MEMORY AS HISTORY
THE LEGACY OF ALEXANDER IN ASIA

Edited by
Himanshu Prabha Ray
Daniel T. Potts
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As a follow-up of the visit, an international conference was organised in February-March 2006 in New Delhi. Dr. Kapila Vatsayan, Chairperson, IIC Asia Project, India International Centre was as always a source of encouragement and Ms. Premola Ghosh and Mr. P. C. Sen of IIC supported the proposal and co-sponsored the meeting.

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January 2007

Himanshu Prabha Ray
Daniel T. Potts
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In 1791 William Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University and ‘Historiographer to his Majesty for Scotland’, reflecting on ‘the knowledge which the Ancients had of India’, concluded that few had grasped the ‘grandeur and extent’ of the plans of Alexander the Great. For Robertson ‘the wild follies’ of Alexander’s passion, ‘the indecent excesses of intemperance and the ostentatious displays of vanity too frequent in the conduct of this extraordinary man’ had ‘so degraded his character that the pre-eminence of his merit, either as a conqueror, a politician, or a legislator, has seldom been justly estimated’ (Robertson, 1799: 15). Like his fellow eighteenth-century orientalist admirers of India, such as Sir William Jones, Robertson relied heavily on classical texts – Arrian, Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy, Megasthenes, among others – to understand the ‘manners, customs, religion’ and the ‘many valuable productions of nature and of art’ (Robertson, 1799: 19) that characterised contemporary Indian culture (see Mukherjee, 1968; Kopf, 1969; Marshall, 1970; Kejariwal, 1988; Sugirtharajah, 2003). Numerous modern scholars, however, have questioned the reliability of these ancient texts (see Cartledge, 2004: 243-70; Bosworth, 1988: 1-15; Carlsen, 1993). Moreover there is a rich historiography on how late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British orientalist and utilitarian writers, while often in sharp disagreement with each other on matters of detail and emphasis, crafted pervasive discourses about Indian culture and character that sanctioned and shaped British rule in India (for example, Bearce, 1961; Stokes, 1959; Brown, 1997).

The importance of ancient texts on India in constituting British discourses and practices has provided one of the contexts for a wider debate about the legacy of the Greeks in India. The now classic dispute between W.W. Tarn and A.K. Narain over the nature, extent and influence of Greek culture in the millennium after Alexander raises important questions about the lasting impact of Alexander’s campaigns and the ancient Greek settlements that arose thereafter in Bactria and surrounding regions on the development of Indian culture and economy. Here there is genuine dispute over the interpretation of the surviving material, numismatic and textual evidence (Tarn,
Many of the papers in this volume take up the vital question of assessing the actual impact of these settlements on Indian culture but there are other dimensions to this debate worth exploring.

A second line of inquiry, also evident in this volume, is the way stories of Alexander became part of European and Asian cultures in the first millennium AD, providing a seedbed for later understandings of early modern and modern European colonisation. In Europe Alexander’s conquests filtered into a larger popular culture relatively early, from Roman times, flourishing in Medieval Europe through the ‘Alexander Romance’ and related vernacular texts. Here Alexander stands as the bearer of Western virtues confronting and overcoming barbarian and, in Christian contexts, pagan ‘others’ (Bunt, 1994: Cary, 1987; Mossé, 2004; Stoneman, 1991). But stories of Alexander could also be a point of resistance to European culture, a metaphor for the illegitimacy of modern Western influence or alternatively a way of turning Alexander into a bearer of Asian rather than Western attributes and virtues. Within Asia scholars have explored the complex ways in which Alexander has been configured in Persian, Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic texts. The origins of various forms of an Arabic Alexander romance and references to Alexander in the Qur’an and other major texts have been the focus of considerable scholarly investigation and debate (van Bladel, in this volume). Some scholars have argued that the prophet Dhul-Qarnayn, mentioned in the Qur’an, may have been Alexander the Great. More directly there is widespread textual evidence that the legend of Sikander, sometimes Iskandar (Alexander the Great), and a whole complex of Alexander tradition were evident in Arabic literature from the seventh century AD and through Arabic and related languages dependent on Arabic, notably Persian, Ottoman, Chagatay and Malay these Asian Alexander legends spread with the advance of Arabic and Persian culture throughout South Asia (Bacher 1873). Later these legends spread to South-East Asia. In these Asian traditions Alexander could be represented as a heroic warrior, bringing Arabic and Persian civilisation to India.

The evident spread and influence of Alexander myths in European, Middle Eastern and Asian cultures raises important questions about how stories, legends and myths develop, spread, perpetuate and translate across different times and cultural contexts. One way of conceptualising the spread and perpetuation of Alexander legends is to see them as a form of collective memory. This paper takes up this question, exploring the utility of the concept of collective memory for understanding some of these processes of cultural transmission and invention. It raises questions about whether we can see a continuing tradition open to elaboration, extension and transformation over time. It also takes up the question of discontinuities in these traditions, pointing firstly to breaks in the collective record and secondly to ways in which different contexts, notably late eighteenth century British India, led to fundamental reinterpretations of texts to craft new meanings for the Alexander legend. The aim here is to highlight some of the potential strengths and weaknesses in using concepts such as collective memory for understanding the legacy of Alexander in Asia.

Collective memory sits within a larger constellation of concepts that have sought to theorise the relationship between memory and social being as it evolves over time. In recent years the proliferation of terms seeking to explain these processes has been significant, indicating the importance of memory and history in current social science research (Le Goff, 1992; Connerton,
Memory studies as a field has a rich lineage. Memory itself was a foundational concept within psychology and moral philosophy, where problems of individual consciousness (of which memory is one phenomenon) have been at the centre of disciplinary debates. Commonly memory has been analysed as a psychological and cognitive phenomenon but other scholarly traditions have sought to move beyond individual consciousness to larger social mentalities. Within sociology Emile Durkheim’s concept of collective consciousness (Lehman, 1993: 159-90) or Gustave Le Bon’s analysis of the ways crowds worked to form social groups with particular psychologies and patterns of behaviour (Le Bon, 1910) were early efforts to move beyond individual psychologies to larger social behaviours, attitudes and sentiments. In this framework a pioneering contribution to theorising the social organization of memory was Maurice Halbwachs’ 1925 essay on collective memory (Halbwachs, 1996). Here Halbwachs sought to explain how events, customs and structures were carried forward by specific social groups in the form of shared memories, constantly revived and revitalised in particular historical moments, to help shape the present. The concept of collective memory has been taken up in a number of recent studies covering a wide variety of historical events, times and places (for example, Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Barthel, 1996).

The link between these psychological and sociological traditions and historical narrative, however, is more recent. There are a number of factors that helped forge this connection. One was the concern of the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s with the experiences of the working classes and other subaltern and marginalised social groups (such as women, ethnic minorities and the poor). Collective ideas, movements, ideologies and the ways individuals responded to and experienced larger social forces involved consideration of the historical relationship between the individual and the collective. Arising out of the desire to chart the history of ordinary men and women (as distinct from social, economic, cultural and political elites) was an interest in new methods and sources for the recovery of everyday life. One important source was individual recollections. The boom in oral history, however, raised complex questions about the interconnections between events, experience and memory (Thompson, 1988, Frisch, 1990; Samuel, 1994). Another formative influence has been ‘denial’. The effacement of historical experience, in relation to traumatic and contested events such as the Holocaust or Hiroshima, has raised vital questions for historians about the mutability of memory and the ways memories have been manipulated to perpetuate specific historical narratives and political agendas that avoid uncomfortable realities (see Hartman, 1996; Rosenfeld, 1997; Hogan, 1996; Olick, 2003; Friedlander, 1993).

