre-existing

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<sup>36</sup> Bosworth, A. B. "Errors in Arrian." *The Classical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1976): 117-39.

association to Heracles inherent from the inherited dynastic origin, as Alexander's family the Argeads were supposedly descended from Temenus, the grandson of Heracles, and lastly due to the apparent origins of Dionysus in the East. The origins of Dionysus are as complicated as most of the Greek deities, with differing beliefs in both the cult's origin and the deity's location of birth. Shepherd in his analysis of the origins of the Dionysian cults, and the introduction into the Greek world, follows the linguistic and archaeological record to trace a societal movement into Thrace, the location of a large number of the Dionysian cults.<sup>37</sup> Shepherd follows the introduction of viticulture one can see in the archaeological record, in conjunction with the movement of people groups throughout the region, to see two potential introductions, through the movement of people from the Carpathian Basin into Thrace, or from Asia Minor, as has been more a consensus in classical scholarship, if following the introduction of viticulture.<sup>38</sup> The belief of Dionysus' origin was far from a consensus in the time of Alexander, with three very different beliefs in his early life. The Orphic tradition had Dionysus the son of Zeus and Persephone, Dionysus being identified with Zagreus, was thought to have been raised at Mt. Ida, as his father had been. Diodorus Siculus proposes that there are two gods with the name Dionysus, an older and a younger, who over time were conflated.<sup>39</sup> The first of these that he introduces would be the Dionysus of India, born to Ammon and Amalthea, Ammon being curiously both a creation deity and King of Libya in Diodorus' account; where he fails to specify which of the Ammon's fathered the demigod. This Dionysus was taken to Nysa, the Nysa in Arabia, where he was cared for by a nurse named Nysa, the daughter of Arisateus. The younger Dionysus Diodorus describes as Hesiod and Homer agree, the child of Zeus and Semele, birthed from the thigh of Zeus. Altogether, the ancient sources seem

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<sup>37</sup> Shephard, Henry. *To the origin of the cult of Dionysus*. Philadelphia 2008

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Diodorus Siculus 4.4.5

to agree that the birthplace of Dionysus is either in Boeotia, Anatolia, Libya, Aethiopia, Arabia, or India.

The birthplace of Dionysus is of importance, as the potential foreign origin of the god accepted within the Greek pantheon would allow for Alexander to acquire an immortality through the methods of the foreign. While earlier authors trust the Greek origin of the god, Homer and Hesiod, which seems established by mentions of Dionysus on Mycenaean texts; there is a significant introduction of this foreign nature in the century before Alexander. Even ancient sources, Herodotus key amongst them, show some skepticism over the origin of the god:

As it is, the Greek story has it that no sooner was Dionysus born than Zeus sewed him up in his thigh and carried him away to Nysa in Ethiopia beyond Egypt; and as for Pan, the Greeks do not know what became of him after his birth. It is therefore plain to me that the Greeks learned the names of these two gods later than the names of all the others, and trace the birth of both to the time when they gained the knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

For the Greek thought of immortality, much had changed in the decades before Alexander's rise, in regards to the philosophical understanding of the nature of the soul, and most explicitly in Empedocles and then Plato, the formation of thought behind an Immortal soul. Plato significantly within *Timaeus*, suggests that the purpose behind humanity's split existence, a mortal body and immortal soul, is for the cultivation of a proper material life, that being in Plato's model a "sound constitution" or rather an attention to both the body and the mind. A cultivation of the rational for the mind, and a perfection of the body. Perception of immortality can largely be divided between the immortality of the body and the immortality of the soul, as most understandings of immortality can be categorized in this manner; the understanding of immortality reached by the Greeks before Alexander was not as simply put. To the Greeks, immortality was ingrained in the culture through the mythological archetypes, and seen as a reward for accomplishments, for fulfilling their life. By

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<sup>40</sup> Hdt. 2.146.2

the time of Alexander, Arete was the undisputed purpose of life for much of Greek philosophy. The two of these are worked together through exercises, and quite literally have the intentions of deification. Should one have the body of a Greek God, one might be closer to such a position. The soul is also split in Plato's model, the rational within the mind in the head (the daimon), the passionate within the chest, and the soul that produces appetite from within the abdomen. Plato extensively links the physical body to the soul, thus the perfection of both must be necessary, and the total perfection of both would produce not only the immortality of the soul, but the immortality of the human.<sup>41</sup> It is incredibly pertinent to cover Plato's thought on this, as scholarship has traditionally come to a consensus on what *Timaeus* was truly about, that being an understanding of the nature of, well nature, the fundamental operation of the universe.<sup>42</sup>

### **Indian Philosophy, & its Influence**

While the specificity of Dionysus' conquest of India is undeniably the model by which Alexander presented his rising divinity to the Greeks, it is by no means the only method he presented his divinity with. As stated previously, Alexander had an easier time presenting himself as a god-king with some of the territories of his empire than with others. The methods by which Alexander presented his desires immortality and of his divine status were multifold, as he expressed different methods with different people, and in this not, the image of Dionysus was not

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<sup>41</sup> Visigalli, Paolo. "Technologies of Self-immortalisation in Ancient Greece and Early India." In *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought*, edited by SEAFORD RICHARD, 104-17. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzdmh.13>.

