THE RELIABILITY OF MEGASTHENES.

The two most influential writers on India in the ancient world were Megasthenes and Ctesias, of whom the former had spent some time in India,[1] while the latter based his account on such information as he could pick up at the Persian court.[2] Separated in time by a good one hundred years they rub shoulders, like many another ill-assorted pair, in the pages of that industrious compiler, Diodorus Siculus.[3] A scant generation later, writing in Rome like Diodorus, the geographer Strabo makes good use of Megasthenes' work even though he does refer to its author in abusive terms;[4] Ctesias he does not even mention. But despite

[1] Evidence about Megasthenes' life is scanty. All we really know is that he was sent on official business to Sandrocottus (i. e. Chandragupta) (cf. Strabo, II, 1, 9; XV, 1, 36; Arr., *Ind.*, 5, 3), and that for an unknown length of time he was attached to the staff of Sibyrtius the satrap of Arachosia (Arr., *Anab.*, V, 6, 2). Whether his frequent audiences with Sandrocottus involve one or a number of separate trips to Pataliputra is not clear. We hear that he lived under Seleucus (Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, p. 132 Sylb.). No one can be sure whether it was Seleucus or Sibyrtius who sent him to Sandrocottus (cf. Müller, *F. H. G.*, IV, 398; O. Stein, "Megasthenes," No. 2, *R.-E.*, XV, cols. 230-1; B. C. J. Timmer, *Megasthenes en de Indische Maatschappij* [Amsterdam, 1930], pp. 7-8). In what follows it will be unnecessary to dwell on these uncertainties. We shall assume he was Seleucus' envoy, and that he wrote early in the third century B. C.

[2] Ctesias was an ebullient doctor from Cnidus who played an exciting role in Persia as personal physician to Artaxerxes Mnemon. Diodorus tells us he was captured in battle, and then spent seventeen years at the Persian court (II, 32, 4). He was prejudiced in favor of Clearchus and the Spartans in general (cf. Plut., *Artox.*, 13, 3; Photius' Excerpts from the *Persica*, 58-60), though his efforts in aiding Conon to obtain command of a Persian fleet later embroiled him with Sparta. However, he was acquitted of all charges in Rhodes (Phot., *Pers.*, 64). For references and discussion see F. Jacoby, "Ktesias," No. 1, *R.-E.*, XI, cols. 2032-7. Jacoby regards the seventeen years as a typical Ctesian exaggeration (2033). He probably left Persia by 398/7 B. C. See also R. Henry, *Ctésias, La Perse, L'Inde* (Brussels, 1947), pp. 4-6. See also the still valuable observations of C. Müller in his *Ctesiae Cnidii Reliquiae* (Paris, 1844, according to the Preface, but bound up with the Didot Herodotus of 1862), pp. 1-11.

[3] Particularly in Book II, 1-42.

[4] Among the liars about India first place is awarded to Deimachus,

this neglect Ctesias survived, and his work on India as well as most of his *Persica* later ornamented the shelves of Photius, the well-known Byzantine churchman and bibliophile.[5] Photius is just as sharp in his judgment of Ctesias as Strabo had been on Megasthenes, but like Strabo he seems most attracted where he finds most to condemn. Strabo, Diodorus, and Photius have this in common. None of them knew India except from books, and none of them, so far as we can tell, had ever met anyone else who had been there. In fact India, which was beginning to be known under Alexander and the Diadochi, recedes farther and farther into the distance until it becomes once more a Never-Never Land, a convenient repository for fabulous monsters and philosophers' dreams. And this was an India where Ctesias and Megasthenes, Nearchus and Philostratus[6] could meet on equal terms.

The re-establishment of India as a part of the oecumene in the modern age has also piqued our curiosity about the older India of the days of the epics and of Buddhism, and, politically, about Chandragupta and his empire. Sanskrit scholars, finding their problems insoluble in terms of Indian sources alone, have turned to the fragments of the Greek historians, while classicists, deploring the paucity of information in Greek writers, have hoped for a helping hand from the other side of the Himalayas. In the search for a satisfactory base of operations Megasthenes' *Indica* has become very important. This is well illustrated by the uncompromising statement made over a century ago by E. A. Schwanbeck, editor of the fragments of Megasthenes:

> Nam etsi geographica Graecorum scientia postea demum perfecta est, tamen Indiae cognitio iam Megasthenis libris ad summam perfectionem ita pervenit, ut qui postea de India scripserunt, ad veritatem tanto proprius accedant, quanto accuratius Megasthenis Indica sequantur.[7]

---

but Megasthenes comes second (II, 1, 9). Deimachus was sent as envoy to Sandrocottus' successor. Little else is known about him.

