

# The discovery of India by the Greeks

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## THE DISCOVERY OF INDIA BY THE GREEKS\*

J. W. DE JONG

One of the first records of India is to be found in the inscriptions of the rulers of the Achaemenid empire in Persia. Darius who reigned from 522 to 485 enumerates among the countries which belonged to his empire Gadāra and Hidu. Gadāra is Gandhāra in North-West India and Hidu is the Indus Valley. The Persian occupation of these countries lasted until the Achaemenid empire was conquered by Alexander the Great. This long occupation of the Western part of India has left almost no traces in the literature of both countries. Nevertheless, Persian influences on Indian culture can be demonstrated clearly. As their official chancellery language the Persians from Egypt to India used Aramaic. The Aramaic alphabet was adopted in India with a few changes under the name *kharoṣṭhī* alphabet. The name of this script is rather obscure and has given rise to many speculations. Perhaps it means 'script written on the skin of donkeys'<sup>1</sup>. This script must have been used already during the reigns of the Achaemenid kings, but the oldest Indian inscriptions date from the middle of the third century B. C. It remained in use in North-West India and in Central Asia for several centuries. Not only was the Aramaic alphabet used in India, but also the Aramaic language, the chancellery language of the Achaemenid empire. When in the middle of the third century countries in Western India, which previously belonged to the Achaemenid empire, became part of the Indian Mauryan empire, inscriptions were written in Aramaic for the benefit of the Iranian population. Fragments of three inscriptions, the last of which has been discovered only recently in 1958 in present-day Afghanistan, prove that for a considerable time after the fall of the Achaemenid empire Aramaic continued to be used<sup>2</sup>.

\* Lecture given at the Queensland University, Brisbane, in September 1966.

1. J. Przyluski, *Le nom de l'écriture kharoṣṭhī*, *JRAS*, 1930, pp. 43-45.

2. Cf. E. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, I, Louvain, 1958, pp. 791-794; D. Schlumberger, L. Robert, A. Dupont-Sommer, E. Benveniste, *Une bilingue gréco-ara-*

One of the most famous historical events is Alexander's expedition to India. After the defeat of Darius III, the last of the Achaemenids, on the first of October 331, Alexander set out to conquer the Eastern part of the Achaemenid empire. Continuing eastwards, he crossed the Indus in 326 but, although he defeated the Indian king Porus, he was soon forced to turn back, because his soldiers refused to go further. The countries conquered in India by Alexander did not long remain under Greek rule. Alexander died in 323 and the last of his generals left the North-West in 317. Seleukos I Nicator tried to reconquer the Indian provinces, but the Indian king Candragupta, who established the empire of the Mauryas, defended himself successfully against the attack of the Greeks and in 305 Seleukos was forced to surrender Western India and a great part of present-day Afghanistan to Candragupta. Alexander's expedition brought the Greeks in close contact with the Indians and a better knowledge of India was gained by the Greeks. However, this does not imply that before Alexander nothing was known about India.

The Achaemenid emperors did not only rule for almost two centuries over parts of India, but the Greek colonies in Asia Minor also belonged to their empire since 546, when Cyrus defeated Croesus, the King of Lydia. At the court of the Achaemenids Indians and Greeks must have come into contact with each other. The emperors employed foreigners in their service and in 519 the Greek Skylax was sent to India by Darius to explore the course of the Indus<sup>3</sup>. One of the Greek historians, a predecessor of Herodotus, Hekataios of Miletus, who lived about 500 B. C., wrote on the geography and the peoples of India, as is known from small fragments of his work which have been preserved. Another Greek author who wrote about India was the Greek physician Ktesias who for a long time was the physician of Artaxerxes II

méenne d'Asoka, *JA*, 1958, pp. 1-48; L. Alsdorf, *Zu den Asoka-Inschriften*, *Indologentagung* 1959, Göttingen, 1960, pp. 58-66.

3. Herodotus, IV. 44.

(404–358)<sup>4</sup>. His work is mainly known from extracts which have been transmitted by Photios in the 9th century. Ktesias' information on India is not very useful, because it is limited to a number of fables. However, it is possible that the lost parts of his writings contained more interesting and reliable information. Not only individual Greeks came into contact with India and Indians, but also large groups of Greeks who were forced to settle in Bactria by king Darius, who had deported them from Cyrenaica in Northern Africa<sup>5</sup>. There in Bactria, called Bactriana in antiquity, which is situated on the upper course of the Oxus river (Amu Daria), these Greeks lived at the gate of India. Bactria is separated from North-West India by the Hindu Kush mountains, but the Khyber Pass and other passes make it possible to travel from Bactria to India. Herodotus, who tells us about the Greeks who were deported to Bactria does not know much about India except some fabulous stories<sup>6</sup>. We must mention one of these stories because it is probably the most widespread one among the ancient writers, the story of the gold-digging ants. Herodotus tells us that the Indians obtained gold in the desert from ants bigger than a fox who as they burrow underground throw up gold-sand in heaps. When during the hottest part of the day the heat drives the ants underground, the Indians fill bags with this sand<sup>7</sup>. In reality the Indian gold probably comes from the washings of the Lena and Amur in Siberia<sup>8</sup>, but the legend of the gold-digging ants is well-known, not only in the ancient world but even in Tibet and Mongolia<sup>9</sup>. The legend may have originated in India because the Sanskrit word *pipīlika* means both ant and the gold collected by ants<sup>10</sup>. After Herodotus

4. F. Jacoby, Ktesias, No. 1, R.-E., XI, 1922, cols. 2032–73; R. Henry, *Ctésias, la Perse, l'Inde*, Brussels, 1947; Truesdell S. Brown, The Reliability of Megasthenes, *AJPh*, LXXVI, 1955, pp. 23–33.

5. Herodotus, IV. 204. 6. Herodotus, III. 97–106. 7. Herodotus, III. 102–105.

8. W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 105–108.

9. B. Laufer, Die Sage von den goldgrabenden Ameisen, *T'oung Pao*, IX, 1908, pp. 429–452.

10. Mahābhārata II, 1860; Poona edition II, 48.4: te vai pipīlikaṃ nāma varadattaṃ pipīlikaḥ/jātarūpaṃ droṇameyam ahārṣuḥ puñjaśo nṛpāḥ //.



many classical authors tell this story, which must have made a great impression on them<sup>11</sup>. Herodotus tells also a story about the Arimaspians who lived somewhere North of the Issedones where gold was guarded by one-eyed men and griffins<sup>12</sup>. This story was also told by Ktesias<sup>13</sup>. Probably this story was first told by the poet Aristeas whose poem on the Arimaspians, the Arimaspea, is mentioned by Herodotus (IV. 14).

