

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF MEGASTHENES' *INDICA*

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THE *INDICA* OF Megasthenes is justly famous.¹ It contained the first eyewitness description of the Gangetic plain by any Westerner and documented a diplomatic meeting with Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire.² According to the traditional view, that meeting took place in 304/3 B.C., when Chandragupta's power was at its zenith; Megasthenes was the emissary of Seleucus Nicator, and helped negotiate the famous exchange of provinces for elephants that preceded the campaign of Ipsus.³ However, it is my contention that Megasthenes' diplomacy took place more than ten years previously, in the period 320–18, before Chandragupta's power extended to the Indus valley. At that time the Mauryan Empire did not exist. The India Megasthenes visited was still a variegated mosaic of polities. Independent peoples coexisted with minor princedoms. Two dynasts then stood head and shoulders above the rest, Porus on the Indus and Chandragupta on the Ganges, but neither could claim supremacy.

One text is of crucial importance. It attests the meeting with Chandragupta, and also associates Megasthenes with Porus, the great dynast of the Punjab, who governed the Indus plains for Alexander and died around 318 B.C. Arrian (*Ind.* 5.3) states that Megasthenes went further than Alexander and his men and claimed to have visited Chandragupta. As the text is generally printed, it reads "Megasthenes states that he met Sandracottus, the greatest king of the Indians, one who was still greater than Porus." On this reading Chandragupta is represented as the great empire builder, surpassing

1. The standard edition of the fragments is that of Jacoby (*FGrH* 715), which replaces the older and still influential work of E. A. Schwanbeck, *Megasthenis Indica* (Bonn, 1846). There is a recent Polish monograph by Joanna Sachse, *Megasthenes o Indiach*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, 587 (Wrocław, 1981), which provides translation and some commentary. On interpretation the most substantial and recent work is the large bipartite article by A. Zambrini, "Gli Indika di Megastene," *ASNP*³ 12 (1982): 71–149, *ASNP*³ 15 (1985): 781–853, which gives a painstaking review of earlier scholarship. This article will be adduced where relevant, but I should here note two articles by Truesdell S. Brown, "The reliability of Megasthenes," *AJP* 76 (1955): 18–33; "The merits and weaknesses of Megasthenes," *Phoenix* 11 (1957): 12–24.

2. Arr. *Anab.* 5.6.2, *Ind.* 5.3; Strabo 2.1.9 (70), 15.1.36 (702), 53 (709); Pliny, *NH* 6.58 (*FGrH* 717 T1).

3. This view was argued at length by Schwanbeck, *Indica*, 11–23, and has been taken as axiomatic since, particularly in the formative works of Otto Stein (*Megasthenes und Kautilya*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 191.5 [Vienna, 1921], 1–4; *RE* 15, 231–34). K. J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte*², vol. 4 (Berlin, 1925), 1.462 and Brown, "Merits," 12–15, accept that Megasthenes may have represented Silyrtius at an early stage, but even they place the embassy to Chandragupta in the years after 305. For a sharp statement of the traditional view see E. Olshausen, *Prosopographie der hellenistischen Königsgesandten* (Leuven, 1974), 172–74, no. 127.

Porus, the greatest of the dynasts who faced Alexander. However, the reading is based totally on emendation. The received text is unambiguous: "Megasthenes says that he met Sandracottus the greatest king of the Indians, and also met Porus, who was yet greater than him" (συγγενέσθαι γὰρ Σανδροκόττῳ λέγει, τῷ μεγίστῳ Ἰνδῶν βασιλεῖ, καὶ Πώρῳ ἔτι τούτου μείζονι). As Truesdell Brown long ago observed, this reading is linguistically unexceptionable,⁴ and, one may add, it is more coherent with Arrian's usage than the emendation (Πώρου ἔτι τούτῳ μείζονι). Elsewhere, when Arrian uses ἔτι and the genitive of comparison, the genitive immediately follows ἔτι,⁵ as it does in the received text of *Ind.* 5.3. The emendation produces an awkward and uncharacteristic word order and a superfluous, misplaced demonstrative. It makes sense, but it is clearly inferior to the manuscript reading and could only be accepted if the original text were historically impossible.

From the time of Schwanbeck and Lassen in the early nineteenth century there has been near unanimity that the text as it stands is an absurdity. Schwanbeck saw three impossibilities.⁶ Firstly, he considered that the meeting with Porus is incompatible with the embassy to Chandragupta. In this Schwanbeck followed the orthodox view that Megasthenes visited the Mauryan court as an envoy of Seleucus, and did so only on the eve of Ipsus, in 304/3 B.C. However, the assumption rests upon prejudice rather than evidence. The only evidence connecting Megasthenes with Seleucus, the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria, is silent about his diplomatic overtures to Chandragupta. In a famous passage on philosophy among the barbarians Clement refers to Megasthenes' comparison between the Indian Brahmins and the Jews, and terms Megasthenes "the historian who associated with Seleucus Nicator" (ὁ συγγραφεὺς ὁ Σελεύκῳ τῷ Νικάτορι συμβεβωκώς).⁷ This may be, as many have assumed, no more than a statement of contemporaneity (Megasthenes lived at the time of Seleucus). However, the verb suggests a closer connection,⁸ and Clement may well have believed that Megasthenes resided at Seleucus' court. Even so, Clement never suggests that he acted as Seleucus' ambassador, and the traditional view that he did arises from the dangerous practice of combining evidence out of context. Megasthenes was the only Greek envoy attested at Chandragupta's court, and the only known negotiations between the Mauryan and Seleucid regimes were those of 304/3. However, this treaty is an isolated beam of

4. Brown, "Merits," 13: "Let us admit that the manuscript reading makes better sense than the text as emended." Brown did not give linguistic parallels, and he accepted the late dating of Megasthenes' embassy to Chandragupta (p. 14), but his observation was eminently sensible. It is a pity it has been ignored.

5. Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.3; 5.2.3 (ἔτι τούτων πλείονας); 6.17.2 (μείζον ἔτι τοῦ Δέλτα); 7.17.2 (μείζονα ἔτι τοῦ πάλα). There is, to my knowledge, no contrary instance in Arrian.

6. Schwanbeck, *Indica*, 22; citing Christian Lassen, who in his early years argued that the clause dealing with Porus is an interpolation (in the later *Indische Altertumskunde*², vol. 2 [Leipzig, 1874] the suggestion is silently discarded).

7. Clem. *Strom.* 1.72.4 = *FGrH* 715 F 3 (from the third book of the *Indica*). On the context in Clement see A. Dihle, *Antike und Orient* (Heidelberg, 1984), 78–88, maintaining (p. 78) that Megasthenes spent some ten years as Seleucus' envoy at the Mauryan court.