This possibility for memories to be reshaped, denied, erased and changed has opened up a range of new areas of inquiry for historians. Over the last few decades, historians have explored these processes arguing that memories are not direct routes to lived experience but artefacts of complex processes of struggle and contest. Oral history is now a field where historians seek to both recover the past but also explore the ways history impacts upon memory and how memories in turn shape the present. Historians insist that memory itself is amenable to historical inquiry (Thompson, 1988; Le Goff, 1992; Hutton, 1993; Portelli, 1995). Much of the best work in this field has concentrated on such questions as memorialisation, museums, ceremony, art, and literature, even historical narrative itself as technologies that construct specific memories in particular social and cultural contexts (Barthel, 1996; Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). There is now a large historiography on the ways social groups construct memories, beliefs, legends, myths.
and discourses for specific purposes and the mechanisms for perpetuating these memories across
generations (Connerton, 1989; Popular Memory Group, 1982: 205-52; Samuel, 1994).

It is now imperative that we examine some of these concepts in greater detail to assess their
utility for the process of understanding the legacy of Alexander in Asia. Here we need to focus
more closely on collective and public memory, the concepts commonly deployed by historians
to explain large social transformations in popular understandings of the past. Halbwachs' notion
of collective memory has become commonplace in the literature and comes out of a Durkheimian
paradigm – societies are organic forms of social organization that can be conceived of as totalities
or represented in collective terms. Social theorists more attuned to conflict models of social
organization, however, have questioned the idea of collective memory by posing alternative concepts
like public memory and popular memory. Public memory has usually been seen as elite,
authoritarian, hegemonic – efforts by those in power to create certain types of meaning that
sustain their social position. Public memory works most often through the creation of material
representations of imagined pasts – such as memorials, national celebrations, historical narratives
themselves spread through books and in the class-room (see Burke, 1989; Hamilton and Darian-
Smith, 1994; Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). Popular memory, on the other hand, is also a form
of collective memory but one that often runs in parallel or even in opposition to an official
public memory and historians have devoted considerable attention to the complex relationships
between official and popular memories (see for example, Popular Memory Group, 1982: 205-
52; Frisch, 1990; Passerini, 1987; Smith, 1996; Bodnar, 1992; Wallace, 2001). Historians have
explored a variety of contexts in which public and popular memories cut across each other. For
example there is now a rich literature on how during times of war private currents of mourning
and despair run counter to official proclamations of noble sacrifice (Cannadine, 1981: 187-242).

The distinction between popular and public memory is an attempt to theorise memory as
an arena of conflict within cultures, between official or high culture and popular or plebeian
cultures: an assumption that works better in relation to modern states and societies with marked
class stratification. In other words these forms of memory sit in a critical relationship to
functionalist concepts such as collective memory. One question we face is whether such distinctions
operate equally well for antiquity? Or do we need to rethink them to fit the circumstances of
antiquity – in both the West and the East? Certainly there have been some noteworthy efforts to
utilise concepts of collective memory (although largely in the sense of public memory) to analyse
ancient cultures (Jonker, 1995). In the absence of detailed written sources, however, the challenges
involved in reconstructing collective memories (public and private) for the ancient past are
significant, although not insurmountable. The importance of material culture in contemporary
studies of public memory suggests the potential relevance of the concept of public memory for
the interpretation of archaeological evidence. Another key issue is whether legends and stories
that have survived down to the time of written records can be traced to an ancient and unbroken
oral tradition or whether they are inventions, invoking a historical lineage but actually produced
in different historical contexts (Goody, 1987; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

We now need to ground these concepts in more concrete and detailed definitions and
reflections. Memory, be it individual, popular, public or collective, is a cultural artefact. It is a
working through of experience into a form, usually a story – oral or written – that is shaped by
literary techniques. Memory is thus active not passive – something more than a repository or
storehouse to be raided at will. This is why historians of memory such as Ralph Samuel often use the concept 'memory work' to signify the cultural and historical processes that operate in the production of memories (Samuel, 1994). Equally important within this framework is the idea that memory work is structured by the present. In other words memory is not just a recovery of things past but an active construction of the past in the context of present concerns – it is dialogic, as Dominick La Capra has argued – a conversation between past and present to create new types of meaning (La Capra, 1983: 23-71). Contemporary identities then are the mobilisation of imagined pasts and the reworking of memories to justify the present.

An obvious corollary of this is that individual, popular, public or collective memories, usually work in a dynamic relationship to each other. This is evident in one of the main areas of debate in memory studies – the historiography on the Holocaust. Here historians have explored the ways diverse national narratives within Europe have grappled with the Holocaust, in the early 1950s marginalizing the experience of mass genocide only to face a very public agonising over the implication of European people in these events in the 1990s. Equally historians have explored the ways memories of genocide were suppressed and explained away or alternatively cultivated and instituted as the dominant facet of European history in the mid twentieth century. There are now extensive debates over the ways in which Holocaust memories have been constructed, suppressed, memorialised and commemorated and the complex politics that surround this culture work (see Friedlander, 1993; Hartman, 1996).

One of the key areas of debate has been theorising the relationship between individual and collective memories. While some historians have sought to use oral history as a means of uncovering facts about the past, more recently historians such as David Thelen (Thelen, 1989: 1117-29) and Alistair Thomson have argued that individuals craft their recollections to fit certain story types. A classic example is the way returned soldiers recast their memories of war to fit a larger public memory of glorious sacrifice. As Thomson has demonstrated there are particular narrative patterns to returned soldier memories of the Great War – bravery under fire, the triumph of mateship, even farce and comedy (Thomson, 1994). Equally there are lapses in memory, gaps that paper over more troubling memories of fear and horror that run counter to dominate public narratives. Oral historians in these contexts need to be alive to the elisions as much as the presences in memory narratives (Esbenshade, 1995: 72-96; Forty and Kuchler, 1999). Moreover memories are often structured to play with or against dominant discourses – in other words they are a point of reference in accord with, cutting across, running parallel to or in opposition to collective or public memory.

Like all sources memory can be tested for reliability and verifiability. Oral history as historical testimony can be used with caution to help construct the past. But if memory is about storytelling or instituting certain types of meaning, then assessments of reliability have to work through the literary forms for the deeper cultural content (see Frisch, 1990; Samuel, 1994; Hamilton and Darian-Smith, 1994; Portelli, 1995). Historians of antiquity of course don't have the luxury of an extensive oral history archive with which to explore these problems. But they do have a complex range of literary texts and material remains to analyse for their deeper meaning and cultural significance. For official and collective memory we have the opportunity to explore the sanctioned discourses being deployed by those in power and the literary traditions, forms of language, tropes utilised by these discourses to produce specific meanings and support particular
social practices. And we can uncover oral and popular traditions that are complex alternatives to public discourses. In other words, we have to operate in the conceptual domains mapped out by scholars such as Hayden White, Northrop Frye, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

Historians are very familiar with these problems. The sources on Alexander's conquests are largely textual – chronicles, accounts, letters (some of doubtful authenticity), legends, romances and the like. In terms of material culture, as we have seen, there are some illuminating texts, particularly coins, that are amenable to analysis in terms of representation, symbolism and cultural discourse. We can read through and against these texts in an effort to reconstruct actual historical events and processes. This is vital work. But we can also work at a different level, taking the very literariness of the text as the thing to explore. The analysis of literary techniques and narrative allows for a deeper exploration of the cultural and historical currents in the production of these texts.

