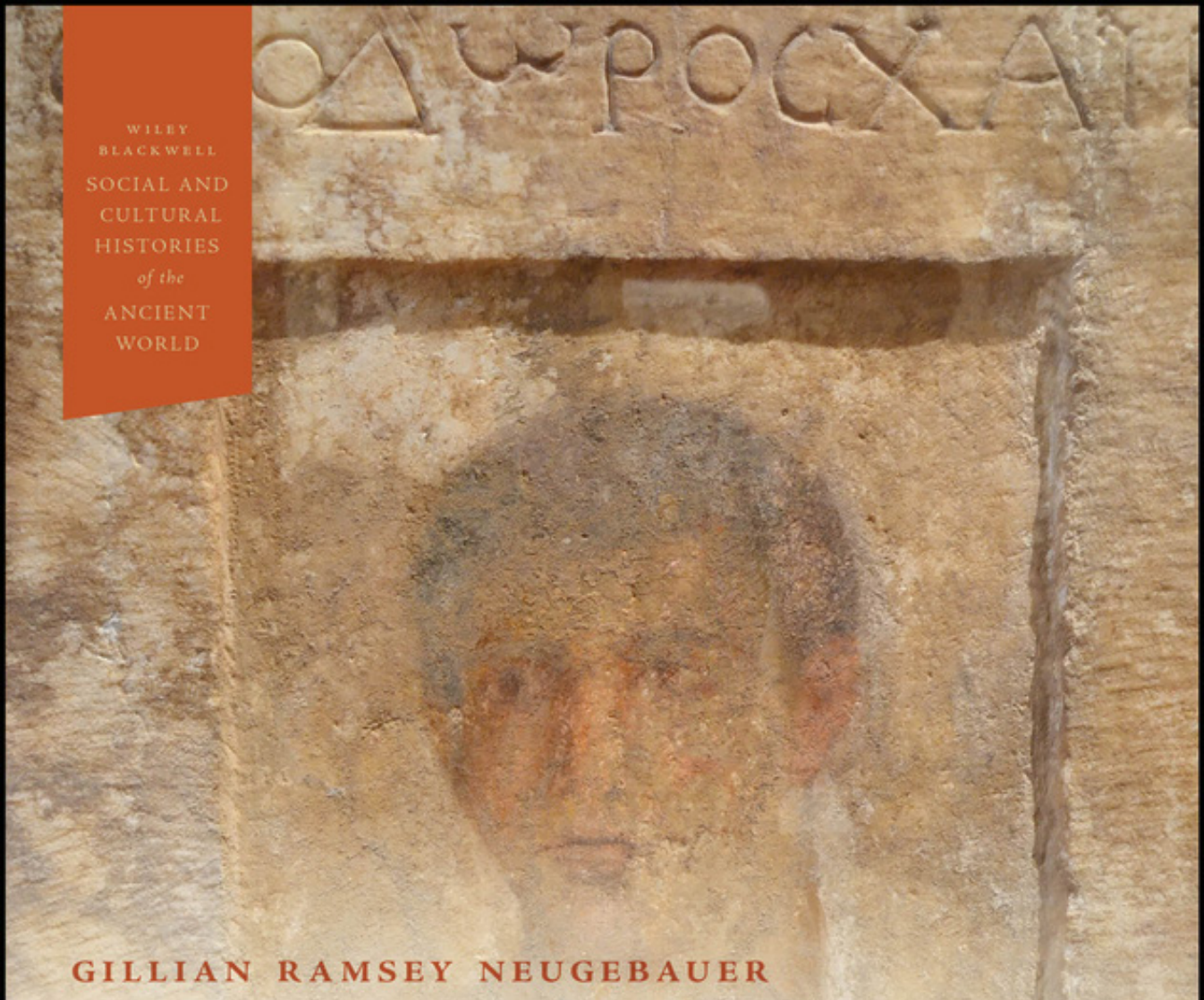

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GILLIAN RAMSEY NEUGEBAUER

A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

WILEY Blackwell

A Social and Cultural History of the Hellenistic World

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For Jamie

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Preface

I first encountered the Hellenistic world, as do many students of ancient history, after a few years of studying the Greeks and Romans. During my master's program at the University of Victoria, my professor of Greek history, Dr. Gordon Shrimpton, suggested that I finish up the year by doing a research paper on some inscriptions from the Hellenistic period. He recommended that I read through Stanley Burstein's anthology of sources in translation to find something to work on, and I selected no. 50, the bilingual inscription of Asoka from Kandahar, Afghanistan. I was astounded to discover just how far east Greek culture had travelled, and found an enduring fascination for all things Hellenistic and especially the people who had shaped and inhabited that culture.

You might find yourself in a similar position, having some experience with either the Classical Greeks or the Romans and now embarking on a course of study in the Hellenistic period. Perhaps this is your very first foray into ancient Mediterranean history. In any case, may you find in these pages some details, topics, and themes about Hellenistic life which will inspire your own research questions.