Although before Alexander's time India was not unknown to the Greeks, much more information about India resulted from Alexander's expedition and its consequences. A source of information which became accessible to the Greeks after the Achaemenid empire were the archives of the Persian administration. A Greek admiral of king Seleukos, Patrokles, who is quoted by Strabo and Pliny, relates that Alexander was well informed about India and had made use of descriptions made for him by people who knew the country well. As a special favour Patrokles was allowed to see these descriptions. The authors were probably Persian officials who had entered the service of the Greek conqueror. However, nothing remains of these descriptions and they are nowhere quoted by later authors. We are in a much better position as regards the writings due to members of Alexander's expedition or to scholars who noted down the accounts of eye-witnesses. One of the most important is admiral Nearchos who brought back Alexander's fleet from the mouth of the Indus to the Persian Gulf. He wrote a report of his travels in India which gives much information on the geography of India. His work has been used by an author of the 2nd century A. D., Arrian, in his *Indike*. Another member of Alexander's expedition whose writings are quoted by later authors as Strabo is Onesikritos<sup>14</sup>.

11. J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenés and Arrian; being a translation of the fragments of the Indika of Megasthenés collected by Dr. Schwanbeck and of the first part of the Indika of Arrian*. Revised second edition by R.C. Majumdar, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 95-96 note; *Megasthenis Indica, Fragmenta collegit, commentationem et indices addidit E.A. Schwanbeck*, Bonnae, 1846, p. 72.

12. Herodotus, IV. 13, 27; III. 116. 13. Photius, *Indica*, 12; cf. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

14. Truesdell S. Brown, *Onesikritos. A Study in Hellenistic Historiography*, U. of California Press, 1949.

Interesting is his report of his attempts to discuss with the γυμνοσοφισταί 'the naked philosophers' as they are called. He tells us that it was impossible to understand fully their ideas because he had to make use of three successive interpreters<sup>15</sup>. One of these 'naked philosophers' made a great impression on the Greek philosopher Pyrrho who had accompanied his master Anaxarchos, one of the many scholars who took part in Alexander's expedition. Kalanos is mentioned by many classical authors. Diodorus (XVII. 107) tells that he was held in honour and esteem by Alexander. When Kalanos was 73, he resolved to die because he was afflicted with an illness which became daily more and more burdensome. He requested the king to prepare a great funeral pyre for him and to order his servants to set fire to it as soon as he ascended it. Alexander tried to persuade him to abandon this plan, but when he found that all his remonstrances were unavailing, he consented to render the service asked. Orders were accordingly given and when the pyre was ready, the whole army watched the extraordinary spectacle. Then Kalanos, following the rules prescribed by his philosophy, stepped with unflinching courage on the summit of the pyre and perished in the flames. Some of the spectators condemned the man for his madness, others for the vanity shown in his act of hardihood, while some admired his spirit and contempt of death. From this account we learn that the Greeks were much impressed by this religious suicide. A French scholar, Léon Robin<sup>16</sup>, considers it possible that Kalanos' example inspired Pyrrho with a new idea of life. Pyrrho (± 360–270) is the founder of the sceptical school. If Kalanos really influenced him in this way, then he must be considered as one of the fathers of pyrrhonism. It is a pity that we do not know about Kalanos from Indian sources. The name Kalanos was given to him by the Greeks because he greeted those whom he met with *kale* which is the Indian equivalent of χαίρειν

15. Strabo, XV. 1.64; cf. B.C.J. Timmer, *Megasthenes en de indische maatschappij*, Amsterdam, 1930, p. 45.

16. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident*, Paris, 1952, p. 10, n. 6.

(Plutarchus, Alex. LXV) as is told in Plutarch's Life of Alexander. Indeed *kalyāṇam* and not *kale* is used in Sanskrit as a form of salute, just as Greek χαῖρε. According to Plutarch his real name was Sphines, but we do not know what Indian name this represents. Later the Greeks had another opportunity to witness the suicide of an Indian sage by burning. Strabo (XV. 1. 73) tells us that an Indian embassy to Emperor Augustus comprised an Indian Zarmanochegas who leapt upon the pyre with a laugh, his naked body anointed, wearing only a loin-cloth. His ashes were put in a monument which bore the following inscription: 'Here lies Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargaosa who immortalised himself in accordance with the ancestral customs of India<sup>17</sup>.'

Of all the classical authors who have written on India, the most important is undoubtedly Megasthenes, who visited India not long after Alexander's expedition. His work is so important because much of it has been preserved in quotations and extracts to be found in later writings. It is possible that better accounts of India were written by other authors, but they have not been transmitted. Megasthenes is the best classical source for India and his account has been quoted over and over again. It is of course a great loss that his work is only known indirectly. It is often difficult to know if a certain fragment has to be attributed to Megasthenes and if his words have been repeated literally or not. Scholars have studied these problems without coming to definite results. The complexity of the transmission of Megasthenes' work appears already in the fact that no less than fifteen classical authors contain fragments which can be attributed with more or less certainty to Megasthenes. The most important of these fifteen authors are the following three:

Diodorus of Sicily who lived in the first century B. C. and who wrote a history (*Bibliotheca historica*) in 40 books, of which only Books I to V and XI to XX are extant. They contain Alexander's campaign in India, a

17. *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*, Paris, 1937, pp. 211-212. Cassius Dio (LIV.9, 10) calls him Zarmaros, cf. K. Ziegler, *Zarmaros, R.-E.*, IX A, 1967, col. 2329.

general description of India and some notes on India. The second is Arrian whose *Indike* we have already mentioned. He also wrote a book on Alexander's expedition, called *Anabasis Alexandri*, for which he made use of the works of Aristoboulos, one of Alexander's generals, and of Ptolemaeus, another of Alexander's generals who later became king of Egypt in 305. Ptolemaeus wrote a book on Alexander's campaigns. The third is the famous Greek geographer Strabo (64 B. C.—19 A. D.), author of the *Geographica*. Strabo was very critical of Megasthenes. In this he is preceded by another Greek geographer Eratosthenes, who lived in the third century B. C. and who was also the author of a work entitled *Geographica*, of which only fragments are extant. Strabo (II. 1. 9) says: 'Generally speaking, the men who have hitherto written on the affairs of India were a set of liars — Deimachos holds the first place in the list. Megasthenes comes next; while Onesikritos and Nearchos, with others of the same class, manage to stammer out a few words (of truth). Of this we became the more convinced whilst writing the history of Alexander. No faith whatever can be placed in Deimachos and Megasthenes. They coined the fables concerning men with ears large enough to sleep in, men without any mouths, without noses, with only one eye, with spider legs, and with fingers bent backward. They renewed Homer's fables concerning the battles of the cranes and pygmies, and asserted the latter to be three spans high. They told of ants digging for gold, and Pans with wedge-shaped heads, of serpents swallowing down oxen and stags, horn and all — meantime, as Eratosthenes has observed, accusing each other of falsehood. Both of these men were sent as ambassador to Palimbothra — Megasthenes to Sandrokottos, Deimachos to Allitrochades his son —, and such are the notes of their residence abroad, which, I know not why, they thought fit to leave.'<sup>18</sup>