The vast historiography on the *Alexander Romance* is a case in point. Here we can trace the operation of ideas across centuries and particular cultures and explore the way this literature offers us a way into those cultures rather than the reality of Alexander's times. Here we might follow the lead of interesting work like that of Richard Stoneman on the *Alexander Romance* (Stoneman, 1991) or Diana Spencer on the ways Alexander was configured within Roman political discourses (Spencer, 2002). In this framework historians have focused on the ways particular vernacular texts construct discursive tropes about the relationship between Europe and India. For example Margaret Bridges' insightful reading of the Anglo-Latin medieval text *Epistola*, a first person travel narrative relating to Alexander's journey through India, explores how India, within European culture, became the land of marvels, wildness, barbarism and monstrosity in opposition to civilisation. Personified in Alexander and Porus we have a play of opposites - small/tall, modest/bragging, exemplary/reprehensible, that position Alexander as the man of European virtues and Porus as the embodiment of Eastern barbarism, helping craft pervasive European understandings of Asia (Bridges, 1996: 45-60).

Another key concept within memory studies is that memory is as much about forgetting as remembering, for both individual and collective memory. Certain things have to be suppressed in order to allow particular meanings to flourish or come to the fore. In particular collective memory, especially in its official forms, strives to institute specific ideas, representations and discourses. This is where scholars in archaeology, art history, cultural history and the history of ideas find themselves in familiar territory. The interpretation of material culture in part seeks to analyse efforts to construct particular discourses – in other words coins, architecture, pottery, inscriptions, scholarly texts can be interpreted as acts, conscious efforts to construct a type of meaning and the scholarship in this area suggests both how complex this task is and how fruitful it is for opening out new perspectives on Alexander and his legacy.

Much of the literature on collective memory seeks to explain the persistence of meanings across time. But as Michel Foucault insisted historians should be alive to discontinuity as much as continuity. Of course Foucault's sense of radical discursive ruptures has been questioned by more sober analyses of the ways cultural material is not so much abandoned but reshaped. More recently Foucauldians such as David Halperin have strengthened their claims for the relevance of
historicist methodologies through a more critical analysis of how ideas transform over long periods of time (Halperin, 1998: 93-120). In the last volume of Foucault's history of sexuality we can see an important shift of approach and emphasis – from rapid change and dramatic disjunctures in the time-frame of decades to profound discursive transformations taking place slowly over centuries (Foucault, 1986). The question of transformation and discontinuity in memory and culture is one of some significance for understanding the legacy of Alexander the Great in Asia.

II

Are debates about memory and history – collective, public and popular memory – relevant to analysing the legacy of Alexander in Asia? Of course much of the historiography on Alexander the Great in the East, and Indo-Greek influence more generally, has focused on how the West has read the East. If we go back to one of the founding debates in the historiography of the Indo-Greeks and the legacy of Alexander for Indian culture, that between Tarn and Narain, historians have concentrated on the political, ideological and historical contexts of this dispute—Tarn as the 1930s Eurocentric apologist for Western colonial expansion and Narain as the nationalist critic of European colonisation. Another dimension of this dispute, however, is that of perspective. For Tarn looking eastwards what is remarkable is how far Greek civilisation reached and how long it survived. Writing at a time of continuing, though fragile, British domination, the seemingly inevitable march of Europe through the East seem to be prefigured by Alexander and the subsequent Indo-Greek settlements. For Narain, writing in post independence India, looking westwards what is striking is the impermanence of Europe in India, how little Alexander and the Indo-Greeks advanced into the heartland of Indian culture. On balance, despite recent efforts to bolster the views of Tarn (Holt, 1989), the weight of argument seems to fall more on the side of Narain. His views have become commonplace among later South Asian commentators on ancient India and Pakistan (Samad, 2002). For instance, R.C. Majumdar concludes that 'there was nothing to distinguish his [Alexander's] raid in Indian history...he never approached even within a measurable distance of the citadel of Indian military strength'. Thus while Alexander’s invasion opened up ‘free intercourse’ between India and the West ‘from an Indian point of view’, Alexander was only ‘a precursor of Nadir Shah and Tamerlane’ (Majumdar, 1960: 101-2).

Much of the scholarship on Alexander suffers from being shaped by a European gaze looking East. Some of the most exciting scholarship reverses that perspective. There is now a flourishing historiography on the Sikander/Iskandar legend within diverse Asian cultures. And within this historiography there are fascinating questions about the different ways Sikander/Iskandar has been configured within specific Asian traditions – from being a heroic figure exemplifying admirable martial qualities of the warrior to being a brutal, barbaric despoiler of Asian cultures, prefiguring the imperial aspirations of European powers. Here we can see how the East has read the West and how diverse Eastern cultures incorporated the Alexander legend into public and popular culture, shaping it to fit specific dynamics within their cultures (van Bladel in this volume).

Nonetheless the question of collective memory highlights important questions within this historiography. There are problems in the extent and interpretation of the evidence that unsettle theories of cultural continuity in the impact of the Indo-Greek culture on India. On the one hand there is material evidence to suggest continuing contact between Indo-Greek settlements in
the north-west and other parts of India. The rich findings from the Ai-Khanoum site in Afghanistan suggest that Indo-Greek cultures thrived in the north-west for at least a millennium after Alexander and these settlements were more likely connected to Indian trade networks (Bernard, 1982: 148-59). Studies of Adam in Central India, for example, demonstrate the presence of Graeco-Roman antiquities in these economies far from their source (Nath, 1995: 149-71). On the other hand there are important questions about whether such artefacts came by land trade routes from the north-west or sea routes connecting India to Graeco-Roman settlements further afield (in, for example, the Persian Gulf). The archaeological evidence from these sites suggests that there were thriving trade connections between the East and the West. But the question of wider cultural influence and whether the Indo-Greek settlements of the north-west were isolated enclaves or embedded, and economically and culturally influential remains unresolved, although the weight of opinion is more towards the former than the latter (Ray, 2003: 165-85).

The more difficult question is whether there were broader cultural contacts and interchanges arising out of trade networks that helped shape the Indian culture. Here the evidence is more opaque. Equally important, there are gaps in the record. While we have a rich literary tradition of Sikander legends in Indian culture did this legend persist within the collective memory and oral traditions of Indian peoples from the time of Alexander the Great or was it of more recent origin? Moreover there are genuine debates about whether figures in Jewish, Arabic and Persian cultures, such as the prophet Dhul-Qarnayn, or reference to the man with ‘two horns’, are in fact Alexander the Great (other scholars have put up plausible alternatives). Some scholars, such as N. Gopala Pillai (1938), have sought to uncover references in Sanskrit to Alexander, thus confirming that Indian culture did engage with and respond to Greek influences. More recently some have tried to argue that references to the Yavanas within ancient Sanskrit texts might refer to Alexander and the Indo-Greeks (Vassiliades, 2000: 105-28). The argument for these claims is based more on inference and conjecture than substantive textual evidence. Moreover such inferences are themselves contested.

