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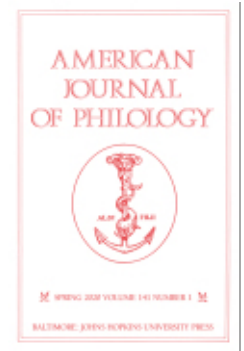
The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks by Richard Stoneman (review)

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American Journal of Philology, Volume 141, Number 1 (Whole Number 561),
Spring 2020, pp. 133-135 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajp.2020.0007>



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RICHARD STONEMAN. *The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. xviii + 525 pp. 58 black-and-white figs. Cloth, \$40.

Richard Stoneman in his study of the Greek experience of India successfully surveys the main points of contact and exchange between the two cultures in the Hellenistic period to show that the “encounter (between the Greeks and the Indians) was more than an encounter between people and nature-spirits; that two peoples grew and learned as a result of their familiarity one with another” (2). Such a study of Greeks in the subcontinent is not a new one and in several instances Stoneman also cites William Woodthorpe Tarn’s 1938 monograph *The Greeks in India and Bactria* (Cambridge). Stoneman deviates from Tarn successfully by highlighting the encounter as more than a unilateral exchange of knowledge from the Greeks to the “Indians”; nevertheless, primary importance is given to Alexander’s presence in India.

Stoneman does not define the geographical extent of his ancient India, and the work focuses mainly on the Mauryan kingdom founded by Chandragupta Maurya at the time when Seleucus I established himself in Bactria. The text makes several references to parts of Gandhara and Bactria with minimal distinctions to the author’s “ancient India,” the former located at the frontier of ancient India and the latter an independent kingdom. This is evident when the author identifies Heliodorus, a Greek in Indian society in the 2nd century B.C.E., and writes that “one should not forget Theodorus, a Buddhist meridiarch who left an inscription on a pot found in Swat” (387). (The inscription attests to the existence of Greek personal names in the subcontinent and does not suggest the ethnic identity of the dedicator.) The suggestion of the Swat region along with Ancient India blurs the lines between different political and cultural groups in the region.

The book is organized into three major parts comprising fourteen chapters in total. The first section of the book, aptly named “First Impressions,” provides a list of Greek authors, Muslim ethnographers, and British and German historians as a useful starting point to readers. Chapter 2 further outlines Alexander’s journey into India via the Indus, his arrival into Taxila, and his encounter with Porus. Chapter 3 engages with the two main deities of the Macedonians during Alexander’s reign, Heracles and Dionysus, both identified by Greek authors in northwestern India and surviving (in ways not fully understood) in Gandhara art. According to Stoneman, “it needs to be emphasized that Alexander and his companions were not seeking to explain phenomena of Indian religion, but to find Dionysus in this unfamiliar land” (97). The argument is persuasive in identifying similarities between the two cultures and indeed the author does so by associating the two Greek gods to Krishna (87–8) and Siva (95), but to suggest that “it is possible that Indian artists found the figure of Heracles coalesced neatly with their earlier, not lost, conceptions of one hero or another” is over-simplified (88). The final chapter of this section covers the plants and animals recorded by the Greeks along with their Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and Pali names.

The second section, “Megasthenes’ description of India,” divided into six chapters, is dedicated to Megasthenes’ *Indica* and its interpretation of Mauryan India in comparison with Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*. Chapter 5 introduces Megasthenes’ work where the author also “tentatively” proposes a new order of fragments regarding India (183–5). The subsequent chapter outlines the various attempts by modern scholars to identify Dionysus and Heracles mentioned in Arrian, Megasthenes, and Diodorus with mythological figures in the Puranas. Stoneman successfully presents an overview of the *Arthashastra*’s royal administration along with Megasthenes’ description of kingship, economic apparatus of the kingdom, and military strategies in chapter 8. This chapter further discusses caste, eating customs, and sexual behavior. Regarding eating, Stoneman provides a short paragraph on eating customs mentioned by the ancient authors. (No comparison is provided based on Indian texts here.) Sexual habits and marriage customs are conflated into one topic, and this is the only section that alludes to the life of women in the region. Chapter 9 presents the idealized landscape and just society of India as remarked by Onesicritus and Megasthenes after which “several Greek writers devised utopian societies which they located in India or, more commonly, on the island of Taprobane (Sri Lanka)” (248). The prominence of the Indian elephant during the time of Alexander and Seleucus I is evaluated in chapter 10. Other marvelous creatures such as the Gold-digging Ants, the Hairy Women, Unicorn, and the Dog-heads are studied with careful documentation of both Greek and Latin texts. This section is particularly valuable in understanding Greek perception of and fascination with a far-away land, delivering on the promise made by the title of the monograph.