It is impossible to know if Strabo is right in saying that Deimachos was a greater liar than Megasthenes. Of his work *Indika* only tiny frag-

18. McCrindle, *op.cit.*, pp. 18–19.

ments remain<sup>19</sup>. Strabo tells us in the passage quoted above that he was sent as an ambassador to king Allitrochades. This name corresponds to Sanskrit Amitraghāta 'the killer of enemies'<sup>20</sup>. He is the successor of king Candragupta to whom Megasthenes was sent, and Indian sources name him Bindusāra. It would have been instructive to compare the works of Megasthenes and Deimachos, who visited India at short intervals. Probably, however, Deimachos' account did not add much to what had been told already by Megasthenes and for this reason later authors have not paid any attention to his work. Very little is known about Megasthenes himself. Both Strabo and Arrian tell that he has been sent to king Sandrokottos, but neither of them gives any details about the date of his voyage or the length of his stay in the capital of king Candragupta Pātaliputra – Παλιβοθηρα in the Greek sources. According to Arrian<sup>21</sup> Megasthenes stayed with Sibyrtios, the satrap of Arachosia, and said that he had gone often to Sandrakottos, the king of India. This information has given rise to many discussions. The German scholar Schwanbeck who was the first to collect and edit the fragments of Megasthenes does not admit that Megasthenes travelled several times from Arachosia, a satrapy situated to the West of the Indus river, because this is not mentioned anywhere<sup>22</sup>. However, all the information concerning Megasthenes is so scarce, that this is no valid argument. There is no reason to doubt the information given by Arrian who was certainly able to use Megasthenes' work directly. If Megasthenes lived at the capital of Arachosia which bordered on India, it is quite possible that he visited India several times on behalf of Sibyrtios, the satrap of Arachosia. Sibyrtios became satrap of Arachosia in 323, but it is not known how long he was satrap. Seleukos Nikator, who tried to reconquer the Indian provinces, accepted in 305 a treaty with Candragupta in which

19. C. et Th. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicum Graecorum*, II, Paris, 1848, pp. 440-441.

20. According to J. Charpentier (Amitraghāta, *JRAS*, 1928, pp. 132-135) Allitrochades (= Amitrochades) corresponds to Sanskrit Amitrakhāda.

21. *Anab.* V.6.2.

22. *Op.cit.*, p. 23; cf. Timmer, *op.cit.*, p. 6.



he surrendered these territories to him. The same treaty made provisions for an ἐπιγαμία 'right of intermarriage' between the two states. It is not entirely clear what was meant by this ἐπιγαμία. According to some scholars it implied a marriage between members of the Greek and Indian royal families, according to others intermarriage between Greeks and Indians. If the second interpretation is right, this would be of very great importance, because it would imply that after 305 Greeks and Indians entered into very close contact with each other. In India marriages are dependent on the caste system. Greeks could only be allowed to marry Indians if a caste was given to them so that they ceased to be barbarians, *mleccha*'s, who were excluded from marriage with Indians<sup>23</sup>. It is quite possible that if such far-reaching agreements were made between the Indians and the Greeks, they must have been preceded by lengthy negotiations. Perhaps it was for this purpose that Megasthenes was sent to the capital of the Indians. If so, he must have been there before the conclusion of the treaty in 305. This, of course, is only a hypothesis but, in any case, the political relations between the Indians and the Greeks must have resulted in the exchange of ambassadors, one of whom was perhaps our Megasthenes.

From Megasthenes' work it is evident that he visited Palibothra, the capital of Sandrakottos. His description of it<sup>24</sup> is quoted by Strabo (XV. 1. 36): 'At the meeting of the Ganges and another river is situated Palibothra, a city eighty stadia in length and fifteen in breadth. It is of the shape of a parallelogram, and is girded with a wooden wall, pierced with loopholes for the discharge of arrows. It has a ditch in front for defence and for receiving the sewage of the city.' Arrian adds to this that 'the wall was crowned with 570 towers and had four-and-sixty gates'. Excavations have brought to light parts of the wooden wall mentioned by Megasthenes<sup>25</sup>. In this case it has been possible to verify the

23. J. Filliozat, *L'Inde classique*, I, Paris, 1947, § 395.

24. Cf. Timmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 290-297.

25. Cf. Timmer, *op.cit.*, p. 294, n.1.



information given by Megasthenes. In most cases, however, this is very difficult or impossible. Megasthenes' book contains information on many subjects: the geography of India, Indian animals, fabulous tribes, castes, administration, philosophers, manners, religion, etc. In many instances Megasthenes recorded what he had observed himself. As he was at the royal court he was able to give much information on the life of the king. The following quotation from Strabo (XV. 1. 55)<sup>26</sup> is extremely interesting: 'The care of the king's person is entrusted to women, who also are bought from their parents. The guards and the rest of the soldiery attend outside the gates. A woman who kills the king when drunk becomes the wife of his successor. The sons succeed the father. The king may not sleep during the daytime, and by night he is obliged to change his couch from time to time, with a view to defeat plots against his life. The king leaves his palace not only in time of war, but also for the purpose of judging causes. He then remains in court for the whole day, without allowing the business to be interrupted, even though the hour arrives when he must needs attend to his person – that is, when he is to be rubbed with cylinders of wood. He continues hearing cases while the friction, which is performed by four attendants, is still proceeding. Another purpose for which he leaves his palace is to offer sacrifice; a third is to go to the chase, for which he departs in Bacchanalian fashion. Crowds of women surround him, and outside of this circle spearmen are ranged. The road is marked off with ropes, and it is death, for man and woman alike, to pass within the ropes. Men with drums and gongs lead the procession. The king hunts in the enclosures and shoots arrows from a platform. At his side stand two or three armed women. If he hunts in the open grounds he shoots from the back of an elephant. Of the women, some are in chariots, some on horses, and some even on elephants, and they are equipped with weapons of every kind, as if they were going on a campaign.' It is evident that Megasthenes' account of the activities of the king is based upon his own ob-