The substantive and acknowledged literary record for the Sikander stories largely dates from the beginning of the Persian invasions. This suggests that it may have been imported from the fourteenth century. What is remarkable, however, is how quickly Sikander stories spread and became part of wider South Asian, and eventually Asian, literary cultures. But a key question here, one that goes to the heart of the problem of collective memory, is why the Sikander stories were so resonant and widespread. Were they merely the imposition of an invading culture or did their popularity build upon a larger oral tradition on Sikander going back centuries. In other words was there an oral collective memory about the Alexander campaigns and the subsequent Indo-Greek culture of the north-west that made assimilation of the Persian tradition into a wider Hindu culture relatively easy? An alternative might be that the literary form of the Sikander stories, legendary hero and conqueror, resonated with similar but unrelated stories within Indian culture. It had a familiar literary form (triumph of a warrior lord) that was easily assimilated into a larger cultural tradition. At this point, however, there are no substantial texts or other forms of evidence that point to the presence of a Sikander legend within Indian cultures before later Turkish and then Persian influences and texts. This is not necessarily conclusive evidence as oral traditions are fragile in contexts of repeated conquests. More textual evidence would be needed before we could be more certain about whether the Sikander stories grew out of a continuing collective
memory or resulted from the importation and transmission of an essentially Persian tradition more than a millennium after Alexander's campaigns in India.

Nonetheless the lack of any evidence of broader Indo-Greek cultural impact on Indian literary culture in the first millennium AD does favours arguments about trade connections but little cultural contact between the East and West in this period. This would also tend to support the argument that Indo-Greek settlements were comparatively small, isolated and largely insulated from the surrounding Indian settlements in the north-west. In other words Narain's contention that there was no significant Indo-Greek influence on India would seem a more plausible account in this light (Narain, 1957). Moreover the emergence of an Alexander legend within India nearly 1500 years after the arrival of Alexander the Great in India highlights the pertinence of larger theoretical debates about the invention of traditions and discontinuities in collective memory (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Olick, 20003).

III

The question of discontinuity is worth exploring in relation to Western attitudes towards India. In the West there is a continuous literary tradition on Alexander. While the original accounts of Alexander's conquests have not survived the later texts of Arrian, Strabo and others, purportedly based on original accounts, established a Western literary tradition within a century of Alexander's death (Cartledge, 2004; Bosworth, 1988; Hammond, 1983). This tradition was then elaborated in various popular texts, such as the Alexander Romance, and also reinterpreted by numerous commentators in later centuries (extending up to the current day). But the tradition remained as a constant reservoir of meaning that constrained and shaped subsequent understandings of Alexander's conquests and the cultures he brought under his sway (see Bosworth, 1988; Cary, 1987; Stoneman, 1991; Mosse, 2004: 167-210). Texts do not have infinite meanings; they have a form and content that limit and shape subsequent readings, but they do contain multiple possibilities and specific historical contexts can foster remarkably varied interpretations.

This is evident, for example, in the ways the trope of effeminacy operates in different readings of the Alexander legend. There is now a rich historiography on imperial discourses on Indian masculinity. The work of Mrinalini Sinha on the 'manly Englishman' and 'effeminate Bengali' positions representations of masculinity as one of the key ways imperial discourses perpetuated the idea of a 'natural European superiority' and the necessity of British rule. Sinha dates the emergence of this discourse on Indian masculinity to the late nineteenth century (Sinha, 1995). While it undoubtedly intensifies in this period and takes on new institutional forms there is little doubt that there was a pervasive discourse on Indian effeminacy in the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century English authorities on India, such as Robertson and Jones, as we have seen above, drew largely on the classical accounts of India to support their own orientalist accounts of India. But many of these foundational texts on the campaigns of Alexander, such as Arrian, are actually remarkably silent on the question of Indian masculinity and indeed some present a very different image of the warrior-like qualities of Alexander's Indian adversaries. In other words there was no necessary link between the canon of 'authoritative' Western texts (as distinct from the subsequent popular accounts in the Alexander Romances) on Alexander in India and the eighteenth century readings of Indian attributes and culture that purportedly drew on these sources.
A more detailed discussion of one case may help to illustrate this point. William Robertson’s 1792 ‘historical disquisition’ on India was based largely on ancient sources and proved to be an influential account. Robertson was very sympathetic to the attainments of Indian civilisation. For Robertson although India was far advanced ‘the colour of the inhabitants, their effeminate appearance, their unwarlike spirit, the wild extravagance of their religious tenets and ceremonies … confirmed Europeans of their own pre-eminence’ (Robertson, 1799: 332).

Things got worse when utilitarian commentators like James Mill began to influence discourses on India. Mill lacked all sympathy for Indian culture. He saw Indians as ‘listless, apathetic, weak, passive seekers after vacuous pleasures’ (Mill, 1826: 413). The differences between utilitarian and orientalist discourses are well known – and while they differed in many respects, with regard to the masculinity of Indian men there was much common ground. For commentators like Robertson ‘it was wonderful how exactly the descriptions given by Alexander’s officers delineate what we now behold of India’. In Robertson’s reading of the ancient texts India (despite all the historical evidence to the contrary) seemed timeless: ‘a country where the manners, the customs, and even the dress of the people are almost as permanent and invariable as the face of nature itself.’ India had an early and high civilisation and the inhabitants were ‘delicate and slender in form’ (Robertson, 1799: 26). While Europeans needed to respect Hindu and Mughal attainments, for Robertson, like later utilitarian critics, Indians were ‘an inferior race of men’ – ‘knowing, ingenious’ but passive, unmanly, unchanging, ill adapted to the demands of modern civilisation (Robertson, 1799: 332).

Despite the reliance of orientalists and later British commentators on the trope of effeminacy for making sense of India, discussion of weak and passive Indian peoples are remarkably rare in classical texts. On the contrary most of the ancient accounts, and most contemporary historians, suggest that Alexander’s campaigns in Bactria and India were ambitious and difficult. Overcoming the Indian rajah Porus, according to all the ancient authorities, was one of Alexander’s greatest military triumphs. At the battle of Hydaspes Alexander faced a numerically superior force. Porus himself was represented within these texts as an imposing figure, commonly said to be five cubits (over two metres) high and imposing on his war elephant. The battle itself and the means by which Alexander’s innovative strategy gave him a tactical advantage that resulted in victory have been the focus of much attention in ancient accounts and modern historiography. Moreover the ancient texts suggest Porus fought particularly bravely and Alexander honoured him as a meritorious foe. As Arrian remarked Porus was a great king and moreover ‘no Indian at all is a slave and the soldier caste has the greatest freedom and the most spirit’ (Arrian, 1933: XII). Indeed the ancient insistence, evident in Arrian, on India as a land transformed by the arrival of Dionysus (and later Herakles) worked to undermine the representation of India as ‘other’, bestowing Greek attributes and characteristics on ‘Asiatic’ peoples (Arrian, 1933: V-VII). Even when we come to many of the Alexander romances and other vernacular European texts of the Medieval Period Porus is defeated and killed more through deception and Alexander’s cunning than Porus’s weakness. Indeed the resort to cunning is in part because of the towering strength of the Indian king (Bridges, 1996: 45-60).

The silver medals and medallions struck to commemorate this great victory seem to represent Alexander, holding the thunderbolt of Zeus. Others depict him on horseback in sole combat
with Porus mounted on an elephant. Alexander's respect for Porus was evident in the fact that he reinstated him as Rajah of Pauravas, even adding to the territory under his control. In other words in the ancient texts that have come down to us and in the material culture that still attests to these events the Indian campaign is depicted as a great victory over worthy and noble foes (Cartledge, 2004: 183-94).

