PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Hellenistic age has one great advantage for us: it is easily definable. Its unity was first perceived, its limits set, even its name invented, by the nineteenth-century German historian Johann Gustav Droysen. For him, as for most subsequent students of the period, it began with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., continued through the rise, decline and fall of the great kingdoms carved by his marshals (known as the *Diadochoi*, or “Successors”) from the empire he left, and ended with Octavian’s dissolution of the last of these, Ptolemaic Egypt, in 30 B.C., just under three centuries later. This is a modern perspective: it is highly doubtful whether any ancient writer, from the Augustan age onwards, ever recognized the problem in these terms. Rome’s triumph encouraged an innate natural tendency to take short views.

It follows that to attempt a historical survey of the Hellenistic period means, in effect, writing the history of the Greek world, the *oikoumenē*, during that period: not only of the Greek-speaking cities and states (as opposed to those that merely employed the vernacular Attic *koinē* as a *lingua franca*), but also of those far larger areas, profoundly alien in speech and culture to the Greek spirit, that were forcibly taken over, and in a very real sense exploited, by foreign overlords: Greek, Macedonian, and, later, Roman.* It became clear to me during my researches that the degree to which this Graeco-Macedonian diaspora spread its much-vaunted culture, its reasons for doing so, and the audience it reached, especially in the East, had been in ways badly misrepresented. Thus one of my objects in writing the present work is to draw a more realistic picture of the impact, nature, and limitations of this diffusion.

I must state plainly at the outset that I regard the whole notion of a conscious, idealistic, missionary propagation in conquered territories of Greek culture, *mores*, literature, art, and religion—much less the undertaking of such conquests, whether by Alexander himself or any of his successors, with this ulterior end in view—as a pernicious myth, compounded of anachronistic Christian evangelicism and Plutarch-inspired wishful thinking, and designed (whether consciously or not) to provide moral justification for what was, in essence, despite its romantic popularity, large-scale economic and imperial exploitation. Edouard Will points out how much the

*Cf. Davies, *CAH* VII².1 263, for a good analysis of the problems involved in defining the field of inquiry.

prewar attitude to Hellenistic imperialism was conditioned by “la ‘bonne conscience’ colonialiste,” and to what an extent “le choc de la décolonisation nous a fait prendre conscience de ce qu’étaient les réalités coloniales,” with a very similar impact on the thinking of the Hellenistic historian.*

I must also, at the same time, emphasize that this does not—since I am old-fashioned enough to prefer operating with a free intellect, an open rather than a closed mind—mean that I am either a declared or a covert Marxist, as should become abundantly clear in the course of this book. Throughout I have been in pursuit of the truth, an aim much ridiculed today, for their own partisan purposes, by committed ideologists; and though neither I nor any reasonable person would believe that Ranke’s ideal of writing history *wie es eigentlich gewesen sei* is attainable—what ideal is?—that does not release the historian from the harsh obligation of striving for it to the best of his or her ability. To do otherwise is as though (to draw a theological parallel) the concept of inherent human sinfulness and fallibility were taken as a self-evident reason neither to pursue virtue, nor to avoid error; or, worse, as indicating that the terms “virtue” and “error” had no significant meaning.

When I first embarked on the vast task that I had, with incurable optimism, set myself, my primary aim was simple enough: to provide an up-to-date and unified survey of a period heavily worked by specialists, but still too often ignored by those (including many professionals) in the habit of skipping adroitly from Alexander—if not from the defeat of Athens in 404—to the rise of the Roman Republic. Such a synthesis must of necessity rest, to a great extent, on foundations laid by the great pioneers in the field. Hellenistic history as we know it would be inconceivable without the work of such scholars as Droysen, Niese, Berve, Wilcken, Tarn, Rostovtzeff, Holleaux, Bouché-Leclercq, and Préaux, not to mention countless others still living, all of whom have contributed so much in understanding to every aspect of this multifaceted age. Yet, at intervals, a time arrives, for this as for other periods and areas, when it becomes desirable to pull all the threads together in the light of a mass of new discoveries and changing interpretations, and to attempt an interim overview, governed by a single outlook.