8. Elsewhere in Clement συμβιῶν and its cognates denote cohabitation: cf. *Paed.* 2.54.2, 3.41.3; *Strom.* 2.142.1, 3.86.1. There are some very famous oratorical parallels: Dem. 18.250, 266; Isocr. 15.97 (cf. *Epist.* 4.4).

illumination in a gaping void of ignorance. We cannot assume that the one attested contact between the two regimes was their only contact. Nor have we any ground to assume that Megasthenes acted as the representative of Seleucus himself. As we shall see, there is another, more plausible context for Megasthenes' mission to the eastern court.

Schwanbeck's second objection is totally insubstantial. It was absurd, he thought, for Arrian to claim that Megasthenes covered more of India than Alexander on the strength of his embassy to Porus. That, however, is a misrepresentation of Arrian, who speaks of embassies to Porus and to Chandragupta: the former took him as far as Alexander, the latter beyond him. If, as Arrian states, Megasthenes reached the eastern capital, he had certainly gone much further east than Alexander, and his visit to Porus occurred along the way. The third so-called absurdity, however, is the most serious, and has convinced practically all commentators. How could Porus be called greater than Chandragupta, when Chandragupta has just been defined as the greatest of Indian kings? And under what circumstances could Porus have been sensibly described as greater than Chandragupta, the architect of the Mauryan empire? The first objection is easily countered. Megasthenes was presumably writing after Porus' death and making an explicit comparison with Chandragupta: on his embassy he met Chandragupta, now the greatest of the Indian kings, and also Porus, who was a greater king still. What we have, it should be recalled, is not the original text of Megasthenes, but its rendering by Arrian. With his penchant for rhetoric Arrian is attracted by the paradoxical comparison,⁹ and he may have omitted the context.

But could this greatest of Indian kings have had a superior? Could it have made sense at any time to represent Porus as greater than Chandragupta? The answer, I think, is affirmative, but it needs to be set in a specific historical and psychological context. Chandragupta's empire, it should be remembered, was not created at a stroke. According to Indian tradition his conquest of the Nanda kingdom was laborious, from the extremities to the centre,¹⁰ and after his usurpation of the throne at Pāṭaliputra it was some years before he was in a position to invade the Indus valley. Our sources are vague and unreliable, but the indications are that his conquest of the west came in the last decade of the fourth century. According to Justin, Chandragupta acquired his kingdom and took possession of India (i.e., the Indus valley) at the time when Seleucus was laying the foundations of his future power,¹¹ which suggests the period after 309 when Seleucus had successfully defended Babylonia against repeated Antigoniid invasions and was

9. The ultimate model is probably Thuc. 1.21.2 (τὸν παρόντα ἀεὶ μέγιστον . . . ὅμως μείζον). There are many parallels to Arrian's expression, notably in his junior contemporary, Appian. Cf. App. *Prooem.* 12.45; *Celt.* 1.9 (τὰ μεγέθη μείζους τῶν μεγίστων).

10. See the evidence cited by R. K. Mookerji, *Chandragupta Maurya and His Times*³ (Delhi, 1960), 33–36, the general surveys of Vincent Smith, *Oxford History of India*⁴ (Delhi, 1981), 96–98, and R. Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, 1966), 70–71.

11. Justin 15.4.20: "sic adquisito regno Sandrocottus ea tempestate qua Seleucus futurae magnitudinis fundamenta iaciebat, Indiam possidebat. . . ."

extending his influence over the far eastern satrapies. To be sure, Justin is vague and rhetorical, and justifies only the roughest of synchronisms with Seleucus' early years of rule. But he also implies that the Indus lands were in disorder for some time before Chandragupta impinged upon them.¹² In 316 Sibyrtius, the Macedonian satrap of Arachosia, was involved in warfare on his borders, and he may well have been commissioned to establish order in the Indus plain to the east.¹³ There were probably some years of sporadic hostilities before Chandragupta intervened to liberate and subjugate the area. That is, of course, hypothesis. All that can be said is that Chandragupta was physically present in the Punjab in 305. It was then, according to Appian, that Seleucus crossed the Indus and fought against Chandragupta before concluding the famous treaty with him.¹⁴ At that time the conquest of the Indus plain was relatively recent. Prior to that time Chandragupta's domains were in the Ganges valley, and, however rich and populous they may have been, they could have been viewed as inferior to the lands under Porus. From the end of Alexander's reign Porus had been given control of a vast expanse of territory. His comparatively small kingdom between the Jhelum and Chenab had been progressively expanded. By 326 he had acquired the entire Punjab east of the Jhelum and south to the confluence of the Ravi (Hydraotes) and Indus,¹⁵ and before Alexander's death he had added Sind to his sway.¹⁶ The settlements of Babylon and Triparadeisus confirmed him in his territories, which in theory extended from the Indian Ocean to Kashmir. By contrast Chandragupta may have seemed a lesser monarch, particularly in his early years, when his power was confined to the old Nanda kingdom in the middle Ganges.

There is another aspect to be considered. In Alexander's reign the public image of Porus was deliberately enhanced. His role in the battle of the Hydaspes was propagated in the most impressive numismatic record of the age. On the great decadrachms struck towards the end of his reign, Alexander is portrayed in single combat with Porus, the Indian king resisting heroically at the place of honour to the fore of his war elephant, and on a

12. Justin 15.4.12–13 suggests an intermediate period before Chandragupta's invasion, a period when the natives killed Alexander's *praefecti*. That may be an oblique, confused reference to the murder of Porus, but it is more likely that Justin is referring to a protracted period of insurrection, perhaps beginning before Alexander's death with the murder of Philip, son of Machatas (Arr. 6.27.2; Curt. 10.1.20) and continuing for some time thereafter. The Indus lands were clearly weakened and anarchic at the time of Chandragupta's conquest.

13. Diod. 19.48.3 refers to a full-scale war (πόλεμος); and the fact that Sibyrtius was assigned some thousand of the Silver Shields to use on suicide missions (see below, n. 26) indicates that there was serious and continuous action on the frontiers of Arachosia.

14. App. Syr. 55.281–82; cf. K. Brodersen, *Appians Abriss der Seleukidengeschichte* (Munich, 1989), 123–29. Justin 15.4.12: "transitum deinde (sc. after the annexation of Bactria) in Indiam fecit." Both Brodersen, *Abriss*, and L. Schober, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Babylonien und der Oberen Satrapien von 323–303 v. Chr.* (Frankfurt, 1982), 153, mention the paradox that Megasthenes, the supposed client and envoy of Seleucus, ignored his invasion of India and implicitly denied its existence (see below, pp. 123–24). The problem disappears, however, if Megasthenes' work is dated before 305.

15. Arr. *Anab.* 5.19.3, 20.4, 21.5, 24.8; 6.2.1 (see my commentary ad loc.). The wealth and population of these domains is systematically exaggerated by the Alexander historians (cf. Plut. *Al.* 60.15; Strabo 15.1.3 (686), 33 (701), agreeing on a total of 5,000 major cities).