There is some initial information which will help with navigating the contents of this volume. The term "Classical" is used in two possible ways: to refer to Classical antiquity in general (the historical era of the ancient Greeks and Romans) or to refer to the Classical period of the ancient Greeks, which lasted from approximately 480 to 323 BCE. All the dates in this volume are BCE, unless they are specifically noted as CE.

This volume, for the most part, follows the convention of writing ancient Greek terms, personal names, and place terms using English letters which most closely mirror the Greek letters. This will be most noticeable to anyone more familiar with the Latinized spellings where "k" is written "c," and "-os" name endings become "-us." I do follow the convention of keeping the personal names of very famous people in their Latinized or Anglicized forms, so Alexander the Great instead of Alexandros. The kings of Egypt are called Ptolemy, but any ordinary person with the same name is Ptolemaios. Personal names are spelled here the way they appear in their source document, so there are a few possible spellings for the same name, for example Heraklides and Herakleides.

At various points, notable terms will be given using a transliteration of the ancient Greek, Akkadian, or Demotic words, and there are a few non-English letters used. The inclusion of these terms is either as a point of interest or to enable readers to research that term further, since scholarship often uses the ancient language term instead of its English translation.

Throughout each chapter many different ancient sources are referenced. Any textual source, such as a literary passage, inscription, cuneiform tablet, or documentary papyrus, will have a citation included. In addition, if there is an English translation available for that textual source, its reference (usually to an anthology of translated sources) will be included. This is so that readers can look up those passages right away, if they wish. In the vast majority of instances, these citations follow the various scholarly conventions for standard abbreviations, which are given in the abbreviations list. Art objects from museums with online catalogues will also have a citation included, since it is often possible to go immediately and find an image of the artifact online by searching for its accession number on the museum website. Archaeological materials will have their publication information provided in the further reading section, since one usually needs to read the full report to get the context, description, and analysis of those findings. All other information derived from modern scholarship is outlined in the further reading section for each chapter.

A book like this requires a great deal of research and library assistance, so many thanks are owed to the librarians at the University of Toronto Libraries, the Dr. John Archer Library at the University of Regina, the Campion College Library, Luther College Library, and specifically to Elaina Lawn, Angela Carnall, Jennifer Hall, Doris Hein, and Kelly Jackman. Thank you also to Jordan Ryan and Janet Johnson for answers to questions. Thank you to Graham Shipley; at my first academic job I was privileged to have an office next door to his, and our many conversations about Hellenistic history were so enjoyable and formative to my growth as a scholar. I will always be grateful to Alasdair Livingstone, who passed away in 2021; he kindly permitted me to attend his immensely engaging Akkadian seminars at the University of Birmingham. Someone who I will forever remember with gratitude and fondness for his generosity of spirit, enthusiasm for epigraphy and ancient history, and wise mentoring is my PhD supervisor, Stephen Mitchell, who passed away early in 2024.

My great thanks go to the editors Will Croft and Pascal Raj Francois for their patience and support, and also to Louise Spencely and Maryanne Reed for their invaluable assistance. Thanks go also to the anonymous readers of this volume, for their attention to detail and helpful suggestions and corrections. Any mistakes here are solely the fault of the author.

Gillian Ramsey Neugebauer

Abbreviations

The Hellenistic field draws upon scholarship from Classics, Assyriology, and Egyptology, and each of these disciplines has its own, long-established traditions for abbreviating titles and authors of both ancient and modern works. Fortunately, there are places where readers can find lists of the standard abbreviations.

Classical materials quoted here follow the list of abbreviations found in the frontmatter of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition, which is available online: https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/3993#i. In the event that something does not appear there, further lists of Classical abbreviations can be found in the 1996 *Greek–English Lexicon, With a Revised Supplement* by H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, especially the *Revised Supplement, II: Epigraphical Publications* or The Packard Humanities Institute Greek Inscriptions Online bibliography, https://epigraphy.packhum.org/biblio#b242.

Assyriological materials are abbreviated according to the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative's *Abbreviations for Assyriology*, http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology.

Egyptological materials are abbreviated according to the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, by J.F. Oates et al., https://papyri.info/docs/checklist.

There are a few further abbreviations used throughout this volume, which do not appear in those lists or which here use a shortened form:

Austin = Austin, M. 2006. *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation*. 2nd augmented ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BD = Bagnall, R.S. and P. Derow. 2004. *The Hellenistic Period: Historical Sources in Translation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Burstein = Burstein, S.M. 1985. *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CDD = Johnson, J.H. (ed.) 2001. *The Demotic Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/docs/CDD_prologue.pdf.

CGRN = Carbon, J.-M., S. Peels-Matthey, and V. Pirenne-Delforge. 2017–. *Collection of Greek Ritual Norms*. http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be.

CPI = Bowman, A., C. Crowther, S. Hornblower, R. Mairs, and K. Savvopoulos (eds.) 2021–. *Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions*. http://cpi.csad.ox.ac.uk/inscriptions.