Specialists are, more often than not, loath to undertake such a task, for which, by temperament and training, they tend, in any case, to be ill suited; when others perform it, they label it “popularization” or, with rather more charitable contempt, *haute vulgarisation*. This of course at once raises the question of the audience for which such books are written. The most common answer is, for the “intelligent general reader,” and loose though this definition is, I would agree that if the findings of ancient historians have any validity at all, they should most certainly be disseminated among thinking people—especially if, as will be seen in a moment, they have some application to the problems of our own world today. At the same time, close and profitable contact, over nineteen years, with colleagues in a large, energetic, and variegated Classics Department has convinced me—not entirely on the *quis custodiet* principle—that specialists, too, benefit at times from an attempt to impose some sort

*Will, in Eadie and Ober, eds., 281–82.

of coherent perspective on their activities. It is no bad thing, once in a while, to stand back, take the long view, and meditate upon the sum of things.

I have, thus, written this book with both audiences always in mind. The main text throughout remains free (I hope) of all arcane allusions, historiographical jargon, specialist shorthand, and quotations—familiar commonplaces apart—in foreign languages. In the Notes and References, on the other hand, my one concession to lay readers is to make it easier for the curious to hunt down references to fragments by directing them, whenever possible, to the actual source of the quotation rather than to the collections of Jacoby, Müller, Diels and Kranz, and others, which may be in every academic library, but remain inaccessible to nonspecialists and baffling even when found. Similarly, I have taken it for granted that my colleagues will know which editions of ancient authors are the most reliable, whereas the general reader will, nine times out of ten, simply go to the relevant Loeb or Penguin volume, if available, and take potluck. But for both categories I have made my documentation of sources, both primary and secondary, as full and scrupulous as I could. Too many Hellenistic commonplaces—*experto crede*—are surprisingly hard to run down. For the sake of precision, I have also frequently made citations in the original Latin or Greek where an important point was at issue, and I have always quoted foreign scholars in their own languages, having suffered in the past from translations that were artfully slanted for partisan ends.

Inevitably, however, my own investigations were shaped and influenced by preconceptions and judgments often very much at odds with those of my predecessors. It is, of course, a truism that every historian remains at heart a revisionist, and I am no exception to the rule. My synthesis is squarely based on its own axioms. Some of my revisionist views (e.g., my treatment of Hellenic cultural diffusion, referred to above) emerged only during the course of writing. Others took the form of conscious principles that I brought to my task *ab initio*, which it is only fair to set down at the outset. My original impulse to write this book came some years ago, when, being required to give a course of lectures on Hellenistic civilization, and having already a clear idea in my head of just what demands the subject would properly make on the historian, I scoured the libraries for such a work, and failed to find it. Surveys indeed existed, and more have appeared since; but none, in my view, met the essential conditions. To the best of my knowledge, no survey of quite this kind on the Hellenistic age exists in any European language. George Leigh-Mallory climbed Everest because it was there. I have written *Alexander to Actium* because it was not there, and needed to be.

The principles I brought to its composition are set out briefly below. First, I regarded it as essential to emphasize—very much against recent trends in historiography—the linear, diachronic, evolutionary development apparent in the three centuries of the Hellenistic era. The general absence of such treatment has been one of the most striking features of the scholarship devoted to the period.* Professor

*This was written before I saw *CAH* VII².1, in which the joint editor, Professor F. W. Walbank, writes (p. xi): “General surveys, whether of particular kingdoms or of the whole area of

Elton's lapidary pronouncement on this topic, reproduced as one of my epigraphs, has been in my mind throughout. The implementation of his advice sent me back to the now-unfashionable business of writing narrative history. This does not mean that I have not learned a very great deal from the tradition of the *École Annales*, from socially oriented scholars such as Lefebvre or Braudel; but I have also taken to heart the recent animadversions on French education made by that formidable historian and *philologue* Jacqueline de Romilly, who remarked, *inter alia*, that while school-children today could tell you just how Louis XVI dressed, or what he ate for breakfast, they more often than not had only the haziest notion of who he was, when he lived, and what he achieved. Even when, inevitably, I break the chronological flow of the narrative to survey special topics, I have always tried to keep in mind the Heracleitan flow and change of events, the far-reaching transformations that the Hellenistic world continually underwent throughout its existence.