[5] This may be inferred because of Photius' summaries of the *Persica* and the *Indica*. Jacoby argues persuasively that Photius did not depend on an abridgment ("Ktesias," col. 2066).

[6] Philostratus wrote a *Life of Apollonius* which enables us to get a glimpse of India, as the Romans thought of it in the time of Septimius Severus.

[7] E. A. Schwanbeck, *Megasthenis Indica* (Bonn, 1846), p. 76, quoted by Müller, *F. H. G.*, II, p. 401.

The recovery in 1909 of the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya suggested a new approach. Kautilya having been Chandragupta's minister, and Megasthenes having been Seleucus' envoy to Chandragupta's court, it was felt that a comparison between the *Arthashastra* and the fragments of Megasthenes would illuminate this important period in Indian history.[8] It would be unkind to say that efforts to combine these sources have been fruitless, but it would certainly be inaccurate to state that they have been altogether successful. The *Arthashastra* appears to be a composite work, additions and other changes having been made from time to time to bring it in line with later Indian views.[9] Therefore, scholars in the field like Breloer[10] and Stein[11] have been able to find support for their divergent opinions in the *Arthashastra* itself. Barbara Timmer has made an admirable study of Megasthenes in which she considers the fragments individually, with a view to arriving at some judgment on the reliability of that author. However, she has deliberately limited her discussion to the passages dealing with Indian society—omitting such matters as geography, religious practices and myths, animal life, and the remote peoples of India. In imposing these limits on her work, not only does she leave out most of what particularly interested the Greek world, but she also deprives herself of a satisfactory criterion for judging Megasthenes. For there is no other Greek writer whose account of Indian society can now be used to confront that of Megasthenes except on one or two points. Her commentary, therefore, consists primarily in a discussion of the relative accuracy with which various writers reproduce the account of Megasthenes, and in the elucidation of Megasthenes' remarks in terms of the Sanskrit literature. In other words, she has practically turned her back on the Greek background of Megasthenes, preferring to explain such idealizing tendencies as he shows by alluding to Brahmanic precepts rather than to Greek literary influences. But

[8] See especially Timmer, *Megasthenes*, pp. 2; 43-4; also see W. E. Clark in the *Legacy of India* (Oxford, 1937), p. 340.

[9] See Timmer, *Megasthenes*, pp. 42-3; also H. C. Raychaudhuri in *An Advanced History of India*, 2nd ed. (London, 1950), p. 126.

[10] Bernhard Breloer, *Kautilya-Studien*, I: *Das Grundeigentum in Indien* (Bonn, 1927); II: *Altindisches Privatrecht bei Megasthenes und Kautalya* (Bonn, 1928).

[11] O. Stein, "Megasthenes," No. 2, *R.-E.*, XV, cols. 230-326.

have we any more right to assume a communicative Brahman than a Greek writer as influencing Megasthenes on these matters implying a theory of society? Or, if both influences were present, how should we distribute the honors? We do not know how long Seleucus' envoy spent in India, nor whether the interpreters at his disposal were competent to translate any but the most concrete statements of fact from one language into another.[12]

Herodotus went into Egypt under somewhat similar circumstances. That is to say the Greeks had a lively curiosity about Egypt even before his time, and there was already a Greek literary tradition.[13] Like Megasthenes, Herodotus had some ideas in his head of what he would find when he left for his admittedly brief visit,[14] and like Megasthenes he was dependent on interpreters.[15] Opinions about Herodotus' Egyptian digression have varied widely in the period since he wrote, but there will be less fluctuation in the future, for he can now be judged in the light of archaeological discoveries. We know a good deal about Egypt from evidence entirely independent of Herodotus and the other classical writers. Eventually this should also apply to Megasthenes, but evidently the Indian archaeologist has a long way to go before he overtakes his Egyptian confrère.

[12] Miss Timmer is not unaware of these difficulties. She notes how different scholars have seen proof of contradictory philosophic influences in Megasthenes' account of the Brahmans. Therefore, she argues that the resemblances are too vague for identification (*Megasthenes*, p. 9). However, Megasthenes might well be eclectic. The real question is, are his ideas Greek or are they Indian? If Indian they would no doubt be vague, because of the difficulties of communication. Need they be precise simply because they are Greek?

[13] Of the earlier Greek writers on Egypt, Hecataeus of Miletus is the best known. See Schmid-Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, I, 1[7], pp. 693-701; Gaetano De Sanctis, *Studi di Storia della Storiografia greca* (Florence, 1951), pp. 3-19.