These classical narratives are in marked contrast to those of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. British commentators on Alexander’s legacy and the lessons to be drawn about Indian bravery and fighting skills, all written by scholars who claimed to have based their account on these ancient texts, were uniformly dismissive of Indian warrior prowess. How could they misread the ancient texts so comprehensively? One factor is undoubtedly the contradictions and ambivalences in the classical accounts themselves. While Arrian, for example, praises Indian culture and in particular its soldier caste, his accounts of Indian customs, their lack of a slave class and their unwillingness to fight amongst themselves situate them as ‘other’ to the martial virtues and social structures of classical Greek civilisation (Arrian, 1933: XVI). Another factor might be the transposition of ideas and representations from other classical texts. There are references in some classical texts to ‘Asiatic flabbiness and cowardice’, notably in Hippocrates, written in the century before Alexander’s conquests (Hippocrates, 1939: 210). These depictions of ‘Asiatics’ are present on occasion in the classical canon and although they run counter to the representations of Indians in Arrian and other texts, European scholars, like Robertson, very familiar with these other accounts obviously deployed them to make sense of India, confirming as they did their own understanding of the contemporary Indian culture they governed.

The significant reconfiguration of the ancient texts, the inversion of meanings, or the strengthening of some meanings over others mark a significant rupture with the main body of ancient texts on Alexander’s campaigns in India. Another factor influencing this reading of India were prevailing ‘Enlightenment’ discourses on race and climate, notably those of Montesquieu, where climate was seen to fundamentally shape the character of races. Thus peoples from the ‘hot tropics’ were markedly different in character and disposition to those of the ‘temperate North’. Enlightenment commentators on India focused more on the climatic evidence in the ancient texts, the arid land, heat, monsoonal downpours that sapped the spirit of Alexander’s men and encouraged mutiny. This suggested a land that made an enfeebled race but it also raised the persistent ambiguity in the imperial endeavour – should the white man be in the tropics? New discourses both validated and undermined imperial desires (see Peabody, 2002; Eze, 1997; Moore, 2003).

This emergent trope of East/West contact – the masculine West and the effeminate East – is amenable to historical critique. It is not embedded in the nature of these cultures but is the product of particular historical circumstances. Nor is it inherent in the gaze looking eastwards as the ancient sources clearly indicate. But the Enlightenment image has surprising longevity and can now be read back onto the ancient past, most graphically in Oliver Stone’s florid, overblown and controversial film Alexander (2004), where India literally is the source of masculinity crisis – barbaric, primitive, hot, wet India drains Greek warriors of their manhood (all except Alexander). India saps their spirit and they are desperate to return home to restore manly vigour.
This simplistic contrast between manliness and effeminacy facilitated imperial expansion but also indicates the ways cultural traditions can be reshaped in specific contexts. The evidence for a substantive Western tradition on Indian effeminacy is thin. In the context of a new imperial gaze Western scholars began to read the classical texts in different ways instituting the trope of effeminacy where it had not previously existed. Such ideas tell us much about the production of Western discourses on the ‘other’. But they are also pertinent for contemporary debates about how India has responded to repeated cultural invasions. William Dalrymple for example has drawn an interesting contrast between contemporary Indian approaches to the question of cultural transmission – between Amartya Sen’s image of a cosmopolitan, polyglot India that has absorbed and transformed a complex mix of ideas, practices and beliefs from successive waves of invasion, migration and cultural contact and V.S. Naipaul’s fear that foreign influences have always been a threat to an essential Indian culture and identity (Dalrymple, 2006: 28-30). On balance the weight of evidence inclines me more towards the former than the latter. Narain seems to have a case – ‘they came, they saw, but India conquered’ (Narain, 1957:11). But as with the Indo-Greeks, so with British rule centuries later: India conquered but in the process was itself transformed.

NOTES

1. Gopala Pillai’s findings were presented to the 1938 All India Oriental Conference in a paper entitled ‘Skanda: The Alexander Romance in India’. Here he argues that Skanda is a corruption of Iskandar and Alexander, and that references to Skanda and also to a lance-bearer (a classic sign of Alexander) can be found in Sanskrit literature in the first millennium AD. But this is not an argument that has been embraced by many later scholars. See http://murugan.org/docs/Skanda%20Alexander%20Romance%20in%20India.rtf

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The North-west region of the Indian subcontinent, which incorporates present day Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, was a major centre of Buddhism in antiquity and holds an important position in the history and development of that religion. It was, for example, the source of many innovations, including developments in modes of artistic expression and in forms of scholastic or abhidharmic doctrinal analysis, and it played a major role in the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia and China. It is also here that Buddhists in any significant number first encountered Greek or “Hellenistic” culture, religion, and thought.

Although our knowledge of Buddhism in the North-West is far from meagre, it has been radically altered in the last decade by the discovery of several major collections of extremely old Buddhist manuscripts from this area. These manuscripts, which together represent the largest and most impressive corpus of Buddhist manuscripts from the North-West, preserve texts belonging to various Śrāvakayāna (or Hinayāna) schools as well as the Mahāyāna, written in either the Gāndhārī language and Kharoṣṭhī script or in Buddhist Sanskrit in various forms of Brāhmī script. At least two manuscripts preserve Buddhist texts in the Bactrian language written in Graeco-Bactrian script. Dating from approximately the first half of the first century AD to the eighth century AD, these manuscripts span a significant proportion of the history of Buddhism in the North-west and therefore are witness to at least some of the ideas that were current among Buddhist communities in the region during this period.

This paper will address the issue of Greek, or Hellenistic, influence on Buddhism in the North-west in the light of these new manuscript finds.

It is generally agreed that Buddhism was first introduced to the North-west during the Mauryan period, most probably by king Asoka (272–232 BC), approximately half a century after his grandfather, Candragupta Maurya, had taken these provinces from Alexander’s successors. Although the initial reception and early development of Buddhism in the region remains obscure, Buddhism certainly came to be the dominant institutionally-based religion in the region, a position...
it occupied at least until the seventh or eighth century AD, with some communities surviving into the eleventh century AD.\(^3\)

It is likely that Buddhists first encountered Greeks, Macedonians and other Hellenized peoples during the Asokan period. In his edicts Asoka states that he sent mahāmātrās “commissioners of Dharma or law” amongst the Yonas, generally taken to mean Greeks, and other peoples of the North-West to promote his Dharma (Rock Edict V; Hultzsch 1925), which is often closely associated with Buddhist ideals, and he names several Greek and Macedonian kings amongst whom his conquest of Dharma (dharmavijaye) was victorious (Rock Edict XIII; Hultzsch 1925). Pali sources (Mahāvamsa XII.3–5) record that missionary monks were sent to the North-West after the council of Pātaliputra (c. 250 BC) reportedly held during Asoka’s reign. One of these monks was sent amongst the Yonas (Yonaloka) while another, referred to as a Yonaka, a Greek, was sent to Aparāntaka, a region said to be inhabited by Greeks.\(^4\)

Throughout the century and a half or more of Indo-Greek rule in the North-West\(^5\) Buddhists and Greeks and other Hellenized people must have interacted and one would presume that at least some members of each community would have had a basic knowledge of each others’ world view and religious beliefs and practices. However, given that the success of Buddhism in the North-West coincided with the end of Indo-Greek rule, or a little later (Fussman 1994: 26), the interaction between Greeks and Buddhists may not have been that frequent and widespread. It is also unclear to what extent the Indo-Greeks were the bearers and promoters of Greek or Hellenistic civilization, and it remains to be determined what Greek thought and literature, religious beliefs and practices were actually available to Buddhists in the North-West had they cared to inquire. Greek presence in the North-West appears to have been quite different to that in Bactria, where a site like Ai Khanum provides evidence of a fully Hellenized culture, including remnants of Greek literature. The Indo-Greek tendency to adapt to local traditions, as witnessed by their bilingual coinage of Indian type, and the general lack of Greek influence on the material culture of the Indo-Greek period has led Pierfrancesco Callieri (1995: 305–306) to argue that the Indo-Greeks were actually a ruling minority unsupported by substantial colonization, confronted by a country with a flourishing culture. If true, this would suggest that Buddhists may have had few opportunities to encounter Greek thought.