Second, I felt it essential that I should treat every significant aspect of cultural development in the Hellenistic age, from the visual arts to literature, from mathematics to medicine, from philosophy to religion, and evaluate each as a significant aspect, not of civilization in a static sense, much less *sub specie aeternitatis*, but of the continually evolving totality, or plenum, that constitutes a civilization's history. This, of necessity, led me into a number of fields where I am no expert, and for which—though I have always studied the ancient evidence to the best of my ability—I am more than usually dependent on the work of other scholars. The deep debt of gratitude I owe them is, I hope, adequately acknowledged in my Notes and References. It is important to emphasize, however, that my intention on such occasions has not been, in the first instance, to rehash specialist conclusions at second hand, but rather to relate the general patterns that emerge from those conclusions to the social and political developments of the age. Thus, for example, the Greek treatment of quadratic equations or conic sections is not, in detail, my business; but the fact that the Greeks (some arguments to the contrary notwithstanding) had no true grasp of algebra until the Christian era most certainly is. In the same way, Stoic cosmology, say, or the scientific principles of Epicurus do not fall, technically speaking, within my competence; but both offer crucial evidence for any historian of the late Hellenistic world, to be ignored at one's peril.

Such an approach is bound to be idiosyncratic, not least in its selectivity. My approach to the sciences and the visual arts is, first and foremost, sociohistorical throughout: I am no scientist, nor is art criticism in the strict sense my professional concern. Even in literature, where I am a good deal more at home, the historian has always perforce taken precedence over the critic. The poet-playwright Menander (who has always struck me as a classic example of a growth industry created by papyrological accident) thus becomes a valuable social witness without any necessary

Hellenistic civilisation, do not provide a substitute for a chronological narrative of events, for without such a framework a general sketch may well fail to convey the sense of historical development." He himself and Professor Edouard Will now offer us, accordingly, three chapters of narrative history covering the period from Alexander's death to the battle of Raphia (217 B.C.), but the general tone of the volume remains synchronic and separatist.

reference to the quality of his work. Further, since my emphasis is on change and evolution, I discuss static institutions only insofar as they show signs of significant development. Hence the reader will find no separate chapter on sex, marriage, and private life, though references to such matters occur, where appropriate, in other contexts. Nor, perhaps more controversially, do I devote specific sections either to law or to school education, on the grounds that during our period the first (where not merely municipal or parochial) was little more than an elaborate sham masking the realities of power, while the second offered nothing, in essence, but literary rote learning, elementary mathematics, music, athletics, and—most important—a rhetorical grab bag that would enable men at the top to talk their way into, or out of, anything.

It has also been suggested to me that I should include a discussion of Hellenistic historiography apart from Polybius (who gets full treatment in Chapter 17), down to, and including, Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C. The trouble here is that Polybius remains the only worthwhile historian of the Hellenistic period whose work substantially survives. Diodorus, as we are too often reminded, is a third-rate compiler only as good as his source: this makes him, at times, of great value, but not on his own account, and I have no wish to burden an already overlong book with yet another imaginative analysis of his chronological inconsistencies and synthetic rhetoric. Like Plutarch, he believed that one virtue of history lay in “recording the nobility of distinguished men, publicizing the vileness of the wicked, and in general promoting the good of mankind” (1.2.2). Successful statesmen, he thought, were righteous, while evil ones met with frustration: nothing, in short, succeeds like success. None of this inspires confidence. Those Hellenistic historians who might have been worth discussing (e.g., Hieronymus of Cardia, Poseidonius, Timaeus, or Phylarchus), not to mention memoirists of events in which they themselves were involved, such as Aratus of Sicyon, are extant only in tantalizing fragments. While I admire the scholarly acumen and ingenuity that enables scholars such as T. W. Africa or Jane Hornblower to convert these fragments into bricks with a minimum of straw, it is not a talent I share. I do have brief discussions of all the historians here mentioned at appropriate points in my text or notes, but hesitate to theorize in general about a tradition almost wholly lost to us. This reticence, I notice, is shared by most recent authors (Ussher, Brown, Grant, Fornara) of general works on ancient historiography.