Rowlandson = Rowlandson, J. 1998. *Women & Society in Greek & Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Money and Weights

These tables summarize the main Hellenistic coin denominations and units of measure for weight (which went by the same terms). See the section on Numismatics in Chapter 2 for further discussion of the coin denominations.

Greek

obol		
drachma	= 6 obols	
tetradrachm/stater	= 4 drachmas	
mna	= 100 drachmas	
talent	= 60 *mnas* = 1500 tetradrachms = 6000 drachmas	

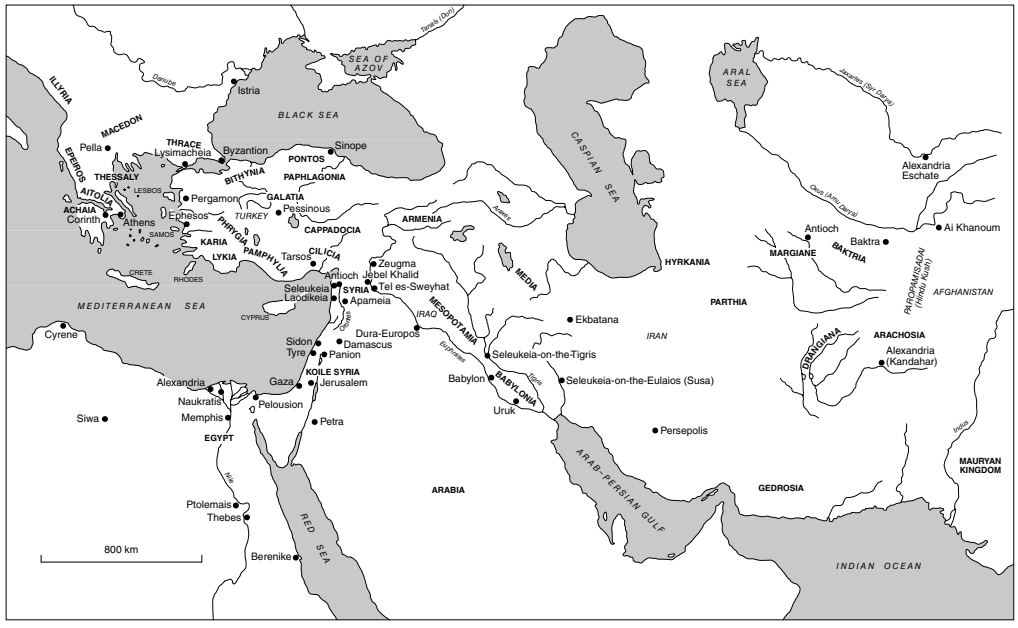
Near Eastern

zuzu (pl. *zuzin*)		
shekel (*siqlu*, Gk. *siglos*)	= 2 *zuzin*	= 2 drachmas
mina (MA.NA, *manû*)	= 60 shekels	= 500 g
talent	= 60 minas	