16. For the arguments see A. B. Bosworth, "The Indian satrapies under Alexander the Great," *Antichthon* 17 (1983): 37–46, esp. 38–41; cf. also Schober, *Untersuchungen*, 20–26.

series of tetradrachms the various components of the Indian army (elephants, war chariots, and archers) are celebrated in a manner unique in the period.¹⁷ No other adversary received the publicity afforded Porus, and the propaganda of the reign made a feature of his courage and magnanimity. His physical stature inspired respect, as did his resistance to the last, and his categorical demand to be treated "like a king."¹⁸ The augmentation of his territories was appropriate recognition of his qualities, and the breadth of his rule corresponded to his outstanding ability. If Megasthenes was writing in the shadow of Alexander's conquests, then the exaltation of Porus mirrored contemporary propaganda. Alexander himself had represented Porus as a near equal and ceded more territory to his control than he vested in any other individual. As a result Porus could be depicted as a ruler of unsurpassable magnitude, certainly eclipsing Chandragupta until the latter added the Indus lands to his empire.

There is nothing absurd about the received text of Arrian. It can be interpreted with perfect sense in a historical setting shortly after Alexander's death, when Chandragupta and Porus held sway at opposite ends of the Indian subcontinent. We can go further and outline the circumstances, thanks to another passage of Arrian. In his Alexander history he states that Megasthenes was an associate of Sibyrtius, the satrap of Arachosia, and that he often claims to have visited Chandragupta, the Indian king.¹⁹ The latter clause is less important, and is somewhat ambiguous. The Greek (πολλάκις δὲ λέγει ἀφικέσθαι) allows one to infer either that Megasthenes made several visits to the Mauryan court ("he says that he often visited")²⁰ or that he made a feature of his (single) visit ("he repeatedly states that he visited").²¹ The second interpretation seems to me preferable. Even the contracted epitomes that survive of Megasthenes' work suggest that he made constant reference to the Mauryan capital and emphasized his experience of the court. What is more, the adverb πολλάκις seems best taken with the main verb which follows, and what parallels there are tend to support it.²² However, whether Megasthenes made one or many visits to the Mauryan

17. M. J. Price, *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* (Zurich and London, 1991), 33, pl. CLIX; cf. "The 'Porus' Coinage of Alexander the Great," in *Studia P. Naster Oblata*, ed. S. Scheers and J. Quaegebeur (Leuven, 1982), 75–85; P. Bernard, "Le Monnayage d'Eudamos," in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, vol. 1, ed. G. Gnoli and L. Lanciotti (Rome, 1985), 65–94; W. Hollstein, "Taxiles' Prägung für Alexander den Grossen," *SNR* 68 (1989): 5–17.

18. See particularly Arr. *Anab.* 5.18.4–19.2, substantially repeated in the rest of the source tradition (Plut. *Al.* 60.12–16; Diod. 17.88.4–7; Curt. 8.14.31–46; Justin 12.8.5–7; *Metz Epitome* 60–61). The story is designed to show Alexander as the magnanimous victor, recognizing the qualities of a worthy opponent and promoting him accordingly.

19. Arr. *Anab.* 5.6.2: Μεγασθένης ὃς ζῶντην μὲν Σιβυρτίῳ τῷ σατραπί τῆς Ἀραχωσίας πολλάκις δὲ λέγει ἀφικέσθαι παρὰ Σανδράκοττον τὸν Ἰνδῶν βασιλέα. . . .

20. This is the most popular interpretation. A variant propounded by Lassen, *Altertumskunde*, p. 219, n. 1 (n. 6 above; cf. Stein, *RE* xv 231) has Megasthenes receive several audiences during a single visit. However ἀφικέσθαι παρὰ τινα is elsewhere used by Arrian of people arriving from a distance (*Anab.* 1.28.3; 3.6.2, 23.7, 25.3, etc.), not of people already at court, and the variant contradicts his normal usage.

21. The suggestion was made, for the first time to my knowledge, by P. A. Brunt in his revised edition of Arrian, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (1983), 19, 448.

22. Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 5.27.1 (πολλάκις μὲν Ἀλέξανδρος ἐκέλευε λέγειν); Xen. *Mem.* 4.1.2 (πολλάκις γὰρ ἔφη μὲν ἂν τινος ἑρᾶν). For a contrary instance see Xen. *Anab.* 7.3.41.

court is irrelevant to the date (or dates) of his legation. What matters is the fact that he was in the entourage of Sibyrtius, and that Sibyrtius, not Seleucus, is mentioned in the context of the visit to the Mauryan court.

There are important historical consequences. The career of Sibyrtius is relatively well documented.²³ Appointed to Arachosia and neighbouring Gedrosia early in 324, he retained his position in the settlements of Babylon (323) and Triparadeisus (321). He was a prominent member of the satrapal coalition formed to resist the ambitions of Peithon of Media,²⁴ and subsequently fell foul of Eumenes, who laid charges of treason against him and forced him to take refuge in his satrapy.²⁵ After Antigonos' victory in 316 he was confirmed in Arachosia and given a large contingent from the turbulent Silver Shields to use up on active service.²⁶ Nothing is heard of him subsequently. We have no idea how long he survived under the regime of Antigonos or what role, if any, he played during the years Seleucus was creating his empire (309–304). In all probability he retained power for many years after Antigonos' defeat of the satrapal coalition,²⁷ and he was one of the most prominent figures in the Macedonian east for at least a decade after Alexander's death.

One important point must be underlined. There is a natural tendency among scholars to retroject the importance of Seleucus. After his creation of a unified monarchy in the last decade of the fourth century, it is difficult to conceive of the satraps of the Iranian east pursuing an independent diplomatic policy and negotiating in their own right with the Indian monarch. However, it was some time before Seleucus' power extended beyond Mesopotamia. Between 320 and 316 he was simply satrap of Babylonia, and was in no position to resist the victorious Antigonos. Restored to his satrapy in 312/11 he had minimal forces at first and had to struggle for survival against the Antigonid armies until at least 309.²⁸ His subjugation of the east came only when Antigonos' attentions were directed elsewhere, to Cyprus, Egypt, and Rhodes.²⁹ Before that time the satraps of the east were virtually independent dynasts. Nominally subjects of the Argead house (and not even that after the death of Alexander IV in 311/10), they were

23. The testimonia for Sibyrtius' career are assembled by H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1926) 353, no. 703, and R. A. Billows, *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State* (Berkeley, 1990), 432–33, no. 106.

24. Diod. 19.14.6. On the background see Schober, *Untersuchungen*, 75–79.

25. Diod. 19.23.4. For discussion of the episode see A. B. Bosworth, "History and Artifice in Plutarch's *Eumenes*," in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, ed. P. A. Stadter (London, 1992), 68–70.

26. Diod. 19.48.3; Plut. *Eum.* 19.3; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 4.6.15. The anecdote presupposes that Arachosia was unusually turbulent in 316. The war with Antigonos may have encouraged local insurgency, and there could have been frontier troubles to the east.