Third, as far as lay within my technical command, I was determined to avoid any unnecessary disruptive fragmentation of the interwoven elements that went to make up the Hellenistic plenum. This applied in particular to the political history (a notable stumbling block in the past), where any misguided attempt to deal separately and successively with Ptolemies, Seleucids, Attalids, Antigonids, Greek *po-leis*, and so on, not only made for hopeless confusion and irritating repetitions, but also, much worse, kaleidoscopically distorted, to an acute degree, what was in fact an admittedly complex, but still unified and interdependent, Mediterranean scene. I cannot pretend to have solved this problem completely, but I have done my level best to bear it in mind at every stage. If the result at times verges on polyphony, I

hope the voices, and their relationships, remain tolerably clear. The importance of political history has, it is true, been overstressed in the past (though not nearly so much as the sociologists would like us to believe); at the same time, until the political threads have been satisfactorily unraveled, it must remain doubtful whether anything else can be understood in any meaningful sense at all.

Fourth, it seemed extremely important to avoid missing the wood for the trees. This is a danger endemic to Hellenistic studies by reason of the nature, and limitations, of our evidence. For Ptolemaic Egypt in particular we have a vast mass of epigraphical and, above all, papyrological material, on which a succession of notable scholars have done epoch-making work. The risks here are comparable to those inherent in the locally concentrated work of European historians such as Le Roi Ladurie, but without the same counterbalancing plethora of national-level testimony to offset them. Our general narrative sources for the Hellenistic period are for the most part either late, or local, or both; even the best historian, Polybius, is not only circumscribed in period, but *parti pris* to a disconcerting extent (below, pp. 269 ff.).

Further, while some of the papyrus finds, most notably the so-called Zenon Archive, are of real national importance, most of them remain local, minor, and particular. This is not for one moment to deny their enormous, and compelling, sociological interest, but the very nature of the material has, inevitably, dictated the pattern assumed by specialist work in the area: where particularism is rated as a high academic virtue, the *disiecta membra* of village bureaucracy come as a welcome boon. This trend is not encouraging to international historiography on a broad canvas. Infuriatingly, the records of Alexandria and the waterlogged Delta are lost; what we have instead, for the most part, is material from the garbage dumps and mummy cartonnage of bone-dry Philadelphia or Oxyrhynchus; and using this to interpret Ptolemaic Egypt is, all too often, like sifting the municipal waste of Rochdale or Kansas City with a view to writing the history of England or the United States. I hope I have exploited this material adequately; on the other hand I have always done my best not to use local evidence to draw unwarranted larger inferences. This is one of many places where the (anyway suspect) rule of *ex pede Herculem* most definitely does not apply.

Several critics have suggested that my treatment of the Greek *poleis* in the Hellenistic era is flawed beyond redemption by what I suppose might be defined as creeping Droysenism. I have, they argue, underestimated both the autonomy enjoyed by the *poleis*, and the importance, even in conditions of limited freedom, that should still be attached to their affairs. I also (it is claimed) exaggerate the degree of freedom enjoyed by city-states in the classical era, and, in particular, take a rose-tinted view of the role of Athens in the maintenance of freedom, a charge that may surprise those familiar with my earlier work (see e.g., *The Shadow of the Parthenon*, pp. 75 ff.). I underestimate the power and reality of *Völkerrecht*, it is said; I am insensitive to Hellenic political traditions, not to mention “the practical limitations upon Seleucid sovereigns.” I strive for *Realpolitik* but succumb to reductionism. And so on. As Diaghilev said to Cocteau, “Etonne-moi, Jean”: I am quite ready to be convinced by sound arguments and good evidence, and in one or two cases I have modified my views accordingly. But on my central thesis I stand firm. The *poleis* were not