[14] For Herodotus' Egyptian journey see John L. Myres, *Herodotus, Father of History* (Oxford, 1953), p. 8. Jacoby accepts the view that he spent no more than four months in Egypt. See his "Herodotos," No. 7, *R.-E.*, Supp. II, cols. 277-8.

[15] To the very real difficulties of translating at all are added the fact that the interpreter is apt to have only a surface understanding of the language, suitable for assisting the traveller in making his wants known, but quite inadequate for serious discussion. And who can check the interpreter if he chooses to oversimplify or even to improvise, rather than reveal his own inadequacies?

This may be illustrated by referring to a recent and admirably lucid survey by Stuart Piggott. Towards the end of his book he refers to Megasthenes and his "objective account of the civilization in which he found himself," and then adds: "He presents a picture of a regime . . . *fully literate* (italics mine), urban, highly organized."[16] Yet in the fragments we read: ". . . they (i. e. the Indians) have no written laws *for they do not know how to write* but manage everything by memory"![17] It may be added that Piggott goes on to point out specific resemblances between Megasthenes' account of Indian society and the Harappa culture, but he has also made it clear that the archaeological evidence for the Harappa culture comes from the third millennium B. C., perhaps 2000 years before Megasthenes.[18] Further excavations are needed, and in the area described by Megasthenes, before the archaeologist can be of any great assistance to us in evaluating Greek accounts of India.

And this brings us back to Ctesias who, unlike Megasthenes, is a known quantity. We may paraphrase Schwanbeck's dictum, quoted above, and say: *Ancient writers on India are reliable in inverse relation to their dependence on Ctesias.* Obviously, even a writer like Ctesias occasionally preserves valuable evidence, but it is evidence we cannot trust without confirmation from a less imaginative source. Clearly, Ctesias was in an enviable position to obtain factual information on Persia, and thanks to the close relations between the two countries, on India as well.[19] For example, when he describes the Martichora with the face of a man, three rows of teeth, stingers in his tail, and a taste for human flesh,[20] he *may* be reproducing the design seen

[16] Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India to 1000 B. C.* (Penguin Books, Reprinted 1952), p. 287.

[17] See Müller, *F. H. G.*, II, p. 421, Megasthenes, fr. 27; Strabo, XV, 1, 53.

[18] Sir Mortimer Wheeler, writing for the *Cambridge History of India, Supplementary Volume* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 84, speaks of the "latter half of the third millennium and the earlier centuries of the second."

[19] See Jacoby, "Ktesias," No. 1, *R.-E.*, XI, col. 2037, where he discusses the kind of information about India obtainable in Persia. He does say India was not as well known in Ctesias' day as Africa (2038). For Ctesias' failure to make use of his opportunities, see *ibid.*, col. 2045.

[20] Following text of R. Henry (*Ctésias*, etc. [Brussels, 1947]), Phot., *Ind.*, 7, we read *μαρτιχόρα*. The word is Persian and means "man

on some Indian article of commerce,[21] and the mythical creature depicted by the artist *may* owe its origin to the tiger which actually does live in India; but if any later Greek writer, even one who has been to India, includes a similar description in his work, the chances are worth taking that he borrowed it from Ctesias. The extent to which such borrowings occur ought to give us the basis for a negative judgment.

Ctesias' *Indica* is the earliest Greek work on the subject known to us. Originally a slender treatise, the contents have been quite generously preserved by Photius' thirty-two chapter summary. For the twenty-three book *Persica* we are not nearly so well off. Chiefly we depend on Photius' sixty-four chapter summary of the last seventeen books, on the Excerpts of the first two books of the lost *History* of Nicolaus of Damascus, and on the first thirty-four chapters of the second book of the *Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus.[22] The *Persica* is relevant to our inquiry because of the story it contained of Semiramis and her attempt to conquer India. Since this story falls somewhere in the first six books of Ctesias,[23] we are forced to rely on the evidence of

eater," thus proving that Ctesias got this account through a Persian intermediary (Jacoby, "Ktesias," col. 2038). For the Martichora see also Müller, *Ctes.*, frs. 64, 65, 66, 67.

[21] This idea appeals to Jacoby ("Ktesias," col. 2038). Perhaps the older view of Baehr, that it was an article of Persian manufacture, is to be preferred (*Ctesiae Cnidii Reliquiae* [Frankfurt on Main, 1824]); Baehr is quoted as follows in Müller's *Ctesiae*, p. 92 b: "Est enim hoc animal in iis fictis animalibus, quibus Persarum artifices delectabantur ad varias res exprimendas adornandasve . . . in quibus ipsis fuisse Martichoram a Ctesia descriptum, hocque animal ab iisdem artificibus pro Indico—in terris incognitis fabulosisque, tot rerum miraculosarum plenis habitante—esse venditum, mihi quidem plane est persuasum." Jacoby finds the account of hunting the "tiger" (*sic!*) perfectly factual ("Ktesias," col. 2038, line 24). This account is contained in one sentence of Photius (*Ind.*, 7 *ad fin.*), and refers to the Martichora, which he says "abounds in India." They kill these animals by shooting down at them from the backs of elephants. It may be added that the Martichora, like the porcupine of fable, shoots darts at its enemies, and shoots them a distance of 100 feet.