27. According to Diodorus (19.48.3) he was "well disposed" to Antigonos in 316. If those good relations persisted, he will hardly have endeared himself to Seleucus in the years after 311. Dynasts could, however, change sides with unembarrassed alacrity, and one cannot build much upon a single attestation of cordiality.

28. For discussion of these obscure years see Schober, *Untersuchungen*, 94–139; Billows, *Antigonos*, 136–42; J. Grainger, *Seleukos Nikator* (London, 1990), 76–94.

29. According to Diodorus (20.53.4), when Seleucus assumed the diadem and regal title (in 305/4), he had only recently gained control of the upper satrapies (cf. Schober, *Untersuchungen*, 143–45). That makes excellent sense. Now that his rule extended far beyond the satrapy conferred by the kings in 321/20, it was pointless to continue dating by the deceased Alexander IV and natural to follow the precedent of Antigonos in claiming royal authority for himself.

far removed from any central authority. Even Antigonus at the high tide of his success could not control them. After his victory at Gabiene in 316 he was able to depose satraps in the vicinity, Peithon of Media, Peucestas in Persis, and Stasander in Areia, but realized that the satraps of Carmania and Bactria were too remote and too well entrenched for him to take any action against them.³⁰ Sibyrtius came into the same category, and had in fact shown his sympathies to Antigonus before the decisive battle. He was confirmed by the victor, and had his army strengthened by the influx of Silver Shields. After he left Iran late in 316 Antigonus was even less in a position to control the satraps of the east, and there was no constraint upon their actions by any higher authority.

Sibyrtius was a very significant actor in the years after Alexander's death. His satrapy was strategically placed above the Indus plain, and he was deeply involved in the turmoil that convulsed the eastern satrapies after Triparadeisus. The details are lamentably thin, but it is clear that Peithon, the newly appointed satrap of Media and ex-Bodyguard of Alexander, had imperial ambitions of his own. He established his brother in Parthyaëa, and so intimidated the other satraps of the region that they formed a coalition against him. Peithon obviously posed a serious threat, and the response was commensurate. The governors of Persis, Carmania, Areia, Parapamisadae, and Bactria joined forces with Sibyrtius and pooled their armies into a powerful conglomerate.³¹ This coalition army was ready in the field by the time Eumenes fled into Mesopotamia in the spring of 317, and there had obviously been a flurry of diplomatic activity throughout the previous years, activity in which Sibyrtius necessarily participated.

There is some trace of that activity in the actions and movements of the "elephant master" Eudamus, who had been placed in command of the garrison forces at Taxila.³² By the spring of 317 at the latest he had joined the satrapal coalition, bringing with him a formidable contingent of 120 elephants, which he had obtained by assassinating King Porus.³³ It is possible, but perhaps unlikely, that he came through the Cophen valley, via the

30. Diod. 19.48.1–2. Oxyartes of Parapamisadae is also placed in the too-hard basket, as had been the case with the Indian dynasts, Taxiles, and Porus at Triparadeisus (Diod. 18.39.6; Arr. *Succ.* F 1.36 [Roos]). Antigonus is not attested making any dispositions for Gandhara, let alone the Indus lands. That might mean that the territory was out of control, but Diodorus' silence cannot be pressed too far. He mentions the changes that Antigonus made, or wished to make, in the satrapal administration of the east. He may have been satisfied by the officials whom Peithon had left in charge of Gandhara at the time of his departure.

31. The details are provided in an invaluable chapter of Diodorus (19.14; see above, n. 24). The first sentence, dealing with Peithon's intrigues in Parthyaëa, is corrupt, but the general sense is clear.

32. Arr. *Anab.* 6.27.2; Curt. 10.1.21; cf. Berve, *Alexanderreich*, 154, no. 311; W. Heckel, *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire* (London, 1992), 333–34; Bernard, *Monnayage*, 83–88 (n. 17, above).

33. Diod. 19.14.8. The relations between Eudamus and Porus are beyond reconstruction. However, it is clear that Eudamus assembled virtually all the war elephants available in the Punjab. Alexander himself had taken 200 elephants from the area (Arr. *Anab.* 6.2.2; *Ind.* 19.1), and even the most inflated estimate of Porus' elephants at the Hydaspes gives him no more than 200 beasts (Arr. 5.15.4; see my commentary ad loc.). Eudamus certainly combined what remained of the war stables of Taxiles and Porus, and gave the confederates a strength of elephants that Peithon could never match. Even when Peithon was allied with Antigonus (who had half the elephants of the Macedonian grand army), no more than sixty-five beasts could be arrayed against Eumenes and the satrapal alliance (Diod. 19.27.1; cf. 29.6, 40.1). Eudamus was one of the most important members of the coalition, and Eumenes took extraordinary steps to win his favor (Diod. 19.15.5; cf. Plut. *Eum.* 16.3).

Khyber Pass and Parapamisadae, for that would have entailed the cooperation of his colleague, Peithon son of Agenor, the satrap of Gandhara. Peithon ultimately threw in his lot with the Antigonid side and was immediately appointed Seleucus' successor in Babylonia.³⁴ He was perhaps a late comer to Antigonus' forces, and may have been neutral (or even sympathetic) when Eudamus brought his elephants to the west. However, Sibyrtius was in the satrapal coalition at an early stage, and a natural ally and assistant for Eudamus. What was more, his satrapy offered a more direct route through southern Iran, via Quetta and the Helmand valley, the route in fact that was followed in 325/4 by Craterus and Alexander's elephants.³⁵ In that case Eudamus moved directly into Arachosia, the satrapy of his ally, Sibyrtius. He was clearly well informed of events to the west, and there had certainly been overtures from the satrapal alliance against Peithon, which will have been eager to obtain elephants. Whether those overtures led to friction between Eudamus and Porus (with Porus perhaps opposing alliance) we cannot say, but certainly it was well known that the satraps of the west needed assistance and elephants. Sibyrtius, the neighbor of Porus and Eudamus, was the appropriate person to conduct such negotiations, and his associate, Megasthenes, may well have represented him. Moreover, since elephants were at issue, this was a good occasion for feelers to be extended further east to the kingdom of the Prasii. There can be little doubt that Alexander received reports as early as 326 of the Nanda kingdom of the Ganges and its vast elephant army.³⁶ The refusal of his troops to cross the Hyphasis had frustrated his ambitions of eastern conquest, but he and his staff had information about a rich and powerful kingdom. When the satrapal allies were combining forces and seeking external support, it was a good moment to send an envoy eastwards, to investigate the kingdom at first hand and establish good relations. On the most optimistic appraisal more elephants might accrue to the satrapal army. This context, then, the preparations for war against Peithon, between 320 and 318, would comfortably admit an embassy led by Megasthenes to the court of Pāṭaliputra.