26. Cf. McCrindle, *op.cit.*, pp. 70–71; Timmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 281–289.

servations during his stay in the capital. In general it agrees with Indian texts with a few exceptions. No Indian source tells us that a woman who kills the king when drunk becomes the wife of his successor. This, of course, is something which Megasthenes cannot have observed himself, but must be based on oral information which was probably misunderstood. Other typical details, however, as for instance the fact that the king was rubbed with cylinders of wood while he is acting as judge, must have been witnessed by Megasthenes. Although they are not confirmed by Indian sources, there is no reason to doubt their reliability. One of the problems in checking the truthfulness of Megasthenes' information is connected with the fact that there are no Indian texts of which it can be said with certainty that they describe Indian society at the time of Megasthenes. Much information on Indian society is found in the *dharmasāstras*, but their usefulness is diminished by the fact that they give an ideal image of society. Moreover, although they contain older elements, they belong to a later period. One extremely important source on ancient Indian society is a work which was discovered only in 1909, the *Arthasāstra*. This work is attributed to Kauṭilya or Cāṇakya or Viṣṇugupta, the minister of king Candragupta. When this work was first discovered, it was considered to be of great importance for a better knowledge of Indian society in Mauryan times. Soon, however, doubts were raised concerning the attribution of this work to the minister of Candragupta. Several scholars, especially Otto Stein (*Megasthenes und Kauṭilya*, Wien, 1921) and Bernhard Breloer (*Das Grundeigentum in Indien*, Bonn, 1927; *Altindisches Privatrecht bei Megasthenes und Kautalya*, Bonn, 1928; *Finanzverwaltung und Wirtschaftsführung*, Leipzig, 1934) have carefully compared Megasthenes' work with the *Arthasāstra*. The considerable differences between these two works have been explained as being due to Megasthenes' misrepresentations of Indian facts. However, other scholars tried to prove that the *Arthasāstra* was not written 300 B. C., but much later and that, in the second place, it does not describe the actual state of affairs even at a lat-

er date but also gives an ideal image, although very different from that given by the *dharmaśāstras*. Since 1909 many studies have been published on the *Arthaśāstra*. It has been translated into English, German, Japanese and Russian<sup>27</sup>. At present, probably hardly any scholar still maintains that the *Arthaśāstra* was written about 300 B. C. by a minister of Candragupta. There is more or less a general consensus that its final composition is several centuries later, although it contains older elements. This conclusion is rather unsatisfactory as long as we do not know which elements are older and in how far they relate actual historical conditions or not. This disappointing result of almost sixty years of intensive study of this work by eminent scholars in India and Europe is bound up with the elusive nature of the great majority of Indian sources. Of so many of them the time of composition is unknown. Many works contain older and newer elements. Finally, they are in general not based immediately upon actual conditions but project an image which reflects the ideals of the society rather than its practices. For these reasons, Megasthenes cannot be condemned by comparing him with Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*. His testimony becomes more valuable insofar as no absolute reliance can be placed in Kauṭilya as a source for the Indian society in 300 B. C. Recently, scholars tend indeed to be more inclined to believe Megasthenes' statements than immediately after the discovery of the *Arthaśāstra*. In 1930 a Dutch scholar, Barbara Timmer, published a very detailed study on Megasthenes and the Indian society<sup>28</sup>, in which she carefully compared Megasthenes' information on Indian customs and Indian society with Indian sources. She concludes that Megasthenes was an excellent eye-witness without prejudice and love of sensationalism. However, he was too rationalistic to understand

27. *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, Translated by R. Shamasastri, Bangalore, 1915; R.P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*. Part II. An English translation. University of Bombay, 1963; *Das Altindische Buch vom Welt- und Staatsleben*, Übers. von J.J. Meyer, Leipzig, 1925-1926; Nakano Gishō (Tr.), *Kautiruya Jitsuriron*, Tokyo, 1936; *Artaśastra ili nauka politiki*, Moskva, Leningrad, 1959.

28. Cf. note 15.

the meaning of Indian customs and a lack of critical sense prevented him from rating at its proper value the information given to him by Indian informants. His work is of value, because it gives us realistic details absent in Indian sources, but it does not contain a reliable picture of Indian society as a whole. I believe that Miss Timmer's evaluation of the value of Megasthenes' work is very fair. Where he speaks as an eye-witness of things which can be observed and described by an outsider, his testimony must be considered as reliable. As soon as he gives his own interpretation or relies on oral information, one must be very careful. This does not mean that even when he tells unbelievable stories Megasthenes is inventing something.

Strabo, as we have seen, accused Megasthenes of telling fables about men with ears large enough to sleep in and about other fabulous tribes and races. Schwanbeck has drawn attention to the fact that the Indian epic *Mahābhārata* mentions men with very large ears (p. 66). Megasthenes shows his lack of critical sense in repeating these stories as true fact, but he reports only what he must have heard from Indian informants. According to Miss Timmer, Megasthenes' book is based upon his own observations and upon oral information, but she believes that he did not use earlier Greek sources. However, we find in his book again the story of the gold-digging ants which had been told already by Herodotus<sup>29</sup>. This story must have been popular in Persia and Megasthenes has probably heard it before he went to India. It is therefore not impossible that Megasthenes received some of his information from earlier sources or from stories told by Persians and Greeks. For the greater part, however, his information undoubtedly stems from his voyages to India.

It is not possible to go into any details as to Megasthenes' account. The fragments of his work have been translated into English by J. W. McCrindle<sup>30</sup>. For a critical study of his information on Indian so-

29. Cf. note 7.

30. *Indian Antiquary*, 1876-1877; Calcutta, 1877, <sup>2</sup>1926; Revised Second Edition by R.C. Majumdar, Calcutta, 1960, cf. note 11.

ciety one must refer to Miss Timmer's book. Recently a Swedish scholar, Allan Dahlquist, has studied Megasthenes' information on Indian Religion<sup>31</sup>, but the value of his book is diminished by the fact that his theories cannot be accepted<sup>32</sup>. When read in the light of the Indian sources, Megasthenes' account adds typical details which partly corroborate Indian evidence, and partly contain new information which is sometimes extremely interesting. As an example I should like to mention Megasthenes' account of the philosophers whom he divided into Brachmanes and Sarmanes<sup>33</sup>. This account which is quoted by Strabo (XV. 1. 58-60) is too long to quote here. Indian sources give much information on the brāhmaṇas and the śramaṇas, the ascetics. According to these sources the life of a brāhmaṇa is divided into four periods: pupil, householder, ascetic and sannyaṣin. In the third period he lives as an ascetic in the woods, studies the Upaniṣads and performs sacrifices. Let us quote from Megasthenes' account the short passages on these ascetics, who are called *vānaprasthas* in Sanskrit: 'Of the Sarmanes Megasthenes tells us that those who are held in most honour are called the ὕλβιοι. They live in the woods, where they subsist on leaves of trees and wild fruits, and wear garments from the bark of trees. They abstain from sexual intercourse and from wine. They communicate with the kings who consult them by messengers regarding the causes of things, and who, through them, worship and supplicate the deity.' The first part of this account agrees entirely with the Indian sources and ὕλβιος 'living in the woods' corresponds very well to Sanskrit *vānaprastha*. However, these sources do not tell us that the king consulted the *vānaprasthas* but this is quite believable, because we know that ascetics were held in high esteem by the kings. They were considered to possess knowledge not accessible to ordinary humans as a result of their ascetic practices.