Egyptian

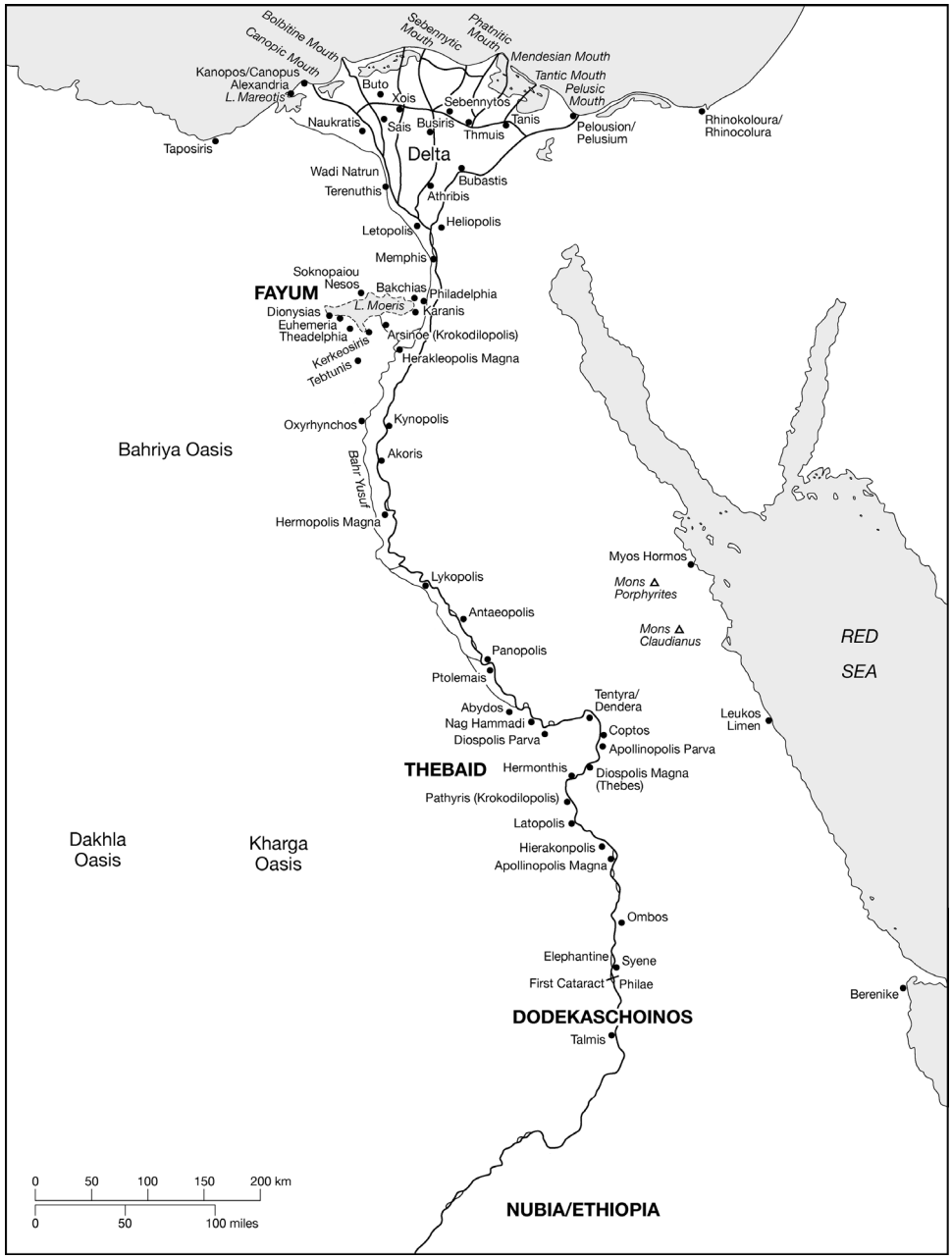
kite		
deben	= 10 *kite*	= 20 drachmas

Maps



Map 1 Map of the Hellenistic Eastern Mediterranean and Near East.

Map 2 Map of the Hellenistic Aegean.



Map 3 Map of Hellenistic Egypt.

1
Introduction

The Hellenistic world is, in its broadest sense, every region and time period impinged upon by the presence and influence of ancient Greek culture. Geographically, it traverses the entire Mediterranean, the Balkans, around the Black Sea, across North Africa and the Near East as far as the Indian subcontinent, and possibly beyond. Chronologically, it extends throughout Classical antiquity, as long as Greek literature and scholarship remained formative within cultures and ways of knowing. All this makes for a large world, not so distant from our own.

This volume addresses the Hellenistic world within somewhat narrower confines, in keeping with how scholars of antiquity generally define historical periods. By this measure, the Hellenistic world encompasses places and peoples affected by the conquests of Alexander the Great, across the parts of the world controlled by his successors until the time when the Romans annexed them into their empire. In terms of dates, the Hellenistic period runs from one monarch's death to another's: Alexander's in 323 to 30, when the last Macedonian monarch, Kleopatra VII, died and left Egypt to the Romans. In practical terms, this periodization actually means that the Hellenistic period has different durations in different places, depending on when the Romans appeared on the scene – 146 for mainland Greece, 64 for Syria, never for areas east of the Euphrates.

A way to make sense of such a geographically and chronologically varied world is to follow the ups and downs of the different political actors who tried to hold it and govern it, starting with Alexander. There are many excellent political histories of the Hellenistic period (see the reading list below). This volume takes a different approach, that of a social and cultural history. It opens up a window on the fascinating circumstances faced by people living in the Hellenistic world, some things seeming perhaps quite odd, some startlingly familiar.

A Social and Cultural History of the Hellenistic World, First Edition. Gillian Ramsey Neugebauer.

When it comes down to it, every history is truly written about the historian's present. That is, whatever world the historian inhabits sets the tone, aims, approach, and concerns of their investigation. Thus, this volume probably has a certain perspective reminiscent of the second and third decades of the twenty-first century, making its assumptions and focus different from the studies of Hellenistic society and cultural life written in the 1940s, 1990s, or even the early 2000s. This might be evident in how the chapter topics are framed and which topics are brought into the foreground versus which ones are allowed to recede. This is due partly to some areas of life being less written about and seeming to deserve some attention, and partly to other areas being so well studied that to go over them in minute detail seems a little redundant. The desire here was not to reinvent Hellenistic history but to add another chapter to it, knowing that more will continue to be written down the road.

What Is Hellenistic?

"Hellenistic" is a word coined in the modern era using ancient Greek grammatical forms to express the concept of "being or becoming Greek," or we might say, it is an adjective meaning "Greek-ish." The ancient Greeks called themselves *Hellenes*, after a mythical hero, Hellen. They had an adjective *hellenikos* to describe Greek things; the word *hellenikon* was sometimes used to describe Greek culture, and they called their language *Hellenikē*. Before going on, we should note that our word "Greek" comes via Latin from the original Greek word *Graikos* which also denoted a Hellene. In his study of the hydrological cycle, Aristotle happens to mention that the Graikoi were predecessors of the later Hellenes and lived in central Greece during mythical times around the time of the flood – from the myth of Deucalion the father of Hellen (*Mete*. 352a–b). The *Marmor Parium*, an inscribed chronicle of Greek history set up in 263/262 on the island Paros, also records that once Hellen took over from Deucalion, the Graikoi came to be called Hellenes (*IG* XII,5 444, 6.10–11).

