

The Making of Roman India. By GRANT PARKER. Greek Culture in the Roman World. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xiii + 357. Cloth, \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-521-85834-2.

In his *Preface*, Parker asks: What did India mean to Romans of the imperial period? He sifts through literary, material and documentary evidence for answers, paying heed to the different contexts in which that information is preserved. Specifically, P. examines references to India in Latin and Greek texts of the imperial period in light of the social processes whereby the notion of India gained its exotic features, including evidence of the role of the Persian empire and Alexander's expedition. Three social contexts receive special attention: trade in luxury commodities; political discourse of empire and its limits; and India's status as a place of special knowledge, embodied in the "naked philosophers." Roman ideas about India ranged from the specific and concrete to the wildly fantastic; such variety must be accounted for. The afterlife of these ideas into late antiquity and beyond is also considered.

The book is aimed at both classicists and those interested in ancient India or the history of orientalism, and is broken into three parts: (1) Creation of a Discourse, (2) Features of a Discourse, and (3) Contexts of a Discourse. Chapter 1, "Achaemenid India and Alexander," outlines the features of Greek Indography from the earliest texts to the late Hellenistic world of the 1st century BC. The extent of Achaemenid power is studied from the perspectives of four ancient writers: Scylax and the King of Kings; Hecataeus' cosmos; Herodotus and the satrapies; and Marvels and lies of Ctesias. Next, Alexander and his aftermath are considered in four categories: A conqueror and his historians; Megasthenes and Chandragupta's court; Bactrians and "Indo-Greeks"; and Mapping India: from the bematists to Eratosthenes. P. asserts that the body of information about India reached new levels of complexity with Alexander's eastern expedition. Part 1 concludes with an analysis of the origin and process of the making of Roman India.

Chapter 2, "India Described," considers contexts of Indography in historiography, geography, natural history, romance and mime. Marvels and monsters characterized Hellenistic accounts of India, even more so than the earliest accounts. This marvel-based view was typical of Greek descriptions of the ends of the earth generally, and in many respects was not unique to India. Also considered are Indian pasts, profusion, social divisions, gender relations, space and race, and catalogue or system. Under modes of literary description, eight tropes that recur in Indographic texts are discussed: the *Pe-*

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riplus form, omission and abbreviation, authors and authority, utopianism and barbarism, narrative space, analogy, fragments, and closure. P. concludes that the recurrence of the marvel, that hallmark of Hellenistic literature, in sources of the Augustan period and beyond is a major theme in this Indographic discourse. Was knowledge about India gathered as a product or a process? P. asserts that despite all it was a process, though a slow one.

Chapter 3, "India Depicted," considers how India was represented in four motifs of Greek and Roman art: the marvel (from the earliest Greek accounts); the Triumph of Bacchus (India is represented as a part in several sarcophagus reliefs from Antonine and Severan times); personification (e.g., the great hunt mosaic of the Villa Filosofiana in Sicily, and a silver platter from Lampsacus now in the National Museum in Istanbul); and the *Christian topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes. Seen as a typology of Indias, the analysis that emerges from this survey may be understood as a set of contexts within which India was perceived by Greeks and Romans.

Chapter 4, "Commodities," explores what India meant to Romans, by examining the discourse about specific goods. Focusing on roughly the late 1st century BC to the 6th century AD, the chapter traces the consumption of Indian goods, or of supposed Indian goods, in the Roman world. Considering objects of exchange and the materiality of distance, P. examines spices and aromatics, precious stones, fabrics, slaves, animals and craft goods. He draws on literary texts (e.g., Pliny's *Natural History*, Strabo's *Geography*, Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography*, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*), documentary sources, inscriptions, excavations and archaeological finds to assess the social meanings of luxury goods from India and the Roman taste for them. The figure of Alexander is particularly crucial to the Roman image of India (cf. Plin. *Nat.* 12.21).

Chapter 5, "Empire," looks at the notion that India marked the ends of the world, a sentiment that abounds in texts from the Augustan age and later. Was that world the inhabited world or the Roman Empire specifically? P. answers that the definition of empire is difficult enough, and that the notion of imperialism raises particular problems. The *Pax Romana* and *Res Gestae* helped define Augustus' discourse about empire after the Battle of Actium. In Propertius' *Elegies* (2.10/13–18; 3.4.1–4) we find variations on the theme of the grandeur of Rome's conquests, including India. Horace's *Odes* (1.12.53–7; 4.14.41–52) shows the same principles at work. But after serious consideration (by Mommsen, Badian and others) it is difficult

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to point to any Roman military interest in India. The aging Trajan may have had designs on India, but his imperial sense of the place was intensely concerned with Alexander's conquests. Nonetheless, according to P., India was in fact part of the Roman empire—a region that could and would be conquered. It was India, more than anything, that reminded Romans that Rome had expanded from agricultural village to world empire. Indeed, Alexander's visit to the ends of the earth gave the Romans, and the western Middle Ages, eminently reusable ways of thinking about that expansion.

In Chapter 6, "Wisdom," P. asserts that holiness, along with the related concept of wisdom, is among the main areas for consideration in any survey of Greek and Roman ideas about India. P. posits that Indian wisdom is a kind of mystified knowledge central to the concept of the holiness of certain Indians. A major theme is India as a destination of religious travel. Travelers to India came from the west and east. Fa-Hsien, a Chinese pilgrim, visited India's Buddhist sites between 399–414 AD. These visits reflect India's status as a site of spirituality. Christian missionary activity in India, another kind of religious travel, also took place. At this point P. wisely considers "wisdoms alien and other" with a discussion of metamorphoses of *sophia* (with Pythagoras as a point of comparison); elements of wisdom; and Jews, Chaldaeans and Indians. He follows up with an analysis of, e.g., Brahmans and Gymnosophists, and then turns to the "diffusion of *paideia*: Apollonius of Tyana" for Philostratus' testimony about Indian holiness. Apollonius' eastward pilgrimage to the wise teachers of ancient societies invites comparison to Herodotus' visit to the Egyptian priests. P. asserts that Philostratus presents Pythagoras as a recipient and transmitter of Egyptian and, ultimately, Indian wisdom.

To conclude, four broad phases of Indography can be identified: the Achaemenid phase, when Greek images of India were formed in close relation to the Iranian world; Alexander's expedition and its immediate aftermath, fleshing out the picture of India that had already emerged; the Roman phase, in which writers appealed to their Hellenistic and earlier predecessors, while the *Pax Romana* made possible the long-distance exchange of luxury goods from exotic places; and the Christian phase, resting heavily on an acceptance of the Augustan discourse about empire. How much of this is due to Alexander's expedition and the later *Alexander Romance*? Imperial memories of Alexander's visit to India account for the attitudes of the vast majority of Romans, who did not themselves visit the subcontinent, and Alexander could not have been far from imperial

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minds during the political revolution of the late 1st century BC that in turn made possible the greater awareness of India in the 1st century AD. Alexander's own concern with India seems inspired by the memory of the Achaemenid kings whose achievements he desired to extend and fulfill. Roman imperial desires, in turn, were fulfilled by virtue of the memory of Alexander in India.

P. makes full use of primary and secondary sources. With impeccable scholarship, he analyzes and challenges the historical data on the subject, while inviting us to engage in the ongoing dialogue about India in Roman thought.

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