[22] See Henry, *Ctésias*, pp. 8-9, where he mentions the manuscripts used by him and not used by earlier editors. The summaries both come from Codex 72 of the *Library* of Photius (*ibid.*, pp. 3-4).

[23] Photius tells us as much (*Pers.*, 1) when he says: Ἀλλ' *ἐν μὲν τοῖς πρώτοις ἓξ, τά τε Ἀσσύρια διαλαμβάνει καὶ ὅσα πρὸ τῶν Περσικῶν.* The

Nicolaus and Diodorus. Both authors present problems in that, unlike Photius, neither contents himself with merely transcribing or abbreviating a single source. Both were writing universal histories which, as Jacoby says, must always be compilations rather than proper histories.[24] It would be out of place, here, to discuss current theories on just how Diodorus and Nicolaus set about their task. It is sufficient to recognize that the problem of their sources is a complex one, and to refer to Jacoby's statement that both writers used Ctesias without an intermediary.[25] However, Jacoby believes that Nicolaus has two main sources for his history of the ancient east, Ctesias and also Xanthus of Lydia.[26] In which, if in either, did he read of the Indian campaign of Semiramis? In Diodorus' second book there are eleven references to Ctesias by name, but only one of these is directly associated with Semiramis' Indian campaign.[27] Even here Diodorus merely cites Ctesias' figures for the size of the army she assembled in Bactria for the invasion of India. Now Megasthenes said that Semiramis prepared to attack India, but died before putting her plan into effect.[28] Therefore, if we are to determine the relationship between Megasthenes and Ctesias it becomes imperative to decide whether Ctesias' Semiramis died before carrying out her projected invasion, or not. Previous discussions of Diodorus, II, 1-34 have failed to emphasize that the Indian cam-

obvious explanation for his beginning the summary with Book VII is that Books I-VI were not available to him. For the Excerpts of Nicolaus, I have followed Jacoby's text (*F. Gr. H.*, II A, No. 90).

[24] See Jacoby, *F. Gr. H.*, II C, p. 233.

[25] Diodorus' direct use of Ctesias was clearly demonstrated earlier by P. Krumbholz ("Diodors Assyrische Geschichte," *Rhein. Mus.*, XLI [1886], p. 326). One detail not noticed before, to my knowledge, is the use of the word "cinnabar" in Diod., II, 14, 4. Apparently Ctesias was fond of this unusual word (e.g. Phot., *Ind.*, 7; 21; 25). It is interesting that this word is found only in Diodorus and in Photius, while it does not occur in the other fragments of Ctesias. This is added confirmation for the view that Photius and Diodorus used Ctesias without an intermediary.

[26] See *F. Gr. H.*, II C, p. 233. For Xanthus, see Schmid-Stählin, *G. gr. Lit.*, I, 1[7], pp. 704-7.

[27] Viz., II, 17, 1. Other references in Book II are: 2, 2; 5, 4; 7, 1; 7, 3; 7, 4; 8, 5; 15, 2; 20, 3; 21 *ad fin.*; 32, 4. Ctesias is also cited in I, 56 and in XIV, 46, 6.

[28] See Müller, *F. H. G.*, II, Megasthenes, frs. 20, 21.

paign is in the nature of a long digression, not necessarily derived from Diodorus' main source on Semiramis.[29]

Martin Braun's thoughtful essay suggests another way of looking at the Semiramis story. Briefly stated, he holds that the Persian conquest led to the invention of compensatory legends by the conquered peoples, tales of past greatness which served to make present subjection more tolerable. Ninus, Semiramis, and Nectanebus, among others, became the leading figures of a popular fiction which reflected both the ancient rivalry between Babylonian and Egyptian societies and their mutual resentment of the Persian conqueror.[30] From the nature of things these tales showed great variety, there being no way to set up any canon of authenticity. A change came about in the Hellenistic period,[31] but that may be disregarded for the present. Alexander apparently believed that Semiramis had invaded India, and that she had barely managed to escape with a few companions, fleeing westward through the unpleasant Gedrosian desert.[32] Accepting Braun's theory about these legends in general, what people would have invented such a story? Evidently the national vanity of the Babylonians would not have inspired such a military fiasco, and it is difficult to see how any Indian legend of attempted conquest and failure, even had such a legend existed, would have become known to the Greeks before Alexander. There is, however, one possibility that should be considered. More than a century and a half before Alexander, Darius stood at the head of an invincible army. For a time there seemed no limits set to the swelling empire of Persia.[33] Like the great Macedonian, he advanced