34. Diod. 19.56.4. It is possible that this Peithon was a latecomer, for neither he nor his forces are attested in the army of Antigonus during the climactic battles. However, his promotion was rapid, to one of the plum satrapies, and it is hard to believe that he had not rendered Antigonus material service. His high profile in the campaign of Gaza four years later (Diod. 19.69.1, 82.1: τῶν ὅλων μέτοχος) tells in the same direction (contra Heckel, *Marshals*, 325).

35. Arr. 6.17.3, 27.3; Strabo 15.2.4 (721), 11 (725). Eudamus began his journey from the north and presumably followed the valley of the Zhob to the vicinity of Quetta, avoiding the Bolan pass, Craterus' most likely route.

36. On this there are two traditions, one the so-called "Alexander vulgate" (Diod. 17.93.2-4; Curt. 9.2.2-9; *Metz Epitome* 68-69; Plut. *Al.* 62.2-3) and the other based on Hieronymus of Cardia (Diod. 2.37.2-3; 18.6.1-2). They are consistent and credible. It is unlikely in the extreme that Alexander could have spent eight months or more in the Punjab without receiving reports of the political conditions to the east. Indeed it is hard to avoid the conclusion that most of the literature on the dating of Megasthenes has been influenced by the violently sceptical arguments of Niese, Tarn, and Kienast (see now T. R. Robinson, "Alexander and the Ganges. The text of Diodorus XVIII.6.2." *AHB* 7 [1993]: 84-99), which discount any detailed knowledge of the Ganges plain in the time of Alexander. If one accepts that postulate, it does become difficult to accept an embassy to the Mauryan court before Chandragupta impinged on the Indus lands. However, the sceptical case, as I argue elsewhere, is grossly overstated and involves a series of cumulative improbabilities. Alexander must have known of the Ganges and the Nanda kingdom, and that knowledge was surely exploited by his Successors.

The evidence that we have suggests a relatively early date for Megasthenes, a decade and a half before the canonical date. His embassy to Porus and Chandragupta is best placed around 319/18 B.C. and the publication of his *Indica* seems to belong around 310, before the loss of the Indus lands to Chandragupta. The mystique of Alexander's campaign in India was still potent. We have seen how his estimation of Porus reflects court propaganda. The same is the case with Megasthenes' treatment of Alexander's expedition. It is clear from all sources that Megasthenes represented the Macedonian conquest as unique.³⁷ The Indians had been conquered once before, by Alexander's ancestor, Dionysus, and the peoples he conquered lived in primitive simplicity. It was Dionysus who gave them their institutions, taught them military science and instituted the line of 153 kings with a span of over 6,000 years.³⁸ No subsequent invasion was successful. Even Heracles was the local manifestation of the Greek deity, not an intrusive invader from the west.³⁹ Accordingly, Alexander's invasion was the first successful invasion, of a people that had never been conquered or conquered others. This version underscores the achievement of Alexander to an extraordinary degree, and it enhanced the credentials of his Successors who supported him in the conquest. Seleucus, who commanded the hypaspists at the battle of the Hydaspes,⁴⁰ emphasized his services for Alexander⁴¹—services that his rival, Antigonos, could not emulate—and the same could have been said for Silyrtius. The implicit claims nicely fit the propaganda of the first years of the Successors.

Megasthenes did not merely stress the uniqueness of Alexander's conquests. He went into some detail about the conquerors of the past who had either avoided India or failed in their imperial ambitions. Strabo and Arrian give overlapping digests of his exposition, which provided extensive and curious information about world conquerors. Arrian's version is more elegant and structured, dealing with the conquests of Sesostris of Egypt and Idanthyrus of Scythia, both of whom were well known from his stylistic model, Herodotus,⁴² and he contrasts their avoidance of an Indian campaign

37. Arr. *Ind.* 5.4, 9.11–12; Strabo 15.1.6 (686) = *FGrH* 715 F 11; Diod. 2.29.4 = *FGrH* 715 F 4. The fullest discussion of this "Urgeschichte" is now Zambrini, "Gli Indika," 784–801 (n. 1 above).

38. Arr. *Ind.* 7.2–8.3; Diod. 2.38.3–7. On the royal genealogy see *Ind.* 9.9.

39. Arr. *Ind.* 8.4–6 (cf. 5.13); Diod. 2.39.1.

40. Arr. *Anab.* 5.13.1, 4.16.3 (see my commentary ad locc.). The career of Seleucus is very scantily attested in the sources for Alexander's reign, but his leading role at the Hydaspes cannot be doubted—and as a hypaspist commander in India he must have taken part in most of the more arduous actions, notably the siege of Sangala (Arr. *Anab.* 5.22.6, 23.7) and the Malli campaign (Arr. *Anab.* 6.6.1, 9.4). See also Heckel, *Marshals*, 255.

41. Diod. 19.55.3, 56.1–2.

42. Arr. *Ind.* 5.5–6. For the conquests of Sesostris see Hdt. 2.103.1, and for Idanthyrus Hdt. 4.76.6, 120.3.126, 127.1. Idanthyrus is a surprise, for Herodotus gives no hint that this Scythian king ventured far from his kingdom, and he belongs in the datable historical context of the reign of Darius I. Possibly Megasthenes embroidered the tradition of a Scythian counter-attack (Hdt. 6.40.1) and elevated Idanthyrus into a world conqueror. However, Arrian re-uses this material in his *Parthica* (F 1.3 [Roos] = *FGrH* 156 F 30a), where Sesostris and "Iandysus" are depicted as near-contemporaries, responsible for the eastern migration of the Parthians. It seems most likely that for Megasthenes Idanthyrus was an early eponym of the sixth-century Scythian king, who repaid Sesostris' conquest of Scythia by overrunning Egypt itself. Pompeius Trogus was to use a variant of the tradition, naming the Scythian king "Tanaus" or "Tanausis" (after the local river): he repaid the invasion of Sesostris "Vezosis" by attacking Egypt (Iord. *Get.* 6; Justin 2.3.8–16, cf. 1.2.6 = Trogus F 36 [Seel]).

with Semiramis who planned conquest but died before she could implement her plans. All these examples recur in shortened form in Strabo, who adds two bizarre names to the catalogue, that of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar and—still more startling—that of the seventh-century Ethiopian dynast, Taharka.⁴³ What is particularly surprising about these latter conquerors is that Megasthenes portrayed them as conquerors of the west. Taharka pressed as far as the Straits of Gibraltar, as did Nebuchadnezzar, who eclipsed Heracles himself,⁴⁴ subjugating much of Libya and Spain and transplanting populations from Spain to the east of the Black Sea (hence the Iberi of the Caucasus). This catalogue was regarded as eccentric even in antiquity, and we can hardly reconstruct the process by which Nebuchadnezzar and Taharka, neither of whom set foot west of Egypt, were made to emulate and eclipse Heracles. However, one suspects that something is owed to the fertile myth-making at Alexander's court. Precedents were eagerly researched and manufactured. Callisthenes had Perseus and Heracles both visit the oasis of Siwah, while Nearchus recorded that Alexander was told (and believed) that both Semiramis and Cyrus had come to grief in the Gedrosian desert.⁴⁵ The so-called Last Plans, Alexander's projects of conquest in the far west, will have engendered similar fabrications, and it is significant that the two areas singled out for attention in our sources, North Africa to the Straits and the Black Sea,⁴⁶ are the scenes of the conquests of Megasthenes' Nebuchadnezzar. What scraps of previous history or local tradition were utilized or perverted we cannot guess. Even the Babylonian Berossus did not take Nebuchadnezzar's conquests east of the Levant,⁴⁷ and one cannot begin to trace the process whereby the historical Taharka, who lost Egypt to the Assyrians,⁴⁸ was transformed into a world conqueror. However, the influence of Alexander is clear enough. His advisers were able to create quasi-historical figures who provided a record of achievement for him to emulate and surpass.