Although Greeks and other Hellenized peoples are likely to have converted to Buddhism, the evidence is rather slim. There are, for example, only a few Greek converts recorded in Indian inscriptions. Among those from the North-West dating to the Indo-Greek period there is only one donor with a Greek name.\(^6\) This is found in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription from Swat, northern Pakistan, which records the establishment of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s relics (presumably in a stūpa) by the meridarkha Theodotos (Theudota).\(^7\) There are also no clear Buddhist symbols on Indo-Greek coins\(^8\) and no evidence that Buddhist texts were translated into Greek (Fussman 1994: 24), although the latter may be due to the orality of the Buddhist tradition at this time rather than proof of a lack of Greek knowledge of and interest in Buddhist literature.\(^9\)

The supposed conversion of the Indo-Greek king Menander (second century BC),\(^10\) mentioned in the Pali text the Milindapañha (p. 420) or Questions of King Milinda, a text which depicts Milinda/Menander debating with the Buddhist monk Nāgasena, has been doubted by some scholars, including Gérard Fussman (1993: 88; 1994: 25ff.), who argued that Chinese pilgrims
mention Asokan stūpas and edifices of Kanishka, but never mention Menander, while Menander's coins lack Buddhist symbols. Menander, according to Fussman, should rather be viewed as one who was at minimum not hostile to Buddhism and at most as one who took an interest in Buddhism but did not give up his own religious orientations. The Questions of King Milinda may, in fact, be best viewed not so much as a record of an historical event than as a work that was composed for propagating the Buddhist teaching amongst those for whom king Menander was a significant figure, including Greeks, and as a model for dealing with critical external inquiry into the Buddhist religion, which also gave the author or authors of this text the opportunity to express certain doctrinal views.

Greek influence on Buddhism has been much discussed. In his major publication Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, Étienne Lamotte argued that Greek influence on Buddhism was threefold (1958: 469–487 = 1988: 426–442). First, Greek piety, which was based on an anthropomorphic concept of divinity and found expression in petitionary prayer, “somewhat washed over the Buddhist mentality” (“a déteint quelque peu sur la mentalité bouddhique” p. 472). This is witnessed, according to Lamotte, in expressions of intent found in Buddhist donative inscriptions in the North-West, such as “may this gift be for the benefit of my mother and father and all beings,” which he argued are missing in other Indian inscriptions of the early period (pp. 473–479). Secondly, the anthropomorphic nature of the Greek notion of the gods played a part in the invention of the image of the Buddha (pp. 479–486). And finally, Greek influence is seen in some Buddhist stories and tales, such as those that depict the former lives of the Buddha (pp. 486–487).

These ideas have, of course, been challenged by several scholars. With reference to the first, Fussman (1994: 23ff., 27) argued that the piety expressed in donative inscriptions, that is, the expectation of material and spiritual results both here and hereafter, is very Indian, with such sentiments being found in the earlier Asokan inscriptions and contemporary inscriptions from Mathurā. The notion of a Greek origin for the Buddha image has also generally been abandoned, although Greek influence, whether direct or mediated through the Roman, Iranian, or Parthian worlds, is not doubted for certain features of Gandhāran art: the classical manner of the Buddha’s robes or his posture; Tyche/Fortuna as model for Hārītī; the Buddha’s attendant Vajrapāṇi represented in the form of Heracles; the appearance of Greek mythological figures, such as atlantes and satyres, and other classical characters on architectural features; Corinthian columns; and elements of technique, to name but a few. But this influence involves decorative elements and affected only the minor deities. Consequently, in his important paper “Upāya-kauśalya: l’implantation du bouddhisme au Gandhāra” (1994) Gérard Fussman maintained that Greek artistic influence had no impact on Buddhist doctrine or practice (p. 28 “ne change rien à la doctrine du bouddhisme ni à sa pratique”). And more significantly, he argued that the Buddhists of Gandhāra seemed to have made few concessions to the doctrines of the Greeks or those of any of the other foreign powers that invaded the land (p. 24).

The most recent scholar to explore Lamotte’s third area of supposed Greek influence, that of Greek influence on the content of Buddhist literature, particularly on the features of certain stories, is Duncan Derrett. For example, Derrett sees Greek influence in the para-canonical accounts of the Buddha’s birth story (Derrett 1992), in the story of Kīśā Gotamī (Derrett 2002a), on the

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form of the *Milindapañha* itself (Derrett 1967), and on certain *Jātakas* (mentioned Derrett 2000: 90–91). However, in many cases these interpretations remain speculative and are yet to be more generally accepted.11

Until recently our understanding of the history and character of Buddhism in the North-west and assessments of Greek influence on it, of which the above views of Lamotte and Fussman are examples, were based on evidence provided by art objects, coins, inscriptions, archaeological excavations, and the accounts of foreign travellers. What has been virtually absent from this field are examples of the Buddhist literature of this region, which, given the long and prosperous history of Buddhism in the North-West, must have been vast.

Before the appearance of the new Buddhist manuscripts the most substantial manuscript find from the North-West of the Indian subcontinent were the so called Gilgit manuscripts, which were found in 1931 and 1938 at Naupur near Gilgit in the far north of Pakistan. Although extremely valuable and interesting, these manuscripts date from a comparatively late period, the sixth and seventh centuries AD, and preserve classic Buddhist texts (some 50 in number in the Sanskrit language), most of which are late in origin and/or were composed outside the region. This includes Mahāyāna works, such as the *Vajracchedikā-sūtra* (Diamond Sutra) and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (Lotus Sutra), and Śrāvakayāna texts, such as a scholastic *Abhidharma* treatise the *Dharmaskandha*, and a portion of the *Vinaya*, or monks’ disciplinary rules, of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school.12

Other previous manuscript finds from the North-West were comparatively minor. The most noteworthy is a small collection of Sanskrit and Gandhāri manuscript fragments discovered by Joseph Hackin in 1930 in a cave at Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Dating from the third to eighth centuries AD, these fragments preserve portions of Buddhist canonical texts, such as the *Samgītīparyāya*, a scholastic or *Abhidharma* work, and the *Sāmyuktāgama* (discourses grouped according to theme), both belonging to the Sarvāstivāda school, and sections of the *Vinaya* or monastic rules of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins.13

Despite the importance of these early discoveries, they provided an extremely limited view of the type of texts that were used by Buddhist communities in the North-west, with the early period in particular being without representation. The manuscript collections that have appeared since the early 1990s have certainly changed this.