<sup>42</sup> Steel, Carlos. "Why Should We Prefer Plato's 'Timaeus' To Aristotle's 'Physics'?" *Proclus' Critique Of Aristotle's Causal Explanation Of The Physical World.* *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, no. 78 (2003): 175-87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43767939>.

the sole model utilized in expressing his divinity to the Greeks. Throughout the century prior to Alexander, a diffusion of philosophical concepts of likely Indian origin.

Philosophers have been interested in the Philosophical connection between the ancient Greeks and Indians for centuries, Voltaire writing about what he described as “Pythagoras’ travels in India” under the pseudonym Ignoramus. As has been examined through the literary and mythological, scholarship has paid particular deference to the philosophical link. The work of Thomas McEvelley was one of the first deviations from more traditional interpretations, and the legacy of works such as this that have questioned the origins of philosophy have taken hold in much of academia. McEvelley explains his editorial brilliantly in the afterword, summarizing not just the purpose and success behind the book, but the effects of this scholarship.

Since the end of colonialism in India, western attitudes toward Indian philosophy have become less defensive... When comparative philosophy originated, in the context of the Romantic search for origins or archetypes, its purpose was conceived as finding an ultimate or Ur-philosophy that lay behind all particular philosophies. Methodologically the idea seems much like Socrates’ method of looking for the meaning of a word by seeking what is common in its various usages. In the cases of ancient India and Greece the Ur-philosophy would seem to lie semi-hidden but implicit in the philosophical texts of the Bronze Age Near East... The contacts and influences presented in this study go part way toward bridging a gap which our thinkers have tended to regard as unbridgeable. What if some of the “basic concepts, which were coined by the Greeks” were not, strictly speaking, “coined by the Greeks” but by the Indians who passed them on to the Greeks?<sup>43</sup>

Calanus or Kalanos is one of the most defined Indian figures who interacted with Alexander. Diodorus describes the relationship between Alexander and Kalanos as amicable, that Alexander held the Indian philosopher with honour and esteem.<sup>44</sup> The most significant record of Kalanos, however, does not come from his life with Alexander, but from his death. Kalanos requested a great funeral pyre to be built for himself, as he realized he had developed an illness

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<sup>43</sup> McEvelley. *The Shape of Ancient Thought : Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. Afterword

<sup>44</sup> Diodorus XVII.107



that was terminal. Alexander attempted to persuade him from this, but upon realizing that argument gained nothing, consented and had a pyre built for him. The whole army watched as he unflinchingly climbed the alit fire, to die amidst the flames. Some thought his choice foolhardy, others admired his courage, but in either case his death impressed the Greeks, and because of this, the philosophy that carried him onto the pyre, carried a greater weight amongst the Greeks. Leon Robin, a French scholar, considers the death of Kalanos the inspiration for the philosopher Pyrrho, who may have been in the crowd that watched. If this is the case, Kalanos' philosophy, of which there is little record, may have become Pyrrhonism.<sup>45</sup> This self-immolation would reappear twice more in the classical world, first at the Olympics and the next in front of the emperor Augustus. In 165 CE, Peregrinus Proteus, a Greek Philosopher, would commit self-immolation at the Olympic Games. Lucian, a contemporary, would describe the event, explaining how the lack of fear in his final moments impressed the crowd, and how he was called a 'new Calanus'.

The Indian Zarmanochegas would leap onto a funerary pyre wearing only a loin cloth, with his skin oiled. The man came to Rome with an embassy from India. The ashes of the man were placed into a monument upon which was inscribed, "Here lies Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargosa who immortalized himself in accordance with the ancestral customs of India."<sup>46</sup>

Immortalization, as previously examined, has had different believed methods corresponding to the different cultures that developed the concept. This immortalization through acceptance of fate may have been the ultimate conquest of Death, as the decision of one's own fate removes the acts of any power beyond human control. This conception of taking death for oneself existing in the antique interpretation, and as the Roman inscription implies, it was considered a certain immortality. This is of significance, as hopefully this chapter has amply explained that

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident*, Paris, 1952, p.10, n.6