Megasthenes seems to have been writing under the direct impact of the mythologizing at Alexander's court, but he used the material to give a special impact to Alexander's conquest. He accepted the false tradition of the

43. Strabo 15.1.6 (687) = *FGrH* 715 F 11a. Megasthenes' characterisation of Nebuchadnezzar was unique and famous: Josephus (*AJ* 10.227: *Ap.* 1.144) enlarged upon it, as did the later author, Abydenus (*FGrH* 687 F 6.11).

44. Ναβοκοδόροσoron δὲ τὸν παρὰ Χαλδαίοις εὐδοκμήσαντα Ἡρακλέους μᾶλλον καὶ ἔως Στηλῶν ἐλάσαι· μέχρι δὴ δεῦρο καὶ Τεάρκωνα ἀφικέσθαι. The same information on Nebuchadnezzar is provided by Josephus and Abydenus (see previous note).

45. Strabo 17.1.43 (814) = Callisthenes, *FGrH* 124 F 14a; Arr. *Anab.* 6.24.1–3, Strabo 15.1.5 (686), 15.2.5 (722) = Nearchus, *FGrH* 133 F3.

46. The two areas of conquest are juxtaposed in Arr. *Anab.* 7.1.1–3. For other references to North Africa see Diod. 18.4.4; Plut. *Al.* 68.1; Curt. 10.1.17–19; and for the Black Sea see Arr. *Anab.* 4.15.6. On the historicity and historical context of the Last Plans see A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander* (Oxford, 1988), 185–211.

47. Joseph *Ap.* 1.132–37 = Berossus, *FGrH* 680 F 8. Berossus documented Nebuchadnezzar's conquests (in his father's reign) in Syria, Judaea, and Egypt. Despite the unhistorical fiction of the Egyptian campaign he ignored Megasthenes' saga of a western crusade. See in general A. Kuhrt, "Berossus' *Babyloniaka* and Seleucid Rule in Babylonia," in *Hellenism in the East*, ed. A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White (London, 1987), 32–56, esp. 56.

48. The most convenient account of the reign of Taharka is now that of T. G. H. James, in *CAH*², vol. 3, part 2 (1991), 695–702.

western conquests of Nebuchadnezzar and Taharka but employed it to enhance the mystique of India. The west was under their sway, but they did not venture to attack the far east, nor did Sesostris and Idanthyrus. Even Semiramis was denied entry into the Indian lands in defiance of the famous romantic tradition of Ctesias,⁴⁹ and the Persians, it was alleged, never extended their conquests into the Indus valley.⁵⁰ The latter was a flat contravention of historical fact, fact probably acknowledged at the Macedonian court, and according to Strabo Megasthenes was well aware of the eccentricity of his narrative, "bidding his readers disbelieve the old stories about the Indians."⁵¹ For him the Indians were literally a race apart, civilized and educated by Dionysus, and endowed with a rich and warlike populace that had deterred the great conquerors of the past. The conquest was therefore a unique achievement that underscored the qualities of Alexander and all who had served with him in India.

There is certainly propaganda here, but it is not, as has sometimes been argued, propaganda against the Ptolemaic court,⁵² where Hecataeus of Abdera made the traditional figure of Sesostris (Sesoosis) into a world conqueror, going further than Alexander himself, to the Ganges and the eastern ocean.⁵³ In Megasthenes there is no diminution of Sesostris. His conquests have exactly the same ambit as they have in Herodotus, Europe, and the north, and they are matched by the fictional achievements of Taharka, whose supposed conquests in Europe and the west would have been useful propaganda for the Ptolemies. If there is a connection between Megasthenes and Hecataeus, it is in the reverse direction: Megasthenes' list of conquerors and his extension of Nebuchadnezzar's victories to the west inspired Hecataeus to take Sesostris to the far east. The stress on the uniqueness of Alexander's Indian conquests better fits the struggle against Antigonos. Then the claim of the satraps threatened with deposition by Antigonos was that they held office by right, by royal authority, and by virtue of their services for Alexander. For Megasthenes the supreme achievement was the invasion of India, in which Sibyrtius, Seleucus, and for that matter, Ptolemy, had played prominent roles, but Antigonos was notable for his absence. Once more 310 would seem a suitable vantage point for the composition of the *Indica*. If, as seems most likely, Megasthenes had moved to the court of Seleucus, where Clement attests him, his emphasis on the Indian conquest was well suited to the claims of his master. It may be added that the traditional dating around 300 makes nonsense of Megasthenes' emphasis on the

49. Diod. 2.16.4–19.10 = Ctesias, *FGrH* 688 F 1.

50. Strabo 15.1.6 (687)—the Persians sent for the "Hydracae" as mercenaries but did not campaign in India, coming close only when Cyrus was marching against the Massagetae. So too Arr. *Ind.* 9.10.

51. Strabo 15.1.6: κελεύων ἀπιστεῖν ταῖς ἀρχαίαις περὶ Ἰνδωνιστορίαις.

52. See particularly the formative article by Oswyn Murray, "Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture," *CQ* 22 (1972): 200–213, esp. 206–7: "Hecataeus' work provoked immediate competition from the other successor kingdoms. . . . The work (Megasthenes) wrote in the first decade of the third century . . . was a direct reply to Hecataeus." This theory is developed by Zambrini, "Gli Indika," 785–97.

53. Diod. 1.55.3–4 = *FGrH* 264 F 25. On Hecataeus' picture of the conquering Sesoosis see Oswyn Murray, "Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship," *JEA* 56 (1970): 141–71, esp. 162–64, and for the myth in general A. B. Lloyd, "Nationalist Propaganda in Hellenistic Egypt," *Historia* 31 (1982): 33–55, esp. 37–40.

uniqueness of Alexander's campaign. It literally annihilated Seleucus' own excursion across the Indus and his clash of arms with Chandragupta.⁵⁴ If one's patron had recently fought in India, it was hardly tactful to insist that Alexander was the only Westerner to have penetrated there with an army.