These new discoveries include three major manuscript collections, referred to respectively as the British Library Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts, the Senior Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts, and the Schøyen manuscripts after the institution or individual that owns them, and several smaller collections, some consisting of a single manuscript or manuscript fragment. A fourth collection, perhaps major, recently came to light in Pakistan. As I have discussed the new manuscript finds in greater details elsewhere (Allon forthcoming 2007), I will give here only a brief summary of these collections and the types of texts they preserve.

THE BRITISH LIBRARY KHAROṢṬHĪ MANUSCRIPTS

These Gandhāran manuscripts, which were acquired by the British Library in 1994, consist of approximately 23 Buddhist texts in the Gāndhārī language and Kharoṣṭhī script preserved on 29 birch bark scrolls. Although their provenance is unknown, they most likely came from eastern
Afghanistan. Based on an inscription on the pot and evidence from within the texts themselves, it appears that they originated from a monastery of the Dharmaguptakas, a school of the Śrāvakayāna that is known to have prospered in the North-west. They are thought to date from the first half of the first century AD, which makes them the oldest Buddhist and oldest Indian manuscripts yet discovered (for full details on this collection, see Salomon 1999).

These manuscripts preserve a variety of texts, including “canonical” prose sūtras or discourses of the Buddha and his disciples (Allon 2001), and “canonical” verse texts, such as fragments of the well-known Dharmaśāstra (Lenz 2003) and Khadgavīsāna or Rhinoceros sūtra (Salomon 2000). Most of these “canonical” texts, and I use the word “canonical” rather loosely, have parallels in other languages, such as Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan. They represent Gāndhārī translations of texts that were composed and transmitted in another Indo-Aryan language and imported into the North-West.

Particularly well-represented in the collection are very brief outline versified stories, referred to as aavadānas or pūrvayogas by the texts themselves, depicting the karmic actions and histories of individuals (Lenz 2003). Although some of these stories have parallels in other languages, a large number do not and appear to be local productions featuring local characters. These include historical figures such as the contemporary Indo-Scythian (Śaka) rulers Aśpavarma, son of the Apraca king Indravarman (of Bajaur), and Jihonika, who were previously known from coins and inscriptions which date their rule to the first half of the first century AD. In the story of Aśpavarma he may be referred to as strategos “commander” (the word is only partially preserved), a Greek title recorded for him in other sources (Salomon 1999: 148). Unfortunately for the current purpose, there are no stories concerning Greeks.

Finally, the collection also contains several Abhidharma texts or scholastic treatises and commentaries. Most of these do not have parallels in other languages and therefore may have been composed locally.

Only four of the texts in this collection have been published to date (Salomon 2000; Allon 2001; Lenz 2003).

THE SENIOR KHAROŚTHĪ MANUSCRIPTS

A few years after the appearance of the British Library Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts, a similar collection of birch bark scrolls containing Buddhist texts in the Gāndhārī language and Kharoṣṭhī script appeared on the antiquities market and was acquired by an English collector, Mr. Robert Senior. Like the British Library collection these manuscripts most likely came from eastern Afghanistan and probably belonged to a Dharmaguptaka monastery.

The earthenware pot in which the manuscripts were found and its associated lid both bore short Kharoṣṭhī dedicatory inscriptions stating more or less the same thing. The inscription on the pot reads “In the year [twelve], in the month Avadunaka, after (*five) days; at this time [this] was established in honor of [his] father and mother, in honor of all beings; [the donation] of Rohaṇa, son of Mašumatra” (Salomon 2003: 76). The features of the dating formula, which includes the use of the Macedonian calendar, in this case the month Audunaios, Gāndhārī Avadunaka, indicates that the era must be that of the Kuśāṇa emperor Kaniska. Taking AD ca. 127 as the most likely date for the accession of Kaniska, Salomon (2003: 76–8) proposed AD ca. 140
as a likely date for the inscription and therefore for these manuscripts. This date is consistent with the radiocarbon dating of these manuscripts (Allon, Salomon, Jacobsen, and Zoppi 2007). It therefore appears that the Senior manuscripts are slightly younger than the British Library Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts, perhaps by about a century, which is consistent with certain linguistic and palaeographical features of these documents.

The 24 scrolls or scroll fragments of this collection preserve at least 41 texts. In contrast to the diversity of literary genres found in the British Library manuscripts, the texts in this collection are either “canonical” Śrāvakāyāna sūtras (discourses of the Buddha) or biographical accounts of the Buddha’s life, which are commonly associated with the Vīnapaṭāka, the division of the canon preserving the monastic disciplinary rules. Most of these Gāndhārī texts have parallels in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and/or Tibetan. The texts of the Senior collection therefore all represent Gāndhārī translations of texts that were imported into the North-West, possibly from the Buddhist heartland of the Gangetic plains. The texts in this collection await publication. (For further details of the Senior collection, see Salomon 2003 and Allon forthcoming 2007.)

THE SCHØYEN MANUSCRIPTS

In 1994 a large collection of manuscript fragments was discovered in a cave near the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan by local people. These birch bark, palm leaf, and vellum manuscripts subsequently found their way onto the antiquities market. The majority were bought by the Norwegian manuscript collector Mr. Martin Schøyen, while smaller quantities of fragments went to private collections in Japan (the Hirayama Institute of Silk Road Studies, Kamakura, and the Genshu Hayashidera Collection, Toyama).

Dating from approximately the second to the eighth centuries AD, these Bamiyan manuscripts preserve texts belonging to both the Śrāvakāyāna and Mahāyāna. The majority are Sanskrit (or more or less sanskritized) texts written in various Brāhmī script types, while a small, but significant portion are Gāndhārī texts written in Kharoṣṭhī. The Mahāyāna texts identified and published so far include fragments of the well-known Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra (Lotus Sutra), Sukhavatīvyūha-sūtra (Larger Land of Bliss Sutra), and the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines), and Saṃādhi-rāja-sūtra, to name but a few. The Śrāvakāyāna texts include portions of “canonical” (āgama) sūtras, texts concerned with monastic rules (Vinaya), commentaries, Abhidharma or scholastic treatises (Śāriputra-Abhidharma), and Buddhist poetical works such as the Jñānakumārotā of Āryasūtra and Haribhāṣa. Particularly interesting are fragments of a non-Buddhist Mimāṃsa philosophical treatise, which represent the first example of a Brahmanical (and rival) philosophical work being found in a Buddhist monastic environment from the Greater Central Asian region (Franco in Braarvig 2002: 269–85).

The texts so far identified amongst these Bamiyan manuscripts for the most part originate outside the North-West and/or belong to a relatively late period of literary production. Texts that are clearly local productions have not so far been identified. (For further information on these documents, see Braarvig 2000, 2002, 2007; Allon forthcoming 2007.)