The verb *hellenizo* referred to speaking *Hellenikē*, but people often defined it in contrast to speaking other languages or, interestingly, dialects. So the early-third-century comic Poseidippos of Cassandreia had a character in one of his dramas say of an Athenian "You speak Attic … but we Hellenes speak Hellenike" (*Harmost* 28). He seems to be distinguishing between the Athenian Attic dialect and the common Greek in circulation elsewhere, with a bit of cultural prejudice thrown in. Aristotle alludes to this notion of an acceptable common Greek language in a discussion of grammatical errors which show someone to be speaking improperly (*Sophistici elenchi* 182a). A real-world example of this comes to us from mid-third-century Syria, where someone, perhaps an Arab, laments to his boss that people treat him badly because he does not know how to *hellenizein* (*P.Col.Zen*. 4.66; BD 137). He might have been referring to his poor grasp of the Greek language (his letter was penned by a scribe on his behalf), or to his lack of Greek-ish manners, or perhaps both.

The word *hellenismos* meant speaking or behaving in a Greek way. The second-century Stoic philosopher Diogenes of Babylon stated that *hellenismos* was the prime characteristic of good communication and required that a speaker be precise and polite (Diog. Laert. 7.59). In terms of *hellenismos* as behaviour, the most famous

ancient usage of it is not favourable. The author of 2 Maccabees condemns the Jerusalem high priest Jason for a corrupting and unlawful *hellenismos*, typified by attending the gymnasium and wearing a certain type of Greek hat (the *petasos*, see Chapter 9), which was making him contemptuous of Jewish traditions and an embarrassment to the community of the faithful (4.12–13). Jason had also abandoned his Hebrew name Joshua for a new one (Joseph. *AJ* 12.239).

Hellenism in antiquity was a complex notion; it could be learned and perfected, but it existed in the eye of the beholder and required the approval of others, or it could earn condemnation either as a failed attempt at Greekness or as a rejection of another culture. Calling an entire historical period of Mediterranean and Near Eastern history "Hellenistic," or the era of Hellenism, is thus a leap of semantics and, perhaps, logic. But it was done long ago, and so, for better or worse, we continue to use the designation and grapple with the terminology's implications for how we understand what culture, and Greekness, meant to people in the past.

More will be discussed in Chapter 3 about the Hellenistic as an historical period, and how we study it. For now, let the introductory description in terms of geography and chronology above suffice. To it we can add the consideration of cultures present in those spaces and times, and there were many. A theme running throughout Hellenistic scholarship is how these different cultures encountered and reacted to the arrival of Greekness. Hellenism could be communicated and lived out in so many specific ways: language use, personal names, manners, education, clothing, cuisine (the petitioner from the papyrus above complained that his sub-par Greekness made people give him bad quality wine for his rations). Hellenism could be found in systems of governance, the kinds of taxes people paid, favourite board-games, house décor, music, religion – in short, all the possible dimensions of society and culture. An important factor in the reactions to Hellenism was the mode of the encounter: whether through trade, immigration, warfare, or colonization – essentially, asking what was the power dynamic in the intercultural relationship. So when scholars investigate the Hellenistic, there is always present some thread of curiosity over cultural identity and what Greekness meant to the people under study.

Why Social History?

Social history, or "history from the bottom up," puts the focus on the ordinary people at the base of society. The method for doing social history embeds the analysis of historical processes, trends, and events in the physical and economic conditions of life, and considers how social relationships and culture shaped the experiences of individuals, families, and wider communities. It also means that we work with the assumption that a full understanding of any society must be rooted in knowing the circumstances of the majority of ordinary people's lives.

When the social history discipline appeared in the mid-twentieth century, it upturned traditional "top-down" methods which sought to understand past societies through the unfolding of political events and the attitudes held by people in power. Knowing the political context helps, and Chapter 3 provides an outline of this for the Hellenistic period, but it is only part of history. The reality in the Hellenistic period, and in many other eras, is that a small minority of mostly men held power, and the vast majority of people were poor and politically unimportant.

Social history seeks to redress the marginalization of past peoples and bring their lives into the centre of attention.