The political orientation of Megasthenes seems best fitted to the first two decades after Alexander's death, and what survives of his picture of Indian society in my opinion suits a time before the extension of the Mauryan empire to the Indus. Chandragupta was then the most powerful ruler in India, but not the only king, or even the paramount king. That would seem to be implicit in Arrian's qualification at *Ind.* 5.3. Chandragupta cannot have been conceived as the greatest king of all time, for Arrian immediately adds that Porus was greater. He is represented as the greatest king of his day, but hardly unique; he coexisted with other, lesser rulers. The body of the surviving fragments is consistent. The physical size of Chandragupta's capital is emphasized, as are the huge numbers of his army,⁵⁵ but it is not implied that he was sole ruler in India. Rather he is defined as king of the Prasii, whom Megasthenes regarded as the most powerful people in India,⁵⁶ but they were only one of 118 tribes. Other kings existed elsewhere, as did autonomous states.

For our purposes the most illuminating passage is the famous section on the composition of Indian society, selectively and independently summarized by Arrian, Strabo, and Diodorus.⁵⁷ Megasthenes described a hierarchical sevenfold division of society into rigid, hereditary groupings, some of which correspond to castes and others to more specialized subdivisions. It is not a description of the caste system as such, as is now almost universally acknowledged, but an analysis of social specialization and hereditary exclusiveness, conducted from the viewpoint of a Greek observer thinking in Greek categories and affected by a tradition of Greek philosophical speculation.⁵⁸ The seven divisions are almost certainly an artificial construct by Megasthenes, but it is a rationalization of observed phenomena, in which the wider castes of *kṣatriyas* (warriors) and *śūdras* (cultivators) are juxtaposed with the narrower categories of royal overseers and counsellors. The raw material seems based on observation, but it is subsumed to Greek categories and terminology.

54. See above, p. 114 with n. 14. It might be argued that Megasthenes' picture of the Indians as a "freedom-loving" people justified Seleucus' decision to leave them in peace (S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis* [London, 1993], 97)—under the despotism of the not very freedom-loving Chandragupta. Even so, the precedent of Alexander did not encourage relinquishing the Indian lands, and highlighting the unique glory of his conquest made Seleucus' cession of his eastern provinces appear pusillanimous by comparison.

55. Arr. *Ind.* 10.6 = *FGrH* 715 F 18a; Strabo 15.1.36 (702): Pataliputra; Strabo 15.1.53 (709) = *FGrH* 715 F 32 (Chandragupta's camp comprised 400,000 souls—obviously including non-combatants).

56. Strabo 15.1.36 (702), adding that Chandragupta followed tradition, and took the name of his capital as his regal nomenclature.

57. Arr. *Ind.* 11.1–12.9; Strabo 15.1.39–41, 45–49 = *FGrH* 715 F 19; Diod. 2.40.1–41.5. The passage has provoked endless discussions, the most important of which are Stein, *Megasthenes*, 119–232 (n. 3 above); B. C. J. Timmer, *Megasthenes en de indische maatschappij* (Amsterdam, 1930); B. Breloer, "Megasthenes über die indische Stadtverwaltung," *ZDMG* 89 (1935): 40–67; Zambrini, "Gli Indika," 802–27; R. Thapar, *The Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta and New Delhi, 1987), 32–60.

58. The most extreme advocate of this position is Zambrini, "Gli Indika," who treats Megasthenes' picture of society as virtually a theoretical construct, with little or no relation to observed facts.

What matters for the present argument is the political setting of Megasthenes' discussion. For Strabo the seven divisions are located in a monarchy. There is a single reference to a multiplicity of kings that probably denotes the historical totality of Indian kings.⁵⁹ Otherwise he refers in general to a singular king. However, both Arrian and Diodorus suggest a more complex social context. Both mention kings in the plural, and both contrast royal administration with the government of autonomous communities.⁶⁰ There can be no doubt that this distinction was already found in Megasthenes. Strabo has simplified and adapted the exposition, as he does elsewhere,⁶¹ and he has excised the references to autonomous communities as superfluous. The other two derivatives make it plain that Megasthenes saw the Indian communities as falling in two categories, those autonomous and those subject to the jurisdiction of kings.

The presence of autonomous communities, or cities (πόλεις), as Megasthenes termed them, has been conceived as a problem in the period of the Mauryan empire, and it has been suggested that they are "the projection of a Seleucid political reality."⁶² In a sense they are. The freedom of the Greek cities was a hotly disputed issue throughout the period of the Successors, and every regime included communities that were accorded autonomy by their current overlords. However, I do not see that Megasthenes' picture of Indian society is either a reflection of Seleucid practice or a prescription for an ideal dispensation. Megasthenes is stressing the parallels between royal and autonomous regimes. Both have the same social structure, the same civic administration, except that the local authorities play the role of the kings. In the Seleucid ambit it could not be claimed that the autonomous cities were a mirror image of the royal court, nor would it have been sensible to make such a prescription. Megasthenes' picture of autonomous communities coexisting with royal administrations reflects rather the state of western India at the time of Alexander's conquests. At that time there was a host of minor dynasts, termed kings or hyparchs according to the predilection of the source, men like Taxiles, Abisares, Sopeithes, and Porus himself. There were also autonomous peoples, most notably the Malli and Oxydracae domiciled along the Hydraotes (Rāvi).⁶³ These people are

59. Strabo 15.1.39 (703): κοινῇ δὲ τοὺς βασιλέας κατὰ τὴν μεγάλην λεγομένην σύνοδον. This is best taken as a timeless reference to the general practice at the Great Synod: the Indian kings at whatever period have used philosophers as advisers at the state sacrifices. In the next sentence Strabo observes that each new year the philosophers assemble at the gates of the king (τῷ βασιλεῖ συνεθόντες), which would seem a general allusion to the king of the Prasii. On the other hand one might argue that the Synod attracted a number of dynasts, and in each kingdom the philosophers congregated around their king at the new year (cf. Arr. *Ind.* 12.5: ἀπαγγέλλουσι τῷ βασιλεῖ, ὥναπερ βασιλεύονται with Diod. 2.41.3: ἀπαγγέλλουσι τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν).

60. Arr. *Ind.* 11.9: τοῖς τε βασιλεῦσι καὶ τῇσι πόλεσιν, ὅσα αὐτόνομοι; cf. *Ind.* 12.5–6. Diod. 2.41.3: ἀπαγγέλλουσι τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν· ἐὰν δ' ἡ πόλις αὐτῶν ἀβασίλευτος ᾖ, τοῖς ἄρχουσιν; cf. 2.40.3, 5, 41.4.

61. On Strabo's adaptation of sources see particularly W. Aly, "Jacoby, Die fragmente der griechischen Historiker," *GGA* 189 (1927): 272–78; Bosworth, *From Arrian*, 41–46 (n. 46 above).