31. A. Dahlquist, *Megasthenes and Indian Religion*, Uppsala, 1962.

32. Cf. the reviews by Sven Hartman (*Temenos*, I, 1965, pp. 55-64) and by F.B.J. Kuiper (*IJ*, XI, 1969, pp. 142-146).

33. Fragment XLI; Timmer, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-106.



Since 1846 when Schwanbeck edited the fragments of Megasthenes, he has been much studied by many classical and Indological scholars. The value of his information has been judged in different ways. I have mentioned already Miss Timmer's opinion which dates from 1930. One of the recent classical scholars who have studied 'The Reliability of Megasthenes' is Truesdell S. Brown<sup>34</sup> who arrives more or less at the same conclusions as Miss Timmer but who stresses the fact that Megasthenes has used Greek sources. A Russian Indologist who recently published several studies on the Mauryan empire and made much use of Megasthenes, G.M. Bongard-Levin, has the following remarks to make as to Megasthenes' reliability: 'Megasthenes correctly described certain actually existing ancient Indian governmental and social institutions and succeeded in grasping the specific administrative features of the Mauryan empire. This allows us to have greater confidence in other statements by Megasthenes that so far have no parallels in ancient Indian records. Further investigations will provide "defence" for more than one assertion by Megasthenes<sup>35</sup>.' Let us take leave of Megasthenes on this optimistic note and hope that a comprehensive up-to-date study of him will be undertaken by competent Indological scholars.

Megasthenes is undoubtedly the most important classical writer on India. Other authors do not add very much of importance. One will find a good collection of the writings of classical authors in a book *The Classical Accounts of India*, published in 1960 by R. C. Majumdar with the intention to bring together in one volume all the classical texts that throw any light on Indian history and culture. Majumdar has excluded the accounts of Ktesias and the stories of fabulous races, or of birds and animals and sundry other topics of this nature. However, by including only the useful classical texts, Majumdar has not enabled us to see the

34. *AJPh*, LXXVI, 1955, pp. 18-33.

35. G.M. Bongard-Levin, *Megasthenes' 'Indica' and the Inscriptions of Aśoka*, Moscow, 1960, pp. 17-18; also published in *Indian studies, Past and present*, 1961, no. 3; cf. also his: *Nekotorye osobennosti gosudarstvennogo ustrojstva imperii Maur'ev, Istorija i Kultura drevnej Indii*, Moskva, 1963, pp. 18-19.



Greek sources in their proper perspective because they give both useful and useless information. Of the later authors, a special place must be given to two geographical works which give much interesting information on India. The first is the *Periplus maris erythraei* 'The Circumnavigation of the Erythrean Sea' which was probably written in the middle of the first century A.D. by an Egyptian Greek. The Erythrean Sea is the name given by the Greeks and Romans to the Indian Ocean including the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The Periplus gives an account of the trade of the settlements on the coast of this ocean and many interesting details of the voyage, partly along the coast and partly across the sea<sup>36</sup>. The second work is the Geography (Γεωγραφικὴ ὑφήγησις) of the famous astronomer and geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus, an Alexandrian Greek who lived in the second century A.D. His work describes in eight books the world as it was known at that time. The seventh book is devoted to India<sup>37</sup>. His work has remained the standard geographical source until the 16th century<sup>38</sup>.

Megasthenes was sent as envoy to king Candragupta, the founder of the Mauryan empire, and Deimachos to his son Bindusāra. The most famous king of the Mauryan dynasty is Aśoka, the son of Bindusāra, who reigned in the middle of the third century over a kingdom which extended over almost the entire Indian subcontinent. History does not record any Greek envoy to Aśoka. However, Aśoka must have been in contact with the Greeks as we know from his own edicts. Aśoka's edicts on rocks and pillars are the oldest epigraphical monuments of India. In one of these edicts Aśoka proclaims to have conquered through Dharma 'as far away as at the distance of six hundred Yojanas, where the Yavana king named Antiyoka is ruling and where, beyond the king-

36. Περίπλους τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς Θαλάσσης ed. by Hjalmar Frisk, Göteborg, 1927.

37. *La Géographie de Ptolémée. L'Inde* (VII, 1-4), texte établi par Louis Renou, Paris, 1925; W.H. Stahl, Ptolemy's Geography, a Select Bibliography, *Bull. of the New York Public Library*, LV, 1951, pp. 419-432, 484-495, 554-564, 604-614; LVI, 1952, pp. 18-41, 84-96.

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

dom of the said Antiyoka, four other kings named Turamāya, Antikini, Makā and Alikasundara are also ruling' <sup>39</sup>. The five Hellenic kings mentioned by Aśoka are Antiochus II Theos of Syria, Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Magas of Cyrene and Alexander of Epirus. This edict probably means that Aśoka has sent messengers to these kings to proclaim the *dharma*. It shows that relations between the Mauryan empire and the Hellenic kingdoms existed at that time. Aśoka's empire comprised a large territory West of the Indus, where inscriptions of Aśoka have been found in the Aramaic language for the benefit of the Iranian population. In the same territory lived many Greeks who had become subjects of the Mauryan empire. In 1958 in Qandahār in present-day Afghanistan an inscription was found which contained an edict of Aśoka in Aramaic and in Greek <sup>40</sup>. This is certainly one of the most sensational discoveries in the field of both Indian and Greek epigraphy. This Greek inscription is the most Eastern Greek inscription and the first Indian inscription in the Greek language, other than the legends on coins. Quite recently at the end of 1963 at the same place another inscription bearing an Aśokan edict in Greek has been found <sup>41</sup>. These inscriptions prove that Aśoka's empire comprised the capital of ancient Arachosia which is situated at a considerable distance west of the Indus. More important is the fact that the Greek population must have been quite considerable and that Aśoka must have made use of the services of Greeks for the administration of this region. At that time there were many possibilities for the Indians to learn about Greek civilization and for the Greeks to learn about Indian civilization.