Practically, this means that every topic in what follows is discussed after considering questions like "Does this relate to poor people?," "Is there evidence for the phenomenon outside of high society?," or "Are these ideas evident in the testimonies of ordinary people?". Thanks to the abundance of Hellenistic-period evidence, this means that, for most topics, there is at least one example, and often many times more than one. There are, however, significant gaps across regions. For example, the arid climate of Egypt has meant that huge quantities of papyri have survived to the present day, and many of these provide very specific data about the mundane details of people's ordinary lives: shopping lists, household budgets, personal letters, tax registers listing the sizes of households, and so forth, not to mention all the governmental documents with their economic and administrative data. Nothing comparable exists for anywhere else in the Hellenistic world, although logic dictates that people living in the Aegean region, Asia Minor, or the Near East had comparable things. Other sources of ancient evidence, such as archaeology or literary accounts, do often provide a window on these comparable situations outside Egypt, and so the task of the Hellenistic social historian is to juxtapose different types of evidence for the same phenomena across these regions. Serendipity occasionally steps in and provides exact matches from disparate evidence types in totally different regions, as in the case of the papyrus and ostrakon examples of alphabet exercises for primary schoolchildren (see Chapter 10). Such instances provide a sharp clarification on how similar life could be in Hellenistic communities, even though they were on the other side of the Mediterranean from each other and embedded within regions with totally different historical and cultural backgrounds.

Sometimes, the most that can be said is that somebody existed. Yet naming this person is a valuable exercise. Anonymity in history-writing perpetuates the idea that the poor and lowly are not worth much attention. So often, scholars are pressed for space and time and so in the effort to complete an argument will cite sources of evidence according to what broader practice, system, or topic they reference. For example, we might mention that when people drew up contracts for loans or property sales in Ptolemaic Egypt they identified the main parties by writing out their physical description. When we actually look at one of these descriptions, we find out that in 232 in Samaria of the Arsinoite nome in Egypt, Andromachos agreed to an advance payment on rent from Diphilos, and that Andromachos was 30 years old, middling in size, with honey-coloured skin, and a scar on the left side of his forehead; Diphilos was 40 years old, large, dark-skinned, and round-faced (*CPR* 18.10). When Herakleides agreed to marry Histiaia (both also from the Arsinoite nome in the late third century) for a dowry of 400 bronze drachmas, we see that he was 25 years old, large, dark-skinned, and round-faced, and Histiaia's father Theodoros was in his fifties, middling, dark-skinned, with a long face – but no description is given for Histiaia (*CPR* 18.6).

This volume tries, wherever possible, to give the name, date, location, gender, and circumstances of the person whose life is memorialized for us in the ancient evidence. Perhaps not all this information is germane to the exact topic under discussion, but at the same time, including it reminds us of the social and cultural context and the real-life details for each historical moment.

Mapping Out the Hellenistic World

Labelling the historical period "Hellenistic" came from the notion that Alexander the Great, through his extensive conquests, brought Greek people, language, and culture to a world much bigger than their traditional homeland. Since these Hellenes had the upper hand politically, their culture enjoyed preferential status in the wider world, which therefore came to be Hellenized. Intercultural contacts indeed characterized the Hellenistic world, but a point often overlooked is just how multicultural the ancient world already was. In fact, many of the areas of the Hellenistic world had very long histories of conquest, settlement, and acculturation by earlier empires, and by the 300s BCE they were home to diverse communities.

Alexander III "the Great" was king of ancient Macedonia, a land situated in what is today northern Greece and the neighbouring countries of North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo. He inherited it from his father, Philip II, in 336, along with a desire to defeat the Achaemenid Persian empire, the nemesis of the Greeks living around the Aegean Sea. By this point in time, the Macedonians were mostly accepted by the Greeks as Hellenic. Polybius, writing in the second century, said the Achaeans and Macedonians were "of the same race" (9.37.7), although that had not always been the case. Philip II had taken on a hegemonic role in Greek interstate politics, although Alexander needed to re-establish this authority for himself after he became king. In 334 he began a campaign of conquest in Persian territory which was to endure essentially until his death in 323, although he had defeated the last Achaemenid king, Darius III, in 330.

The political map of the Hellenistic world will be sketched out more in Chapter 3, but it is useful to give here an initial outline. After Alexander's death his empire was divided up among various of his generals and relatives, who fought a series of wars over these territories. What resulted were a few major kingdoms and a number of smaller states. The large kingdoms were those of the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Seleukids in the Near East and part of Anatolia (or Asia Minor), the Attalids in Western Asia Minor, and the Antigonids in Macedonia and Greece. Scholars will often refer to these dynasties as means to identify the period and territory of their investigations.

The Greeks thought of themselves as belonging to different tribes, associated with various legendary heroes and coinciding with dialect families within the Greek language (see below). They all shared a legendary homeland in what is now west-central Greece – the home of Deucalion, Hellen, and the Graikoi (above). In their Iron Age past, the Greeks of the Cyclades and mainland Greece had been prolific sailors, traders, and colonizers, sending out parties who established settlements along the west coast of Anatolia, around the north of the Aegean, around the Black Sea, at a few points along the North African coast, and in the south of Italy and the coast of Sicily (called Magna Graecia). This brought them into contact and coexistence with numerous peoples in those regions, including Sicels, Italiotes, Celts, Thracians, Scythians, Phrygians, Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and others. The Phoenicians were themselves adventurous sailors, establishing colonies in the far west of the Mediterranean, notably Carthage on the coast of what is now Tunisia.