wholly free in the fifth century, but at least they were fighting each other, and that not all the time. Not to be subject, in the last resort, to the dictates of a bureaucratic monarchy does make a difference to one's outlook, as the exceptional case of Rhodes (see pp. 378 ff.) demonstrates with peculiar clarity. Of course the *poleis* had autonomy to the extent that they ran their own municipal affairs: so do the cities of the Soviet Union today. The passionate pursuit, against all odds, of *eleutheria* was not a mere political gimmick. Would the Greeks have fought with such desperate fury at Crannon, or in the Chremonidean War, or for Mithridates VI, or at Corinth in 146, if they had not seen something infinitely precious at stake, something for which municipal self-government, flourishing commerce, and empty public honors were no adequate substitute? The answer is self-evident.

There is one further point that should, perhaps, be stressed. As my work proceeded, it acquired an unexpected and in ways alarming dimension. I could not help being struck, again and again, by an overpowering sense of *déjà vu*, far more than for any other period of ancient history known to me: the "distant mirror" that Barbara Tuchman held up from the fourteenth century A.D. for our own troubled age is remote and pale compared to the ornate, indeed rococo, glass in which Alexandria, Antioch, and Pergamon reflect contemporary fads, failings, and aspirations, from the urban malaise to religious fundamentalism, from Veblenism to *haute cuisine*, from funded scholarship and mandarin literature to a flourishing dropout counter-culture, from political impotence in the individual to authoritarianism in government, from science perverted for military ends to illusionism for the masses, from spiritual solipsism on a private income to systematic extortion in pursuit of the plutocratic dream. Contemporary cosmological speculation seems to be taking us straight back to the Stoic world view, while Tyche has been given a new lease of life by computer analysts, who prefer to describe it, with pseudo-Hellenic panache, as "stochasticism." I have, however, steadfastly tried to avoid drawing such factitious parallels in my text, or coloring ancient phenomena with modern associations. Wherever possible I was determined to let the evidence speak for itself. What this parallelism signifies I do not pretend to know, and think it wiser not to speculate; but it does suggest, forcibly, that there may indeed be something more in the Hellenistic age for concerned modern readers than mere antiquarian interest.

The final revision of the fourth and last draft of this book was completed during a year's leave from my duties in the University of Texas at Austin, while I was primarily and officially engaged upon a very different (and far more particularist) project. I am profoundly grateful both to the National Endowment for the Humanities (which elected me a Senior Fellow for 1983–84), and to the Research Institute of my own university, for thus enabling me to spend my leisure moments, as well as my working days, uninterrupted by those multifarious claims on a teacher's time that, in the ordinary way, make sustained work on this scale so difficult of achievement. The superb holdings of the Classics Library and the Perry-Castañeda Library in the University of Texas at Austin have been my prop and stay throughout: I would

like to express my warmest thanks to the Classics Librarian and the Classics Bibliographer, Bernice Dawson and Goldia Hester, for their consistent courtesy and helpfulness. Nor is it easy to find sufficient praise for the always overworked yet unfailingly cheerful staff of the Inter-Library Loan Department, who procured me innumerable *recherché* volumes that I had despaired of ever finding, at a speed that constantly belied their own pessimistic prognostications.

Both Professor Erich S. Gruen and the University of California Press, and Professor K. D. White and Thames and Hudson Ltd, made available to me, well in advance of publication, proofs of their then-forthcoming new books, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* and *Greek and Roman Technology*, respectively. A similar courtesy was extended to me by Professor Stanley M. Burstein in respect of *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome*, vol. 3, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII*, by Pauline Hire of the Cambridge University Press in respect of Professor J. J. Pollitt's *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, and by Doris Kretschmer of the University of California Press in respect of *Hellenism in the East*, edited by Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White. This most generous courtesy on their part was of inestimable benefit to my own work.