<sup>46</sup> *Memorial Sylvain Levi*, Paris, 1937, pp. 211-212

Alexander wished not just to conquer the world, but to conquer beyond it also. Kalanos' death was not only significant in action, but in his last words: "We shall see each other again in Babylon."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Brian Bosworth, "Calanus and the Brahman Opposition" in: Wolfgang Will (ed.), *Alexander der Grosse. Eine Welteroberung und ihr Hintergrund* (1998 Bonn), pp.173-203

## 5. Conclusions

Alexander pursued the myths and legends of both foreign and Greek traditions, attempt to locate and then recreate the myths of Dionysus Heracles in their conquest of India. In his pursuit of obtaining the myth of India, Alexander would create his own legend, the Alexander Myth. Alexander would spawn a new era in Greek history, the Hellenic World a result of his conquest. Alexander would create the myth of his conquest, as record of his life only exists in the in-between, a combination of history and legend. For the Greeks, there was no defined scholastic discipline of history, there was memory, and there was a curious mix of myths and reliable historical accounts, that the Greeks made no distinguishment between. For the Greeks legend and myth were the past, and were in the present. Alexander's ascent to Godhood was present in his lifetime. This thesis should show that historical analysis of the age of Alexander must take into account the Greek conception of the world. A Greek perception of India was a perception through the mythic. A history of this period is a history of the records of myth. There may be truth in the Dionysian conquests, as both Indian and Greek accounts introduce conqueror figures from the ages before Alexander. There may have been a Dionysos from India who established an Empire from India to Syria. There may have also not been any comparable figure, though the lack of a historical figure does not dispute the reality of the figure in the Greek perception of the world. Acquiring the reality behind the myths Alexander believed will not alter the actions that he took in belief of them, nor should knowledge of these change the modern understanding of his decisions. There also is no way of asserting the understanding of Alexander, not with any authority. Hopefully this Thesis has adequately uncovered some of the potential perceptions the figure may have had. The fantastical

mythic tribes that supposedly inhabited the region, and Alexander likely did not consider the accuracy of these accounts, but the idea of Indian Dragons seems to have plausibly piqued his interest. Alexander may have had misguided understandings of the geography of the regions he wished to pursue, but he corrected these errors after encountering them, and sent navies and armies to explore the questionable and establish a more accurate understanding of the world. Alexander may have believed in the Dionysian conquests of old, and that in Nysa he encountered the last vestige of an old empire, but he may have simply used an established tale to serve as a basis for his own deification, to a Greek audience. Alexander may have believed that continuing further eastward he would eventually encounter the palace of Helios, and discover the edge of the world where the sun sets, or to the end of land to discover the world encircling sea, or he may have believed in a spherical earth. Neither understanding stopped his desire to discover the unknown, his pursuit to the ends of the Earth. It would be the Macedonian troops, longing to return home, now upset that Alexander called Persians kinsmen as much as themselves, that his intentions over new subjects were not just in subjugation, but in establishing similar relations with his new subjects. Because Alexander did not continue his pursuit further eastward, we may never know what it was he pursued past India, nor what he thought he would find in this pursuit. Alexander would turn his armies back westward, beginning a homeward march, the start of a planned consolidation of his conquests. Alexander would not fulfil the ambition of establishing an empire either, meeting his fate in Babylon, as Calanus foresaw. Not all of the ambitions of this young conqueror may have been reached, but many of his ambitions were, and it is worth considering which these were. Alexander succeeded in toppling the Persian Empire, replacing it with his own Empire. Alexander reached India, the Indus, and discovered the remnants of a Dionysian conquest before him. Alexander may not have conquered the world, nor obtained the immortality that would

have protected him from his fate in Babylon, but Alexander may have acquired Immortality. The earliest Greek idea of immortality is found in the Iliad, where Homer recounts the legendary pseudo historical Achilles, who aspired to obtain an immortality through the preservation of his memory. Achilles did obtain an immortality, so long as we continue to remember the hero. There is an immortality in the memory of the dead, an enduring legacy, that Alexander has provided. Achilles may very well have been a figment in the imagination of Homer. Homer may very well have been an imagined figure, or a man who took credit for writings he did not produce. None of these potentialities matter in regards to the immortality, as the memory of the figure lives on in spite of reality. What Alexander may have believed he would find in the East may or may not have existed; but it also may not matter. It is indisputable that Alexander created his own myth from the myths of figures like Dionysus; Alexander attained immortality through the established method of prior myths, deified himself from the myths of deified heroes. Alexander would create a Myth of himself from existing Myth. Alexander also altered history, one might say he created his own history. It may not be unreasonable to suggest that much like his creation of myth from myth, he may have been creating history from history.

*Let me not then die ingloriously and without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.*

— *Achilles, The Iliad by Homer*

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