[29] E. g. Carl Jacoby, "Ktesias und Diodor, eine Quellenuntersuchung von Diodor B II c. 1-34," *Rhein. Mus.*, XXX (1875), pp. 555-615; Paul Krumbholz, "Diodors assyrische Geschichte," *Rhein. Mus.*, XLI (1886), pp. 321-41; "Wiederholungen bei Diodor," *Rhein. Mus.*, XLIV (1889), pp. 286-98; "Zu den Assyriaka des Ktesias," *Rhein. Mus.*, L (1895), pp. 205-40; LII (1897), pp. 237-85; Felix Jacoby, "Ktesias," No. 1, *R.-E.*, XI, cols. 2032-73, but esp. cols. 2051 ff.

[30] See M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford, 1938), Ninus and Semiramis, pp. 6 ff.; Nectanebus, pp. 19 ff.

[31] *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 1 ff.

[32] See Jacoby, *F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 133, Nearchus fr. 3a, b. Nearchus is perhaps our most reliable writer on Alexander.

[33] De Sanctis appears to believe that it was the spectacular growth of Persia that first gave the Greeks a sense of history. See his *Studi di Storia della Storiografia greca* (Florence, 1951), esp. pp. 27 ff.

into India, and then directed his attention to the sea route from the Indus to the Red Sea. Like Alexander later, Darius might well have been flattered by the comparison with the earlier unsuccessful attempt of Semiramis, and this might have found expression in the lost work of that celebrated navigator, Scylax of Caryanda.[34] This attractive possibility should be dismissed, albeit reluctantly, on chronological grounds. Semiramis herself is a complex figure, owing her name to Sammu-ramat of Assyria,[35] many of her attributes to the dove-goddess of Ascalon, and her popularity to the spurious notion that she had founded Babylon.[36] An essential part of the story is her union with Ninus the eponymous builder of Nineveh, and this presupposes the reconciliation of older hostile relations between Assyria and Babylonia.[37] Such a development, fostered by the conquest of Assyria and Babylonia, could hardly have been complete so soon after 539 B. C. Also, it is probable that with his interest in India, Herodotus would have told us about Semiramis' attack, had he found it mentioned in Scylax.

Ctesias' contemporary, Xenophon, also has something to say about India. It is worth noting that his references, like those of Herodotus, are uniformly favorable, and that all of them occur in his idealized biography of Cyrus.[38] Cyrus, great conqueror though he is, never dreams of attacking India, but regards the moral support of India as greatly to be desired. Incidentally, nowhere does Xenophon refer to Semiramis. Yet he must have read the *Persica*.[39] However, Xenophon does not

[34] On Scylax, see Herod., IV, 44; Strabo, XIV, 2, 20. J. L. Myres suggests, on what seems scanty evidence, that Scylax sailed down the Ganges rather than the Indus (*Herodotus*, p. 39). For further discussion of Scylax, see Fritz Schachermeyr, *Alexander der Grosse, Ingenium und Macht* (Graz, Salzburg, Vienna, 1949), pp. 364 ff. For Darius and India, see G. B. Gray, *C. A. H.*, IV, p. 183. For an enthusiastic appraisal of Darius, see Ernst Kornemann, *Weltgeschichte des Mittelmeer-Raumes* (Munich, 1948), I, pp. 25 ff.

[35] See M. Braun, *History and Romance*, p. 7.

[36] See esp. P. Krumbholz, *Rhein. Mus.*, LII, pp. 284 f.; also Braun, p. 7 and also n. 2 on p. 7.

[37] Braun, p. 8.

[38] Viz. *Cyrop.*, I, 1, 4; 5, 3; II, 4, 1; III, 2, 25; VI, 2, 1; 2, 9. He does refer elsewhere to the famous Indian dogs (*Cyneg.*, 9, 1; 10, 1).

[39] To judge by *Anab.*, I, 8, 27.

allude to Herodotus' account of the death of Cyrus, because to have done so would have marred the portrait of Cyrus he wished to present. In writing a historical romance he feels no obligation to give variants.