Dr. B. J. Bardsley read each chapter of my final draft in typescript, and saved me from a variety of errors and infelicities. Further stringent professional scrutiny of the entire text was provided by Professor Eugene N. Borza and an anonymous reader for the University of California Press. My chapters on Hellenistic art have been read and annotated by Professor A. F. Stewart, and further benefited from correspondence with Professor Brunilde Ridgway. On numerous occasions all the above-named readers made illuminating suggestions, and more often still did their best to save me from my own perverseness; they should not be blamed for those occasions on which the author's idiosyncratic obstinacy remained deaf to their admonitions. My meticulously accurate, thorough, and learned copyeditor, Paul Psinos, rescued me from more slips, confusions, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies than I care to think about, and will always remain in my mind as the living embodiment of Zeno's favorite paradox. In London, Jamie Camplin and Suzanne Bosman went far beyond the call of duty in ensuring that I got, finally, just about every illustration I wanted. Mary Lamprech and Doris Kretschmer have been towers of strength and reassurance throughout what proved a longer haul than any of us originally envisaged. Last but not far from least, I am immensely grateful to my old friend Dr. August Frugé, Director Emeritus of the University of California Press, for the endless time and trouble he took in reading a gargantuan manuscript, and the unfailing tact, sympathy, and wisdom with which he strove to tone down my purple patches and overstated views. How far he succeeded in this laudable endeavor is another matter.

Modified versions of Chapters 6, 10, and 37 have previously appeared in *Grand Street*, and of Chapters 13, 27, and 33 in *Southern Humanities Review*. Chapter 19 was originally delivered as a lecture at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick, Canada, and afterwards published by the Crake Institute in that university as part of *The Crake Lectures 1984* (1986).

All translations in this work (including those of Cavafy) are, unless otherwise attributed, my own. I am, further, conscious of having been more than usually inconsistent in the transliteration of Greek names. Having lived in Greece for the best part of a decade, I find it hard to tolerate any but the most insistent of Latinized or Anglicized names (e.g., Athens, Piraeus, rather than Athenai, Peiraieus—or Peirai-efs); at the same time, many Latinizations have become so firmly rooted that it would be pure pedantry to reject them. In the end I simply chose, in each case, the spelling with which I felt most comfortable, without any attempt at consistency. Thus the reader will find Piraeus, but also Kerameikos (rather than Ceramicus); Cassander and Antigonos, rather than Kassandros and Antigonos; while Anglicized Ptolemy (as opposed to Greek Ptolemaios) has an orthodox Hellenic title in Philadelphos. My attitude in this matter was inspired by the dealings of T. E. Lawrence with his proofreader, over variants of Arabic orthography, in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Walt Whitman's best-known apothegm also applies.

The length of time between the original submission of my manuscript (fall 1984) and publication has, inevitably, prevented me from taking full account of much useful work published during the intervening period. However, I take comfort from the fact that nothing I have read to date has persuaded me of the necessity to make major substantive revisions to my text. There is, I do not doubt, much of value that I have missed: the flow of scholarship on the Hellenistic period is now so strong that it has become virtually impossible for one man to master it all, and I have not attempted to do so. I have, however, wherever possible added fresh material to my notes in particular, and modified some points of detail as a result.

The accident of major retinal surgery meant that this preface was written—ideally as I now perceive—without access to books, and in the perfect conditions provided by Seton Medical Center in Austin: I would like to thank the unfailingly friendly nursing staff who looked after me so well, and made my stay such a pleasant one, despite its antecedent cause. I owe, further, an eternal debt of gratitude to Dr. Coleman Driver, Jr.: scholars and writers live by their eyes, and Dr. Driver's great skill saved mine, literally, at the eleventh hour.

My wife, as always, has been a source of encouragement, loving support, and sensible advice (not always sensibly taken) throughout. My deepest long-term debt, however, must always be to those great Cambridge scholars under whom, a more than usually irritating ex-service undergraduate, I studied in the halcyon years immediately after World War II. Some of them, now gone from us, are commemorated in my dedication. I do not for one moment flatter myself that they would have entirely approved of my present undertaking; but anything of real value in it I owe to them, and I gratefully offer it to their memory.

Peter Green
Austin, Texas
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