OTHER MANUSCRIPTS

Besides the three major collections of Buddhist manuscripts outlined above (British Library, Senior, and Schøyen), several individual manuscripts that must have originated from the North-
West have come to the notice of scholars. The most important of these is a substantial portion of a large Sanskrit birch bark manuscript of the Dirghāgama, the division of the canon containing long discourses, belonging to the (Mūla)-Sarvāstivāda school, which dates to the seventh or eighth centuries AD (Hartmann 2000, 2002, 2004) and a Sanskrit birch bark manuscript containing at least two Mahāyāna texts, which is dated to the sixth or seventh centuries AD on paleographic grounds (Allon forthcoming 2007).15

Also of interest are two Buddhist texts found amongst the 150 or more secular Bactrian language documents tentatively dated to the fourth to the eighth centuries AD that must have come from northern Afghanistan, which incorporates much of ancient Bactria. These contain invocations to Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other beings and represent relatively late texts. Interesting for our purpose is the fact that these documents are written in a modified form of the Greek script, known as the Graeco-Bactrian script, which was also used in Bactrian inscriptions and coin legends. (See Sims-Williams 2000; for a general overview of the new Bactrian documents, see Sims-Williams 1997.)

CONCLUSION

The new manuscript finds from Afghanistan and Pakistan, represent the most substantial examples of Buddhist literature from the North-West. Dating from the first to the eighth centuries AD, they provide examples of the kind of texts that were being used by Buddhist communities in the region for a large proportion of their history. Although these manuscripts all post-date the last of the Indo-Greek kingdoms, said to have ended in the second half of the first century BC or a little later, the earliest, namely the British Library manuscripts, which are dated to the first half of the first century AD, come very close to it. But as these British Library manuscripts would have been copied from yet earlier exemplars, it is highly likely that the texts they transmit are representative of those that were in circulation among some Buddhist communities in the North-West during the Indo-Greek period. The same undoubtedly applies to the texts of the slightly younger Senior manuscripts.

A large proportion of new manuscripts coincide in date with the flowering of the “Greco-Buddhist” or “Greco-Roman” style of Buddhist art, known as Gandhāran art, when the art of the region absorbed many Greek influences. This being the case, we can ask three questions with reference to the new manuscripts: i) do they include examples of overtly Greek material, such as texts of Greek origin?; ii) do they contain references to things Greek, such as religious beliefs and practices?; and iii) is there evidence for Greek influence in them, say, on doctrine, literary genres, narrative elements, stylistic features, or in terminology?

The answer to the first is already obvious: there are, in fact, no Greek texts amongst the new manuscript finds, whether in the Greek language or in translation. They therefore do not provide evidence for the idea recorded by Derrett (1992: 49) that Greek texts were translated into Indian languages, nor for his notion that Buddhists would have read Greek texts, such as those of Plato and Homer (Derrett 2000: 93; 2002b: 344). The only non-Buddhist text so far identified is the Sanskrit Mīmāṃsā text in the Schøyen collection which preserves the views of a rival Indian philosophical school. Although this manuscript dates to a relatively late period, the sixth century AD, it can be viewed as representative of the state of affairs for the early period also. That is, within
the Indian realm, at least, Buddhists were most concerned with the religious and philosophical views of their Indian rivals, whom they perceived to be most threatening.

For the purpose of answering the remaining two questions, the Buddhist texts preserved in the new manuscript collections can be divided into two classes. The first consists of Gāndhārī and Sanskrit versions of texts that were originally imported into the North-West and are generally known from other sources. These texts certainly lack any reference to Greek ideas and do not exhibit any Greek influence, even in vocabulary. The second consists of those texts that are not known from other sources. As a large proportion of these were most likely composed in the North-West, it is this second group of texts within which we would expect to find Greek influence had it occurred. However, the only discernible Greek features of these texts and their associated materials is the use of the Greek title *stratega* “commander” applied to Aśpavarman in one of the stories preserved in the British Library collection, a loanword that is well attested from Gandhāri coin legends and inscriptions, and the use of the Macedonian month Audunaios, Gāndhāri Avadunaka, in the inscription on the pot in which the Senior manuscripts were found, which is evidence of the employment of the Macedonian calendar. Besides these, Greek influence is to be seen in the use of a derivative of the Greek script in the case of the Bactrian documents. But these are relatively minor things: a loanword applied to a civil office, an administrative convention, and the adoption of a script. All of these texts are composed in well-known Buddhist and Indian literary genres and styles, the stories are typically Indian, they utilize common Buddhist vocabulary and espouse standard Buddhist concepts and ideals, while the views that are debated and criticized in the scholastic treatises are those of other Buddhist, not Greeks. In short, no significant Greek influence is discernible in them.

The limitation of this assessment is that, although a preliminary reading of most of the new manuscripts has been made, only a small proportion have been edited or studied in detail, and many texts remain to be identified. Despite this, I would anticipate that further study of these manuscripts will not reveal Greek influence beyond that already noted.

The lack of significant Greek influence in the new manuscript collections therefore supports Gérard Fussman’s views, mentioned earlier, that Greek artistic influence had no impact on Buddhist doctrine or practice and that the Buddhists of Gandhāra seemed to have made little concessions to the doctrines of the Greeks, a state of affairs that he attributed to Buddhists not being curious about heretical doctrines (Fussman 1994: 27).17

This lack of Greek influence is probably not surprising. Buddhism was a well developed and sophisticated religion by the time it came into contact with Greek religion and thought. Indeed, in terms of doctrine at least, one might ask what the Greeks could have offered the Buddhists. But the general lack of Greek influence on Buddhist literature, doctrine, and probably also practice in the North-West, as witnessed by the new manuscript finds, may not only reflect the overwhelming strength of Buddhism, but may as much be due to the weakness of Greek culture in the North-West. Contrary to Fussman, Buddhists did pay attention to heretical doctrines, but generally only if they perceived them to be a threat. Clearly, Greek religion and thought cannot have represented a serious challenge to Buddhists in the North-West, nor could it have offered anything that the Buddhist religion did not already possess.
NOTES

* I would like to thank Richard Salomon and Jason Neelis for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. The history of the Greeks, Macedonians, and other Hellenized peoples in the North-West has been well documented by numerous scholars and will not be rehearsed here.

2. It is possible that individual monks reached the North-West prior to this period, despite the lack of evidence to support it (see Fussman 1994: 19).


5. Beginning with the invasion of the North-West by Demetrius I c. 180 or 185 BC and ending with the last of the Indo-Greek kingdoms in eastern Punjab in the second half of the first century BC or the beginning of the first century AD (see, for example, Lamotte 1958: 469ff. = 1988: 426ff.; Callieri 1995: 293; Zwalf 1996, vol. 1, p. 16; Karttunen 1997: 347).

6. The Greek name Theudama = Theodomos also occurs among a group of Buddhist names inscribed on silver vessels: theudama-putrasa budhalasa ‘[Property] of Buddhala, son of Theodomos’ (Falk 2001: 308, 317).


8. The wheel symbol found on some coins may symbolize ‘du souverain ca kavartin, du dharma bouddhique ou de Kṣṇa’ (Fussman 1993: 88).

9. Derrett’s statement (2000: 87) that ‘Greek interest in Buddhism was intense in the time of the Indo-Bactrian king Menander’ remains speculative.

10. For his dates, see Boparachhi (1990: 40, 60–63) and Fussman (1993: 104).

11. His assumption that Buddhists would have read Plato and Homer is highly speculative (Derrett 2000: 93; 2002b: 344).


13. For details of these and other early manuscript finds, see Allon (forthcoming 2007).


15. For the discussion of two further manuscripts and the new collection discovered in Pakistan, see Allon forthcoming 2007.

16. It is unclear to which group the Bactrian documents should be assigned.

17. Further research is needed on the manuscripts before we can evaluate Fussman’s claim that, in terms of ideology, Gandhāran Buddhism is not distinguishable from gangetic Buddhism (Fussman 1994: 43).

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