During the reign of Aśoka's successors the Mauryan empire declined and in 187 B. C. it ceased to exist. Greek invaders made use of the declining power of the Mauryan empire to conquer parts of Western India. About 250 B. C. Bactria had become an independent Greek king-

39. Transl. D.C. Sircar, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, Delhi, 1957, p. 54.

40. Cf. note 2.

41. E. Benveniste, *Edits d'Asoka en traduction grecque*, *JA*, 1964, pp. 137-157.

dom which was recognized in 206 by Antiochos, the Seleucid king. The most famous of the Indo-Greek kings is Menander who ruled – about the middle of the second century B. C. – from the Kabul valley in the west to the Ravi in the east, and from the Swat valley in the north to northern Arachosia in the south<sup>42</sup>. Menander is well-known to the Indians, because his discussions with the philosopher Nāgasena are recorded in a well-known Pāli text, the *Milindapañha* ‘The Questions of Milinda’. According to this text Milinda = Menander was born not far from Alasanda and 200 yojanas from Sāgala<sup>43</sup>. A Chinese translation says that Alasanda is 2000 yojanas from Sāgala. French scholars have identified Alasanda with Alexandria in Egypt<sup>44</sup>, but other scholars with Alexandria near Kabul<sup>45</sup>. *The Questions of Milinda* have been studied by many scholars. Tarn had supposed that at its basis there is a Greek work in which Menander questioned an invented figure, the Buddhist sage Nāgasena<sup>46</sup>. There is no evidence to prove this hypothesis. Tarn and Lamotte believe that Menander was not converted to Buddhism<sup>47</sup> but other scholars are firmly convinced that Menander has become a Buddhist<sup>48</sup>. However this may be, it is certainly true that Menander must have been in close contact with his Indian subjects. For the relations between Indians and Greeks the history of the Indo-Greek kingdoms is of great importance. Their history has been brilliantly described by

42. A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, Oxford, 1957, p. 97.

43. *The Milindapañho*, ed. V. Trenckner, London, 1880, p. 82.

44. Cf. P. Pelliot, *Les noms propres dans les traductions chinoises du Milindapañha*, *JA*, 1914, pp. 413–417; P. Demiéville, *Les versions chinoises du Milindapañha*, *BEFEO*, XXIX, 1924, p. 168, n. 1; Sylvain Lévi, *Alexandre et Alexandrie dans les documents indiens*, *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*, pp. 417–418.

45. Cf. E.J. Rapson, *Cambridge History of India*, I, 1922, p. 550; W.W. Tarn, *op.cit.*, pp. 420–422, 460–462; I.B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions*, Vol. I, London, 1963, p. 114, n. 2. Alexandria near Kabul is the Alexandria of the Caucasus in the Greek sources (cf. Tarn, *op.cit.*, p. 49) but with Caucasus the Indian Caucasus is meant.

46. Tarn, *op.cit.*, p. 434.

47. Tarn, *op.cit.*, pp. 268–269; Lamotte, *op.cit.*, p. 467.

48. Cf. A. Foucher, *A propos de la conversion au bouddhisme du roi indo-grec Ménandre*, *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Tome XLIII, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, Paris, 1943, pp. 260–295; Narain, *op.cit.*, pp. 98–99.

W. W. Tarn in his famous book *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge, 1938, 21951). Not all of Tarn's ideas have been accepted by later scholars. Tarn attributed great conquests to the Greek king Demetrios and stated that his name is mentioned in Indian texts under different forms: Dattāmitra in the *Mahābhārata*<sup>49</sup>, Dharmamita in the *Yugapurāṇa*<sup>50</sup>. Whereas Alexander's expedition seems to have left practically no traces in Indian literature<sup>51</sup>, Demetrios would have been better remembered. However, E.M. Johnston and A.K. Narain in his excellent book on *The Indo-Greeks* have shown that there is not enough evidence to prove that Demetrios is mentioned in Indian texts<sup>52</sup>. The history of the Indo-Greek kingdoms has been reconstructed by Narain mainly with the help of numismatic evidence, for the information given by classical and Indian texts is very scarce and difficult to interpret. His work is the latest comprehensive study of this interesting chapter of Indian history which is of such great importance for the mutual relations of Indian and Greek civilizations. About the middle of the first century B. C. the last Indo-Greek king, Hermaeus, died and the Greeks were supplanted by the Scythians, the Śakas of the Indian sources. Their ruling families merged with the mingled racial stocks of North-West India, until all traces of them were lost<sup>53</sup>.

From the end of the 6th century when Greeks were deported to Bactria until the fall of the last independent Greek kingdom in the middle of the first century B. C., Indians and Greeks were in close contact with

49. Lamotte (*op.cit.*, p. 412) follows Tarn without taking into account Johnston's critical remarks (cf. note 52) and Tarn's reaction (cf. *JRAS*, 1940, p. 179). See also Tarn, *op.cit.*, sec. ed., p. 526: 'It must now be taken that the *Mahābhārata* does not mention Demetrias, Demetrius, or Apollodotus.'

50. Tarn. *op.cit.*, pp. 118, 178, 378, 454; Lamotte, *op.cit.*, p. 411.

51. Sylvain Lévi, *Alexandre et Alexandrie dans les documents indiens*, *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*, 1937, pp. 413-423; E. Lamotte, *Alexandre et le Bouddhisme*, *BEFEO*, XLIV, 1947-1950, pp. 147-162.

52. E.M. Johnston, *Demetrias in Sind?*, *JRAS*, 1939, pp. 217-240; Narain, *op.cit.*, pp. 39-45; Tarn, *op.cit.*, second edition pp. 526 and 536.

53. Cf. Narain, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

each other. However, Greek influence was certainly not limited only to this period. The Parthian empire which lasted until 226 A. D. was not averse to Hellenistic culture. Only with the establishment of the Sassanid empire reaction against foreign ideas became strong and Zoroastrianism was restored as a kind of national religion. It is not excluded that even during the time of the Sassanid empire (226–651) Greek learning was still received in India. According to some scholars this is the case in the field of astronomy. A famous Indian astronomer Varāhamihira wrote about 500 a work *Pañcasiddhāntikā* which testifies to a strong Greek influence. Terms like *anaphā*, *sunaphā* and *durudharā* which indicate zodiacal positions of the planets are Greek words: ἀναφή, συναφή and δορυφορία<sup>54</sup>. Varāhamihira has used older Indian works which partly reflect the concepts of the second century Greek astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus. According to Sylvain Lévi<sup>55</sup> Greek astronomy must have been borrowed by the Indians between 350 and 450. It seems safer to be less definite and to ascribe the borrowing to the period 200 to 450<sup>56</sup>. Probably most of the borrowings from Greek culture must have taken place before this time. I am afraid that it is impossible to discuss in any detail Greek influence on India and Indian influence on the Greeks. The bibliography on this subject is extensive and the number of unsolved problems considerable. In the 19th century scholars tended to exaggerate Greek influence. Greece was considered as the birth-place of civilization and any resemblance between Indian and Greek culture was immediately considered to be an indication of Greek influence on India. Recent scholars have been more modest in their claims<sup>57</sup>. At the same time they have been able to use more relia-

54. L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Dynasties et histoire de l'Inde*, Paris, 1935, p. 301. See also James Burgess, Note on Hindu astronomy and the history of our knowledge of it, *JRAS*, 1893, pp. 746–748. However, ἀναφή is not recorded in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*.