Throughout the Archaic period (c. 800–480), Greek civilization is characterized by the *polis* city-state. This was the main state formation among the Greeks, although some in the northwest organized according to tribal confederacies. In its idealized

form, each *polis* was autonomous and self-sufficient, no matter how small its population. In actual fact, for most of the Archaic period the Spartans dominated Greek foreign affairs (that is, relations between the *poleis*), and they not-infrequently staged interventions in the internal politics of different *poleis*, notably Athens. Although they shared a sense of being the same people, Hellenes, the Archaic Greeks spent many years at war among themselves.

In the period of their history after wars with the Persians began, which scholars call the Classical period, the Athenians embarked on an imperial project called the Delian League. It was ostensibly an anti-Persian defensive alliance, but in fact became a thalassocratic empire, with all the trappings of resource extraction, forced relocations of people, military dominance, and political control. Resistance to this arose as others of the larger *poleis* established hegemonic leadership over smaller cities. It was into this milieu that Philip II stepped as the supreme *hegemon*.

The Achaemenid Persian empire had its origins in the conquests of Cyrus II "the Great," heir to kings of Anshan in Elam in the highlands of modern Iran. Over his career, he defeated a long list of rival kingdoms and states: the Medes and Urartu in 550, Lydia in 547, the Greek cities of western Anatolia or Asia Minor in 546, Babylon in 539, and Bactria by the time of his death in 530. The conquest of Babylon – ending the Neo-Babylonian empire – brought a large swath of Near Eastern territory under Achaemenid governance, in particular Syria and Judaea, known as the "Land beyond the River." (In the Hellenistic period, the part of this territory which is now most of Lebanon and Israel north of the Sinai Peninsula was known as Koile Syria.) In 525, Cyrus' heir Cambyses II conquered Egypt, which had most recently been ruled by the Saite pharaohs of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty.

Thus, when Alexander laid claim to the lands of the Persian empire, and subsequently realized these intentions by physically campaigning throughout their breadth, he entered a part of the world populated with a multitude of diverse cultures, from the Fish-Eaters of the Iranian coast to the matriarchal chariot-driving Drangianai of the Scythian north, to the ancient civilization of the Egyptians, to the Aramaeans of Mesopotamia. At its heart was the Fertile Crescent, spanning from the Nile Delta through the Levant around to the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. This region had already experienced millennia of imperial activity resulting in long-standing traditions of bureaucracy, social organization, and language use, and the coexistence of different ethnic communities.

Greeks were also part of this older, pre-Hellenistic multicultural context. Achaemenid iconography depicts Greek tribute-bearers, and documents from the Persepolis Fortification Tablets record the rations provided to Ionian slave women who worked on irrigation structures (*PF* 1224). Greek mercenaries of the sixth century left graffiti on the statue of Rameses II at Abu Simbel (Jeffery, *LSAG* 354–355, 358). Memphis in Egypt had several neighbourhoods named after their non-Egyptian inhabitants: Canaanites were known as the Phoenico-Egyptians, Ionians living in the Hellenion neighbourhood were known as the Hellenomemphites, Carians in the Karikon neighbourhood were the Caromemphites. Elephantine was home to a community of Jewish immigrants, well known from their archives of Aramaic papyri found there. A papyrus from Elephantine dated to c. 300 lists a harvest collected from community members whose names are a mix of Jewish and Greek, for example, Obadiah, Simeon, Haggai, Jonathan, Nikias, Isidoros, Lysimachos, Bacchias (Cowley 1923, no. 81).

A Polyglot World

With so many regions and peoples present in the territories which were to become the Hellenistic world, language diversity is also an important feature. Language is central to cultural identity, evident from the usages and meanings of *Hellenike* and *hellenizo* (above). Historians can only work with whatever written evidence survives today, meaning that not all the languages spoken in antiquity are known if their speakers were not literate and did not produce any documents. We should thus remember that the linguistic landscape was more diverse than what surviving sources would indicate.

One aspect of this linguistic diversity concerns the Greek dialects. These are represented in writing – through spelling and grammatical differences – and so historians of language have been able to identify the dialect groups and their areas of circulation. The main groups were Doric (spoken in the Peloponnese, west-central mainland Greece, Crete, parts of the Cyclades, Caria, and Magna Graecia); Aeolic (spoken in Boeotia, Thessaly, and the Aeolis in western Asia Minor); Ionic (spoken on Euboea, around the north Aegean, Black Sea, parts of the Cyclades, and in Ionia of western Asia Minor); Attic spoken in Attica; Arkadian spoken in the central Peloponnese. There was also a related language, Cypriot, spoken on Cyprus, and scholars are still unsure whether to classify Macedonian as a Greek dialect or a separate language. The level of detail to which scholars can study ancient Greek is thanks to the sheer number of its written sources, and ancient Greek authors themselves talked about their dialects, sometimes in a technical sense, sometimes more anecdotally. In Theocritus' *Idyll* 15, a passerby speaks down to some women for their annoying Doric Greek accent, which one of the women defends as an honourable pattern of speech: they are Syracusan settlers in Alexandria with a proud Peloponnesian heritage.