Since the account of Semiramis' unsuccessful Indian expedition was known to Alexander,[40] but was not mentioned by Herodotus or by Xenophon, and since its invention cannot be attributed to the Syro-Babylonian subjects of Persia, Ctesias emerges as the most likely originator of the tale, and Ctesias was a writer well known to Alexander. Despite the fact that Diodorus' only reference to Ctesias in his account of the Indian campaign (II, 17, 1) concerns Semiramis' preparations, we may be confident that the Semiramis of Ctesias lived to carry out her plan and to suffer an ignominious defeat. This also makes it probable that when Nicolaus of Damascus refers to Semiramis' Indian expedition, he is following Ctesias, not Xanthus. Megasthenes deserves to be commended for rejecting this colorful story. However, the very passage that proves his distrust of Ctesias raises other questions bearing on the reliability of Megasthenes. That passage may be translated as follows:

> (6) But what confidence can we rightly have in Indian history connected with expeditions like those of Cyrus or Semiramis? Megasthenes tends to support this attitude, urging us not to believe the old stories about India, because the Indians never sent an army outside, and were never attacked and conquered from without, except by Heracles and Dionysus, and recently by the Macedonians. To be sure Sesostris the Egyptian and Tearco the Ethiopian advanced as far as Europe, and Nabocodrosor, who is more famous among the Chaldaeans than Heracles, got as far as the Pillars. Tearco also reached this point, but Sesostris led his army from Iberia to Thrace and the Pontus. Idanthyrsus the Scythian overran Asia as far as Egypt. But *none of these reached India, while Semiramis died before the attempt. The Persians recruited the Indian Hydracae as mercenaries, but they did not invade India*; they only came close to doing so when Cyrus marched against the Massagetae.
>
> (7) Now Megasthenes and a few other writers regard the accounts of Heracles and Dionysus as trustworthy, but most

[40] R. Henry suggests that Ctesias might even claim part of the credit for bringing about Alexander's Asiatic expedition. See his *Ctésias*, p. 8.

of the rest, including Eratosthenes, regard them as incredible and mythical, like the Greek stories about them.[41]

This fragment betrays Megasthenes. Rejecting one myth he has made room for others, preferring the more recent fabrications of the Alexander historians to the outmoded mendacity of Ctesias. Also, even his rejection is not all we might desire, for he concedes that Semiramis' invasion was frustrated only by her death.[42] Nothing could illustrate better Megasthenes' limitations as a historian. He evidently begins with an *idée fixe*, that "the Indians launched no campaigns against other peoples, nor did others against them."[43] This sounds like a gnomic statement, to be associated with Greek ideas about the Indians and other peoples living at the edges of the world; such peoples were usually endowed with all the virtues, and tainted with none of the cardinal sins like avarice and greed. Theopompus, in his own sardonic fashion, had already commented on this prevailing Greek attitude. The warriors of Machimus, least perfect of the remote peoples, once visited our world, and were so repelled by the morality of the Hyperboreans—the best people in our world —that they withdrew in disgust.[44] But Theopompus' historical intelligence was of a much higher order than that of Megasthenes, in that he devotes a whole section of his justly celebrated *Philippica* to *Θαυμάσια* ("Marvels"), and by segregating this material evidently distinguishes between history and myth.[45] Megasthenes' fragments do not suggest a similar clear-cut distinction. While rejecting Semiramis as an invader, he adopts specious etymological arguments to show that Dionysus *had* invaded India, and probably Heracles as well.[46] Yet he rejects

[41] Strabo, XV, 1, 6-7; Müller, *F. H. G.*, II, Megasthenes, fr. 20.

[42] This is stated even more clearly in fr. 21, Arr., *Ind.*, 5, 7: *Σεμίραμιν δὲ τὴν Ἀσσυρίην ἐπιχειρέειν μὲν στέλλεσθαι εἰς Ἰνδούς, ἀποθανεῖν δὲ πρὶν τέλος ἐπιθεῖναι τοῖσι βουλεύμασιν . . . .*

[43] *Ibid.*, 5, 4: *. . . οὔτε Ἰνδοὺς ἐπιστρατεῦσαι σύδαμοῖσιν ἀνθρώποισιν, οὔτε Ἰνδοῖσιν ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους.*

[44] See Jacoby, *F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 115, fr. 75; and my *Onesicritus, A Study in Hellenistic Historiography* (U. of Calif. P., 1949), p. 65.

[45] Jacoby believes *Θαυμάσια* to be the title of a part of the *Philippica*, rather than that of a collection of excerpts from the work as a whole (*F. Gr. H.*, II D, p. 365, lines 17 ff.).

[46] See Müller, *F. H. G.*, II, Megasthenes, fr. 21. It would be interesting to know whether Megasthenes got this from Clitarchus. W. W.

the historically sound report of the Persian invasion of India in favor of a garbled story of their use of Indians as mercenaries.