62. So Zambrini, "Gli Indika," 824. Thapar, *Mauryas*, 47 evinces similar sentiments, but allows some basis for the theory in Indian reality: "Although a familiar feature of Hellenistic Asia Minor [self-governing cities] are not referred to in Indian sources, unless Megasthenes had in mind a vague notion of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* each of which had an urban centre as its nucleus."

63. Arr. *Anab.* 6.6.1, 11.3, 14.1–2. They also fall under the rubric of Republics (*gaṇa-saṅghas*) in Pāṇini: cf. V. S. Agrawala, *India as known to Pāṇini* (Lucknow, 1953), 453; Mookerji, *Chandragupta*, 23–24 (n. 10 above).

attested east of the Hydaspes, and the main group, the Cathaei, gave Alexander some of his most arduous fighting in the Punjab.⁶⁴ They are described as tribes (ἔθνη) rather than cities, but Arrian makes it clear that the autonomous Malli were divided into distinct πόλεις, one of which, it seems, had its own Brahman administration.⁶⁵ And the most famous autonomous community, Nysa in modern Nuristan, is explicitly described as a πόλις.⁶⁶

Megasthenes, then, appears to have been aware of independent, self-governing communities, comparable to those subjugated by Alexander. Other than Nysa, these groups did not preserve their independence under Alexander. They were absorbed into the expanding realm of Porus east of the Hydaspes. However, there were geographical limits to Alexander's conquests, and there is every reason to believe that conditions east of the Hyphasis mirrored those to the west; autonomous communities and petty kingdoms existed side by side. This was the territory of the Yaudhēyas, then and later attested as a major autonomous people,⁶⁷ and it would seem perverse to deny that Megasthenes had experience of self-governing communities in his long journey to Pāṭaliputra.

The same applies to the plurality of kings, attested in Arrian and Diodorus. India between Alexander and the creation of the Mauryan empire boasted a large number of independent rulers. Even where Alexander had established satrapal rule, he countenanced the continuation of local rulers, who could be described as kings. Abisares of Kashmir was confirmed in his territories and subjected to tribute, retaining his title of king.⁶⁸ The same applied to Taxiles and, above all, Porus, both of whom are termed kings in our records of the Babylon and Triparadeisus settlements.⁶⁹ What is more, even in the territory ceded to Porus' control, there were dynasts who allied themselves with Alexander and were confirmed in their regimes, in particular Phegeus and the two rulers named Sopeithes, both of whom were within easy access for a traveller on the road to Pāṭaliputra.⁷⁰ If Megas-

64. Arr. *Anab.* 5.22.1–2; cf. 5.20.6, 21.5, 24.6–8, 6.15.1 (see my commentary ad locc.).

65. Arr. *Anab.* 6.9.4; cf. 6.6.2, 4, 6; 8.1, 4, 7–8. See also 6.14.1, where Arrian describes the official overtures of the autonomous ἔθνος of the Oxydracae (Kśudraka). The people was represented by its authorities, and the first to be mentioned are “the leaders of the cities” (οἱ ἡγεμόνες τῶν πόλεων). The cities themselves could be to some degree regarded as governmental entities.

66. Arr. *Anab.* 5.1.1, 1.3, 2.3; *Ind.* 1.5.

67. Pāṇini 5.3.117; cf. Agrawala, *India*, 445.

68. Arr. *Anab.* 5.29.5 (for Abisares' regal status see 5.8.3; Diod. 17.87.2; Curt. 10.1.21).

69. Diod. 18.3.2, 39.6; Arr. *Succ.* F 1.36 (Roos) = *FGrH* 156 F 9. By and large all sources but Arrian refer to Taxiles as king in his own right. Arrian tends to term him “hyparch,” his usual designation of the independent rulers of the Cophen valley and India proper (cf. *Anab.* 4.22.6, 5.8.2, etc.), perhaps symbolizing the fact that Alexander saw them as traditional vassals of the Achaemenids. Porus' status is less clear-cut, but Arrian does claim that he was eventually declared king of the lands east of the Hydaspes (*Anab.* 6.2.1). For Plutarch (*Al.* 60.15) he ruled his kingdom with the title of satrap. That may have been the situation after the battle. When he expanded his domains, Alexander confirmed his royal status.

70. On Phegeus see Diod. 17.93.1–2; Curt. 9.1.36, and for the eastern Sopeithes, whose realms lay close to the Hyphasis (Beas) see Diod. 17.91.7; Curt. 9.24, 35; Strabo 15.1.30 (699); *Metz Epitome* 66. Another dynast named Sopeithes, boasting a palace (βασιλεία) on the lower Hydaspes, is attested in Arrian (*Anab.* 6.2.2); his domains probably extended westwards into the Great Salt Range (Strabo 15.1.30 [700]). I discuss the problems of identity and topography in my forthcoming commentary. For the moment my concern is only to prove that there was a plurality of rulers in the Indus region whom a Greek visitor around 319/18 might legitimately term kings.

thenes did visit the Punjab and the Ganges valley around 319/18, then the political system he will have encountered will have corresponded to his analysis of Indian society—a plurality of local rulers and autonomous communities, falling under the vague control of Porus west of the Hyphasis and dominated in the central Gangetic valley by the growing kingdom of Chandragupta. There were two great dynasts at either extremity of India and between them a colorful blend of autonomous peoples and minor kings. The picture, fragmentary though it is, is definitely not that of a large, centralized empire, rather a varied, pluralist pattern of government. In the west Porus held the detritus of Alexander's conquests, which were rapidly losing any semblance of satrapal control, and in the east Chandragupta had established himself on the throne at Pāṭaliputra and was poised to enlarge his regime.

Megasthenes' account of India was invaluable in that it was an eyewitness account of a period of transition, before the full expansion of the Mauryan empire. He documented the wealth and military power which won Chandragupta his conquests, but the India he described was still the India of the Alexander period, variegated, disunited and ripe for conquest by the strongest power. The Mauryan empire in its developed form would have been described by later writers, Daimachus of Plataea, who visited the court of Chandragupta's successor, Bindusāra, and the mysterious Dionysius who represented Ptolemy Philadelphus before Aśoka.⁷¹ Unfortunately these authors are little more than names. For Daimachus we have a few characteristically bilious criticisms by Eratosthenes, focusing on geographical data, and a handful of reports of curiosities. As for Dionysius there is no certain attestation of the content of his work. The Greek descriptions of the Mauryan empire at its acme are, then, irretrievably lost. Megasthenes is the sole source to have made an impact upon the extant literary tradition, and he belongs in the world of the Alexander historians—a contemporary of men like Onesicritus and Nearchus, writing at much the same time as them and perhaps independently of them. His experience ranged more widely than theirs, but the society he described was the same.⁷²

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71. Testimonia and fragments (in Dionysius' case non-existent) are collected in Jacoby, *FGrH* 716–17. For brief discussion see K. Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Helsinki, 1989), 99–101.

72. I am grateful to Professor Richard A. Billows for his pertinent criticisms, which have materially improved this paper.