In Mesopotamia, the main (written) languages were Semitic: Aramaic and Akkadian. Aramaic had been the lingua franca of the Persian empire and was still used by different groups around the Near East and Egypt. Idumaeans (Edomites) living in the Transjordan and southern Judaea still spoke and wrote Aramaic, as did their Judaean neighbours. As already noted, the Jewish community living at Elephantine also continued using Aramaic. Akkadian was very old, dating back to the Old Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Its name comes from the city Akkad, built by Sargon c. 2300. Akkadian went through several phases, since languages do shift over time, and the Akkadian of the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods is called Late Babylonian. The very ancient, non-Semitic language Sumerian survived as a literary language and with certain words and phrases incorporated into Akkadian. Both Sumerian and Akkadian used cuneiform script.

In Egypt, the phase of Ancient Egyptian spoken and written in the Hellenistic period is known as Demotic. It had already been in use since the seventh century for both administrative and literary purposes. What distinguished Demotic from the form of Egyptian language known as "Traditional Egyptian," used mainly for religious texts, is the script. Traditional Egyptian was written in hieroglyphics and hieratic, whereas Demotic used a script derived from hieratic but which functioned phonetically (like an alphabet). We should also note that historically there were several different regional dialects of Egyptian spoken across Upper and Lower Egypt.

Other Near Eastern languages are known, either through references to them or to a few surviving documents. Phoenician is attested in inscriptions from all around

the Mediterranean. Diodorus Siculus, writing of events in the late fourth century, refers to a letter purporting to be from a Persian ruler of Armenia and "written in Syrian writing" (19.23.3), and on another occasion in the same period, a group of Nabataean Arabs sent to the Macedonian general Antigonos Monophthalmos a letter written in Syrian (19.96.1). Perhaps Diodorus meant Aramaic, the only candidate for a language and writing system current in both northern Mesopotamia and the Arabian Desert. Because Aramaic, like Greek, used an alphabetic script, it could be employed to write out other languages phonetically. A later example of this practice comes from Avroman in Kurdistan, where in 1909 a local peasant found a sealed jar containing three parchment documents dating to the first centuries BCE and CE, two written in Greek and one using Aramaic letters to write out Parthian.

As the following chapter explains, all these languages and writing systems appear in the sources of written evidence for the Hellenistic period, all with different interpretive challenges. Not least among these challenges is the distribution of surviving evidence, with Aramaic documents, for example, being quite rare due to the materials on which they were written not surviving in the archaeological record. Conversely, Greek papyrus documents survive in huge numbers in the dry climate of Egypt, but are virtually non-existent elsewhere, even though we know they were being created. Other Greek writing, like the corpus of poetic, historical, and philosophical literature, also weights our knowledge of the period in a Hellenic direction. The cultural cachet of ancient Greek literature in the modern West has also had a disproportionate effect on historiography of antiquity. That is, we have valued these centuries of the ancient world as "Hellenistic" because of the preference given to Classical culture.

Through a social history, bottom-up approach, we can consider the experiences of Hellenistic people as they lived them, in their own context and on their own terms. In finding how historical significance and meaning emerges from the stories of real people, we might also hold them up as a mirror for our own world now.

Further Reading

For the descriptions of Herakleides and his father-in-law, see Fikhman (1999). For the ethnic communities at Memphis, see Thompson (2012: 76–78). For the Avroman parchments, see Minns (1915), Cowley (1919), and Haruta (2001).

For further reading on Hellenistic history and culture, and for the historiographic development of the Hellenistic history discipline, see Rostovtzeff (1941), Walbank (1984), Boardman et al. (1986), Walbank (1992), Green (1993, 1996), Shipley (2000), Ogden (2002b), Erskine (2003), Bugh (2006), Errington (2008), Erskine and Llewellyn-Jones (2011), Chaniotis (2018), and Kaizer (2022). For foundational and recent studies on Hellenism as a cultural process and historical phenomenon, see Lewis (1986), Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1987), Bilde et al. (1997), Cartledge et al. (1997), Burstein (2008), Stavrianopoulou (2013), Ager and Faber (2013), Mairs (2014), Chrubasik and King (2017), Bonnet (2019), and Bru et al. (2021). For the Macedonians, see Hatzopoulos (2020), Howe and Pownall (2018), Lane Fox (2011a, 2011b), and Roisman and Worthington (2010). For background on the Greek *polis*, see Hansen and Nielsen (2004). For the Greek language see Colvin (2014) and Bakker (2010) (especially the chapters by Colvin, Hawkins, Brixhe, and Torallas Tovar).

Several university and academic publishers developed book series on Hellenistic history, each now with numerous titles in their lists. Aarhus University began Studies in Hellenistic