The last part, titled “Interactions,” identifies key points of contact between the two cultures. The section begins with Alexander’s interaction with the Naked Philosophers. Already a topic of interest to Stoneman (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 [1995], 99–114), in chapter 11 he further relates the episode to “its possible Indian roots” by tracing the history of self-immolation in the subcontinent (300). Here, Stoneman again strengthens the case to identify Megasthenes’ sramanes with the Buddhists and the Naked Philosophers with the Jains by analyzing the differences in Greek texts between the brahmins and the sramanas. The conclusion of this chapter draws the reader towards the philosophy of both cultures and this philosophical parallelism between Greek and Indian thought is discussed in chapter 12. The Indian-style argumentative structure of the *Milindapanha* dominates this chapter as Stoneman identifies that “it contains nothing that would remind one of Greek philosophy nor does it resemble the Platonic model of dialogue with its continuous application of Socratic dialectic” (366). The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of philosophical debate based on the Upanishads, Mahabharatha, and Buddhist texts to showcase the differences between Greek and Indian debate models. Chapter 13 focuses on the time period from the death of Alexander to that of Menander. According to the author, in this period “Indian religious ideas inevitably had more impact on Greeks living in India” based on the *Questions of King Milinda* (Menander) and the Heliodorus Pillar dedicated by a Greek ambassador, who identifies himself as a worshipper of Vasudeva (Vishnu).

Infiltration of Greek ideas into Indian culture is evidenced by the Gandharan relief depicting the Trojan Horse in chapter 14. Again, the key evidence such as the vase depicting Sophocles' Antigone and papyrus from Ai Khanoum originate from Gandhara and Bactria respectively. This chapter continues the analysis of the influence of Greek and Indian storytelling on each other. Here, Stoneman critically examines Fernando Wulff Alonso's work in *The Mahābhārata and Greek Mythology* (New Delhi, 2014) on the parallels between Greek mythology and Sanskrit epics using the common narrative about the event of bending of the bow by the different protagonists. Chapter 15 discusses the influence of Greeks on the artistic production of India such as the Dionysiac scene at Mathura, the Hellenistic lion fountainhead on the *kirtimukha*, griffins on the Sanchi gateway, and common features between the Macedonian tomb paintings and Ajanta. On the last point, Stoneman writes: "to my eye, the paintings at Ajanta could have been made by a Greek (Macedonian) . . . At present, it seems impossible to do more than speculate, but the fact that wall paintings in India begin at a time when Greeks were dominant in the north-west of the country . . . does suggest more than coincidence with regard to the origin of this Indian art" (460). The final chapter of this section and the monograph discusses the *Life of Apollonius* and Taxila. As Stoneman begins his monograph with accounts of India by Greek authors who remarked on the marvelous and exotic, he ends the monograph with the work that identifies India with "the familiar, but not so remarkable after all. This is a political dimension to his travels, in which India, now known to Rome through many trading links and its productivity of grossly expensive luxuries, is no longer 'other'" (477).

Perhaps the only shortcoming of the book is its lack of references to the kings of Odi and Aparaca during the Kushan reign. New epigraphic and manuscript evidence emerging from present-day northern India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan has provided us with a treasure trove of information regarding Greek personal names and Greek names for "royal" administrative offices that were a consequence of the Greek presence in northwestern India. (Noteworthy is the reference that Stoneman makes to Theodoros, the meridiarch. The relationship between Hellenistic court culture, local kingdoms, and ritual landscape is discussed in Marco Galli's "Hellenistic Court Imagery in the Early Buddhist Art of Gandhara," in *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 17.2 [2011] 288–92.)

Stoneman's narration of a complex subject is a worthy addition to the numerous works on Indo-Roman and Indo-Greek interaction providing a comprehensive review of the time immediately following Alexander's presence in the Indian subcontinent with copious references to primary sources and secondary works. He convincingly argues that the nature of the interaction between the Greeks and the northern Indians was dynamic and multilateral.

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