55. *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*, p. 201.

56. G. Thibaut, *Astronomie, Astrologie und Mathematik*, Strassburg, 1899, pp. 43–50.

57. For bibliographical details see Lamotte, *op.cit.*, p. 469, n. 1.



ble materials. The existence of Greek cities near the Indian frontier and in territories which during certain periods were under Indian rule have resulted in the presence of Greek coins. The oldest have only a Greek text, later ones are bilingual: Greek and Indian. The word δραχμή is used in India: *dramma* (*drakhma*)<sup>58</sup>. The coins which were distributed over a large area were perhaps the greatest propagandists for Greek art as reflected in the images on the coins. Greek coins must have been used already before Alexander by the Greeks settled to the North-West of India by the Achaemenid emperors<sup>59</sup>. In art and architecture the influence of the Greeks is undeniable. The famous Buddha statues from Gandhāra immediately remind one of the statues of Apollo. In the first centuries after the death of the Buddha, he was never represented as a human figure. About the beginning of the Christian era the first images of the Buddha appear in the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhāra. Many scholars have tried to prove that the first image of the Buddha is due to Greek influence<sup>60</sup>. At present there is considerable doubt because pure Indian representations of the Buddha appear about the same time in Mathurā. Even if the idea of representing the Buddha as a human figure is not exclusively due to Greek inspiration, it remains a fact that the Gandhāra images of the Buddha show in many points a very great influence of Greek art. In its turn, the art of Gandhāra influenced medieval Chinese Buddhist art and Japanese Buddhist art.

It is not known when the Indians started to write. The oldest inscriptions date from the middle of the third century. One of the two oldest Indian scripts derives from the Aramaic script, i. e. the Kharoṣṭhī script. Some scholars believed that Alexander's invasion introduced and propagated writing in India<sup>61</sup>. However, it is possible that long be-

58. Cf. Sten Konow, *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 6, p. 255; H.W. Bailey, *Irano-Indica* II, *BSOAS*, XIII, 1949, p. 129; L. Renou, *Jakob Wackernagel, Altindische Grammatik*, Introduction générale, Göttingen, 1957, p. 108.

59. Cf. Narain, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-5.

60. Cf. Lamotte, *op.cit.*, pp. 480-481.

61. *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi*, p. 200.



fore that time Greek coins circulated in India. In Pāṇini, the Indian grammarian, who lived perhaps about 400 B.C., occurs the word *yavanānī*, an adjective of the feminine gender 'the Greek one' (IV. 1. 49). Pāṇini knew script<sup>62</sup> but the word for script used by him derives from Old Persian *dipi*<sup>63</sup>. However, it is possible that *yavanānī* refers to the Greek script<sup>64</sup>. Certainly derived from the Greek are the terms for ink, reed-pen and book: *melā* (μέλαν), *kalama*, *kalamā* (κάλαμος) and *pustaka* (πύξιον)<sup>65</sup>. Another word very close to *yavanānī*: *yavanikā*, has provoked many discussions. *Yavanikā* is the curtain against which Indian plays were acted. The use of this word has suggested the idea that the Indian drama derives from the Greek drama. At present this theory is generally rejected, but it may be possible that the *yavanikā* stems from the Greek mime, because Greek mimes were acted against a curtain<sup>66</sup>.

There are many analogies between Greek and Indian medicine, but it is difficult to indicate the origin of these common elements. It seems that especially in surgery Greek influence was considerable<sup>67</sup>. In many other fields scholars have discussed the possibility of mutual influences for instance in philosophy, geometry and literature, but the evidence is not sufficient to prove this. In the fields of arts and astronomy Greek influence is obvious, in other fields it is probable but difficult to demonstrate. As the Greeks have influenced the Indians, so have the Indians influenced the Greeks. In the first place, of course, the Greeks in India were subject to Indian influence. We know from inscriptions that Greeks were converted to Buddhism and to Hinduism. Indian influence

62. Cf. *lipikara* in III.2.21.

63. Cf. Renou, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

64. Cf. V.S. Agrawala, *India as known to Pāṇini*, University of Lucknow, 1953, pp. 312 and 465-466; Renou, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

65. Cf. A. Weber, *Die Griechen in Indien*, *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1890, pp. 911-914; Tarn, *op.cit.*, p. 376, n. 2; Renou, *op.cit.*, pp. 32 and 108.

66. Tarn, *op.cit.*, p. 383; M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, III, Leipzig, 1922, pp. 174-180.

67. J. Jolly, *Medicin*, Strassburg, 1901, p. 19.

even reached Greece itself. Filliozat has proved that Indian medicaments were known to the Greeks. The *Corpus Hippocraticum*, a collection of treatises on medicine named after the famous Greek physician Hippokrates, mentions *πέπερι* which is the Greek form of the Indian word *pippali* 'pepper'<sup>68</sup>. Pepper was first exported from India in the period of the Indo-Greek kingdoms<sup>69</sup>. Pepper seems to have been known in Greece first as a medical drug and only later as a luxury for gourmets. In later Greek medical treatises more Indian medicaments are known<sup>70</sup>. A few other Indian products reached Greece but this proves only the existence of trade relations and not of cultural contacts.

I believe that it is no exaggeration to say that up to modern times no culture has exercised so much influence on India as the Greek culture. There are two main reasons to explain this important phenomenon. In the first place the Greeks had in many respects developed a richer culture than the Indians when they came into contact with them. Secondly, at that time Indian culture was still in its formative stage and open to foreign influences. In later times when Hinduism was firmly established, India closed itself to foreign influences which could only affect the fringe of Indian society and culture. The Indians received much more from the Greeks than the Greeks from the Indians. This is in striking contrast with the relations between the Indians and the Chinese. Together with Buddhism, the Chinese received many elements of Indian culture and exercised themselves but very little influence on the Indians.

Indian influence also reached Greece in much later times via the Sassanid empire and their Arab successors. The two most famous examples are the spread of Indian fables to Europe and the adoption by the church of the Buddha as a Catholic saint.