Ctesias wrote about the gold-guarding griffins in his *Indica.*[47] Megasthenes rejects this bit of fable, but again he rejects it only in favor of another version, equally unsound. He reverts, this time, to the older Herodotean tale of the gold-digging ants. However, it is only fair to note that, according to Arrian, Megasthenes expressed doubts, saying that his information came only by "hearsay."[48] This is a strange qualification. When Herodotus visited Egypt he reported certain matters on the basis of his own observation (ὄψις), others as known to him only by hearsay (ἀκοή). The emphasis, so far as ἀκοή is concerned, would be on what he was told by his informants in Egypt, rather than on a literary source.[49] Also, whenever possible, Herodotus followed up his "hearsay" evidence by further investigation, by ἱστορίη proper.[50] No one will believe that Megasthenes did this, that he tested the rival ant and gryphon theories by interrogating the Indians. He evidently made up his mind on the basis of the written accounts. This example serves to warn us not to assume an Indian source for Megasthenes when there was a Greek literary source at hand. It also suggests an interpreta-

Tarn has argued vigorously that Clitarchus did not write before 280, perhaps not until 260 (*Alexander the Great*, II, *Sources and Studies* [Cambridge, 1948], p. 21), and that he definitely wrote later than Megasthenes (*ibid.*, p. 76). A recent article takes up the cudgels for an early Clitarchus date, and a late date for Aristobulus (Fritz R. Wüst, "Die Rede Alexanders des Grossen in Opis, Arrian VII 9-10," in *Historia*, II, 2, pp. 177-88). Earlier C. Jacoby tried to prove that the chief source for Diod., II, 1-34 was a Hellenistic writer with close ties in Egypt, preferably Clitarchus (*Rhein. Mus.*, XXX [1875], pp. 555-615); then J. Marquart suggested Agatharchides of Cnidus as the author (*Philologus*, Supp. 6, pp. 503 ff.). However, neither view has found favor since Krumbholz demolished them (see *Rhein. Mus.*, XLIV, pp. 286-98; L, pp. 205-40; for others see n. 29 above).

[47] See Phot., *Ind.*, 12.

[48] Megasthenes' account of these ants is vouched for both by Strabo (XV, 1, 44) and by Arrian (*Ind.*, 15, 5), printed in Müller's *F. H. G.*, II, as Meg., fr. 39. It is Arrian who speaks of "hearsay." Presumably he is echoing Megasthenes' words rather than making an observation of his own.

[49] For discussion, see Myres, *Herodotus*, esp. pp. 9 ff.

[50] *Ibid.* for discussion and references.

tion of Megasthenes less flattering than prevailing views.[51] One may grant that he was a keen observer of the life around him, and that he was able to put down in writing a reasonably accurate description of what he saw and heard. This qualifies him as a journalist; it does not show that he was a historian, for it implies no ability to evaluate conflicting testimony. Where he must rely on the accounts of others, it cannot be said that Megasthenes shows critical ability in any way superior to that of his predecessors, or that he was led by his stay in India to distrust the exaggerations of fable. He, too, had pygmies who fight with cranes, only adding verisimilitude by the detail that cranes had been found later, with the points of miniature weapons still embedded in their flesh. He, too, accepts the long-lived Hyperboreans of Simonides and Pindar,[52] and the Barking Men of Ctesias.[53] He knew the more recent literature as well, for he borrows from Baeton, one of Alexander's *itinerum mensores*. Baeton tells us that certain wild men with "feet reversed" (*aversis post crura plantis*) could not be brought in to see Alexander or other reigning potentates because of their inability to breathe any but their native air.[54] Interestingly enough, Megasthenes gives the same reason to explain why certain savages had never been brought before Sandrocottus (i. e. Chandragupta).[55] Megasthenes appears to have been familiar with Onesicritus' book about Alexander, a work in which India seems to have been treated at some length; but he adapts Onesicritus to suit his own purposes. For while Onesicritus reports that there were no slaves in the Land of Musicanus, Megasthenes goes so far as to say that there were no slaves in all India.[56] He also seems to have made use of Onesicritus' imaginative de-

[51] Miss Timmer, in summing up the results of her able study, scrupulously avoids exaggerated statements about Megasthenes' ability and also about his understanding of India (*Megasthenes en de Indische Maatschappij*, esp. p. 300).

[52] See *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., fr. 30.

[53] *Ibid.*, fr. 31.

[54] See Jacoby, *F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 119, fr. 5. Baeton is writing about the Scythian Anthropophagi.

[55] See *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., fr. 30. He can hardly be referring to the Scythians here, ubiquitous though they are. He has simply found Baeton's explanation a convenient one, and used it in a different context.