One of the most famous collections of stories in India is the

68. J. Filliozat, *La doctrine classique de la médecine indienne*, Paris, 1949, pp. 211-212.

69. Tarn, *op.cit.*, pp. 370-371.

70. J. Jolly, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

*Pañcatantra*. As early as the 11th century, this work reached Europe, and before 1600 it existed in Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, German, English, Old Slavonic, Czech and perhaps other slavonic languages. Its range extended from Java to Iceland. How did this work reach Europe? It was first translated in the 6th century by a Persian physician into Pehlevi, the Middle-Persian language. Both this Pehlevi translation and the Sanskrit original which it rendered are lost. However, in 570 A. D. this Pehlevi translation was translated into Old Syriac and about 750 A. D. it was translated into Arabic under the title *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. The work became very popular in Arabic literature and there are now in existence numerous manuscripts which differ widely from one another. Also wide differences are found in the numerous translations and re-translations from the Arabic. Perhaps the oldest is a second Syriac version made in the 10th or 11th century. In the 11th century a Greek version entitled Σταφανίτης καὶ Ἰξνηλάτης was made by one Symeon Seth; from it were made Latin, German and Slavonic versions. The Arabic version was also rendered into Spanish by an unknown author about 1251. This version is based on an Arabic text closely related to that used by Rabbi Joel in his Hebrew rendering. This latter was composed in the 12th century and translated again into Latin by John of Capua between 1263 and 1278. The Latin of John of Capua became famous in the Middle Ages, and was rendered into Spanish, into German and into Italian. The Italian version was the basis of the earliest English descendant of the *Pañcatantra*, by Sir Thomas North: *The Morall Philosophie of Doni* (London, 1570). Doni is the name of the translator of the Italian version. Most of the stories in the *Pañcatantra* are animal fables. The title of the Arabic version *Kalilah wa Dimnah* mentions in a distorted form the names of two jackals, Karaṭaka and Damanaka, which are prominent in the first book.

Not only fables reached Europe in this way. In mediaeval Christendom an honoured place was occupied by the Saints Barlaam and Josophat. To them was ascribed the second conversion of India to Christen-

dom, undertaken when the land had relapsed once more into idolatry after the supposed mission of the Apostle Thomas. Though never officially canonized, both Barlaam and Josaphat were numbered by popular acclamation in the roll of saints recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, their day being November 27. In the Greek Church, Ioasaph (Josaphat), son of king Abenner of India, was commemorated on August 26. The Russians, on the other hand, were accustomed to remember Barlaam and Ioasaph, as well as the latter's father, King Abenner, on November 19. All the Western versions of the Barlaam and Josaphat romance derive from the Greek version, the edifying story of Barlaam and Ioasaph.

In the Middle Ages it was believed that the story was an original work by the great St. John Damascene (c. 676–749), composed on the basis of oral information given to him by Indian holy men. More than once translated into Latin from the 11th century onwards, the lives of Barlaam and Josaphat found their way into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Provençal, Romanic, Dutch and the Scandinavian languages. In England, it featured in Caxton's translation of the *Golden Legend*, which he printed at Westminster in 1483. From here, no doubt, Shakespeare had the idea of using Barlaam's parable of the Four Caskets for an episode in *The Merchant of Venice*. Already about 1612 a Portuguese writer, Diogo do Couto, was struck by the similarities between the legend of Josaphat and the life of the Buddha which had become known to his countrymen during their stay in India. Nobody paid any attention to do Couto's remark and it was a shock to the learned world when quite independently in 1859 a French scholar, Laboulaye, drew attention to the Buddhist origins of the legend of Barlaam and Ioasaph. In the century which has elapsed since Laboulaye's discovery, many scholars have studied this legend and now more is known about the ways in which it travelled from India to Europe although some of the connecting links are not entirely clear. There are indications that this legend was absorbed by Manichaeism, a religion founded by Mani in Persia in the

third century A. D. From Persia this religion spread through Central Asia and became the dominant religion in areas formerly permeated by Buddhism. Old Turkish fragments from Central Asia, found in the beginning of this century, show that the life of the Buddha was transmitted by the Manichees. The Barlaam and Ioasaph legend next makes its appearance about 800 A. D. in Bagdad at the time of the famous Harun al-Rashid. One of his protégés, the poet Abān al-Lāḥiqī, is the author of a metrical version of the legend of Barlaam and Ioasaph, the *Kitāb Balauhar wa Būdhāsaf*. This metrical version, which has not been preserved, was probably based upon an Arabic translation of a Pehlevi version. Under Harun there was a great interest in India. The ministerial family Barmak had come with the ruling dynasty from Balkh, where an ancestor had been an official in the Buddhist temple Naubehār (i. e. *nava vihāra*). Induced by family traditions they sent scholars to India to study medicine and pharmacology. Besides, they engaged Hindu scholars to come to Bagdad, made them the chief physicians of their hospitals, and ordered them to translate from Sanskrit into Arabic books on medicine, pharmacology, toxicology, philosophy, astrology and other subjects<sup>71</sup>. It is quite natural that at that time the legend of the Buddha was studied in the Arabic world. It is not known if the Pehlevi version was based upon a Manichean version which had originated in Central Asia, but in any case this Pehlevi version must have been already quite different from the original legend of the Buddha in India. Several Arabic versions of the *Balauhar and Būdhāsaf* story have been handed down. Once these Arabic versions became known, scholars tried to explain the relation between this Buddhist legend in the Arabic language with the Greek version in which the legend had been completely christianized. Since the discovery almost ninety years ago of an Old Georgian Christian recension, *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, in which the proper names are close to the Arabic, while the Christian framework and the selection of parables anticipate the Greek, a number of scholars have

71. Cf. Edward C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, I, London, 1910, pp. xxxi–xxxii.



defended the view that this Georgian text provides the link between the Oriental and the Western Christian versions. However, this Georgian version is much shorter than either the Arabic or the Greek versions. One scholar, Marr (1864-1934) supposed that it was an abridgment of an earlier and more complete rendering. Marr's hypothesis has been confirmed by the discovery of a manuscript entitled *The Life of the Blessed Iodasaph*, by Robert P. Blake. David Lang has shown that this version is nothing but an adaptation of the Arabic book of *Balauhar and Būdhāsaf*. The Georgian text of this version has been published in 1957 in Tiflis and a Russian translation in 1962 also in Tiflis. According to Lang this Georgian version must have been adapted from the Arabic between the years 800 and 900 A.D. This Georgian version was rendered into Greek by St. Euthymius the Athonite, the son of a Georgian nobleman, who translated into Georgian many works of the Greek Fathers. He lived from c. 955 to 1028. This Greek version has been the basis for the Latin version from which it has been translated into many European languages.

The translation of the Pañcatantra and of the story of Barlaam into Greek in the 11th century is probably the last manifestation of the long history of the cultural relations between Greece and India, a history which extends over a period of more than fifteen centuries and which forms an interesting and important chapter in the history of mankind.

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