[56] See *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., fr. 27 and *F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 134, fr. 25.

scription of Taprobane (i. e. Ceylon),[57] and when he refers to the grain called *bosporum* he is following the same source.[58] Many other examples might be cited to show Megasthenes' acquaintance with the Alexander historians, but enough has already been said to indicate the way he used them.

On the animal life of India both domesticated and wild we have a right to expect a great improvement in Megasthenes over his predecessors, because of his unique opportunities for observation. To some extent the fragments justify this hope. His description of elephant hunting and also his account of the dancing elephants are excellent, as are his remarks about Indian horses.[59] However, when he says the tiger is "almost twice the size of a lion," and that "a tame tiger led by four men seized a mule by the hind leg and dragged it in by main force,"[60] we wonder whether this is based on ὄψις or ἀκοή! Megasthenes also speaks of "horses with a single horn, and a head like a deer."[61] This reminds one of Ctesias' one-horned wild asses.[62] Ctesias' unicorn may have been suggested by the Indian rhinoceros, but if so, the connection is as remote as that between the tiger and the Martichora, discussed above. Now Aelian gives us the following description:

> There is also said to live there (i. e. in the remote parts of India) an animal with a single horn, which they call a Cartazonus. This creature is as large as a full grown horse and has a mane and soft yellow hair. It is provided with excellent legs and is very swift, for the legs resemble those of the elephant, being without joints. The tail is like a pig's. Between the eyebrows it has a horn growing, not

[57] See *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., fr. 16, where we are told that the inhabitants of Taprobane produce more gold and more pearls than the Indians. Onesicritus (*F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 134, frs. 12, 13) speaks of Taprobane as lying farther south than any other island, and as nourishing larger and fiercer elephants than the Indian mainland. He evidently devoted some attention to Taprobane, and his account must necessarily have been highly imaginative.

[58] For Megasthenes, see Diod., II, 36, 3-4; for Onesicritus, see *F. Gr. H.*, II B, No. 134, fr. 15.

[59] *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., frs. 37, 38 (elephants); 36a (horses).

[60] *Ibid.*, fr. 10.

[61] *Ibid.*, fr. 13.

[62] See Phot., *Ind.*, 25.

> symmetrically but with natural twists. The horn is said to be very sharp and black.[63]

Here we have a faulty but still recognizable impression of a rhinoceros, and a correction of Ctesias for which Aelian's author, almost certainly Megasthenes, deserves full credit. But what can one say about the following passage, where Aelian acknowledges his debt to Megasthenes?

> Megasthenes says that in India there are huge scorpions with wings, and that they drive in their stingers just as the European species do. Also there are snakes with wings. They do not go out by day, but at night only, and they release their urine which, if allowed to touch the person, causes immediate putrefaction. These things are said by Megasthenes.[64]

And now we must try to sort out our impressions of Megasthenes, and his place in Greek historiography. On the credit side we must admit that he frequently corrects his literary sources by the evidence of his own experience; and this justifies some confidence in his description of Indian society at the court of Chandragupta, where he can have had no Greek source at all. The difficulties of language necessarily make his understanding a superficial one, but it is a great deal to be able to rely on his integrity. Integrity, in fact, is his strongest claim to recognition, for where critical sense is required he cannot always be trusted. Megasthenes was not the man to sift earlier accounts and reach a carefully thought out opinion about them. Consequently, when he gets away from the part of India he knows he is only as reliable as the source he follows, and we cannot be sure he is following the best available source. How far he was able to transmit the substance of what Indian acquaintances told him cannot be determined in the present state of our evidence. Megasthenes needs archaeological support just as much as Kautilya does. It should be remembered that he did not expect to become an Indian classic. He could scarcely have foreseen that time was running out for the Greeks in India, and that more than 2000 years later even the fragments of his travel notes would be precious. Nevertheless, Schwanbeck's statement is still defensi-

[63] Ael., *N. A.*, XVI, 20 (printed in *F. H. G.*, II after Meg., fr. 13).
[64] *F. H. G.*, II, Meg., fr. 12.

ble, that later writers on India owe their value to the fidelity with which they reproduce Megasthenes; Megasthenes also shows up pretty well in our negative test, for he seems, more often than not, to have turned his back on Ctesias. But all this is not so much a tribute to his superior abilities, as it is an expression of the melancholy state of our knowledge about ancient India. Perhaps the best that can honestly be said is that while Megasthenes might well have proved to be a Sir John Mandeville, he deserves our respect instead as a third century Marco Polo.[65]

TRUESDELL S. BROWN.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES.

[65] It may be added, also, that without Megasthenes' *Indica* Eratosthenes would have failed to write an intelligible account of Indian geography.