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AND CHINA

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For my grandparents

He Yongkang 何永康 (1924-2018) and Chen Shizhu 陳世珠 (1932-2018)

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how Rome and China simultaneously developed their ethnographic knowledge of the world beyond their borders, spanning from the Mediterranean to China. This occurred during the nearly simultaneous imperial expansions of both empires between the 2nd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. Part I focuses on Bactria as a converging ground in which common ethnographic knowledge between Rome and China took place. Chapter 1 examines Bactria as a cipher for the imperial expansion and desire for an expanding Roman regime from the mid-republic to the Augustan age. I argue that while Greco-Latin authors under Roman rule developed their idiosyncratic understanding of Bactria, their writings on Bactria coincide with Rome's imperial expansion from Greece to the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Moreover, I highlight the way Hellenistic imperialism in Central Asia, from Antiochus III to Indo-Greek kingdoms, served as the political basis for Greco-Roman ethnographic knowledge of Bactria. Chapter 2 interprets Sima Qian's report on Hellenistic Asia, especially Bactria, within the context of Chinese intellectual debates about the political economy during the late 2nd century and the early 1st century BCE. I emphasize that China's engagement with the nomadic political economic system is the background of Sima Qian's representation of late Hellenistic Asia. In particular, I demonstrate the way Sima Qian rethinks the relationship between nomadic and sedentary areas through outside cases by using the knowledge of the late Hellenistic world.

Part II considers performance as an identifiable carrier of ethnographic knowledge in Rome and China. Chapter 3 discusses pantomime-dominated Roman theater as the institutional mechanism through which Rome imagined former Hellenistic Asia from Syria to Bactria/India as an entity. I suggest that the development of pantomime performance, especially the growing importance of pantomime dancers, affected ethnographic knowledge production. In

turn, chapter 4 highlights the agency of wandering performers (from both the Mediterranean and Central Asia) in shaping Chinese knowledge of Rome. I argue that Chinese knowledge of Rome derived from popular narratives of Roman state power on the Indian Ocean. I also highlight that Homeric motives were employed to craft relevant narratives.

Introduction

Let us start with two pairs of snapshots. First, in a slave revolt in Sicily between 135 and 132 BCE, the rebel leader was a man named Eunus. The late republican Greek author Diodorus provides the most detailed account, with two slightly different versions, of this rebel. In one version, Eunus was known for his magical abilities, particularly his ability to breathe fire.¹ Similarly, in 128 BCE, the Chinese envoy Zhang Qian returned from Central Asia to China after spending ten years in the nomadic empire of the Xiongnu and Central Asia. During his sojourn, he collected geographical information on the regions from Syria to India. The Chinese historian Sima Qian, who lived a few decades earlier than Diodorus, recorded Zhang Qian's report. Regarding Syria, which is called Tiaozhi in China, the report emphasizes the people of Tiaozhi's ability to create illusions.²

For this pair of snapshots, what both reports have in common are the perception of Syrians as possessing magical power. We can investigate how this knowledge came to be from the Syrian, Roman, and Chinese points of view. At the time of the slave revolt in Sicily and Zhang Qian's diplomatic mission, Syria was synonymous with the Seleucid empire. As the largest successor regime of the Achaemenid empire that Alexander conquered, the Seleucid domination spanned from present-day Turkey to today's northern Afghanistan during its heyday around the 270s BCE. However, during the 2nd century, the Seleucids witnessed the rise of two new powers: Rome in the western Mediterranean and Parthia in Central Asia. The Seleucids' loss to Rome in the Battle of Magnesia on the Maeander Valley in present-day Turkey in 189 BCE reduced Seleucid power in the Mediterranean. Under the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE, the Seleucids were required to relinquish their territorial claims outside the west of the Taurus

¹ Diod. Sic. 34/5.2.4

² Shiji, 123.3162.

Mountains. While Rome only limited the Seleucids' influence in the Mediterranean, the rise of Parthia from present-day Turkmenistan marked a real end to the Seleucids as an empire. From the 150s to the 130s BCE, Parthia managed to take the Iranian Plateau and Mesopotamia from the Seleucids. In particular, the Seleucid king Demetrius I became a captured hostage in Parthia in 139 BCE.

The Greco-Roman perception of the Syrian magical abilities was contingent upon Rome's subjugation of the Seleucids from the west, resulting in the exportation of Syrian slaves to Sicily. Sicily was Rome's first province conquered during the First Carthaginian War in 241 BCE. In other words, the knowledge of Syrian magical abilities, exemplified by the depiction of Eunos, is part of Rome's knowledge of numerous ethnic groups around the Mediterranean.

Parallel to Rome's perception of Syrian magic, a similar Chinese notice of Syrian magical abilities is a result of Parthian conquests of most Seleucid lands. Zhang Qian's geographic report as recorded in Sima Qian's work also recounts Parthia's domination of Syria.³ The way in which China acquired this knowledge is part of China's western expansion during the last decades of the 2nd century BCE. To counter the Xiongnu empire, the first nomadic empire based in present-day Mongolia and Serbia, China expanded westward to oasis states from the Hesi corridor in present-day northwest China to the Ferghana Valley in today's Uzbekistan. In this context, China accumulated knowledge of the outside world, and Syria marked the western limit of the Chinese geographical horizon.

This pair of snapshots illustrates how imperial reconfigurations from the Mediterranean to East Asia resulted in converging knowledge of Syria, shared by Rome and China during the last two decades of the 2nd century BCE. It provides a snapshot into the major

³ Shiji, 123.3162

theme dealt with in the dissertation, “Post-Hellenistic Asia and Common Ethnographic Knowledge in Rome and China.” The dissertation examines how Greek intellectuals in the Roman Mediterranean and imperial Chinese intellectuals simultaneously developed knowledge of the outside world in the Eurasian continent, in the context of the respective regime’s imperial expansion and transformation from the late 2nd century BCE to the early 3rd century CE. During this period, the Near Eastern world witnessed three empires: from the late Seleucids to the early Sasanians, with the Arsacid Parthian empire in between.

Meanwhile, as we delve into another pair of snapshots, it is noteworthy that in 120 CE, a group of performers from the Mediterranean arrived at the Chinese capital as part of tributes sent by a state called Shan, which is located in present-day northern Burma. These performers, known as the Western Sea People (*haixiren*) in Chinese sources, staged a performance at the imperial New Year banquet in 121 CE. This event sparked a debate at the court regarding the appropriateness of including them in the imperial performance. The Confucian canon was invoked during this discussion.

Additionally, Lucian's dialogue, *De Saltatione*, written in the 160s CE, presents a debate on whether Roman pantomime dance should be considered a serious art form. Within this discourse, references to Greek classics are made. To support the significance of pantomime dance as an important art form, Lucian, through his alter ego Lycinus, recounts an anecdote about a pantomime dancer serving as a diplomatic tool in the Pontus region during Nero’s reign.

This part of snapshots illustrates a moment of “global classics” where both Greek and Chinese intellectuals utilized their respective classical texts to comment on the Mediterranean performances they observed. These Mediterranean performances provided a lens through which Greek and Chinese intellectuals could perceive foreign cultures. Although Greek

knowledge during the imperial period was indebted to classical and Hellenistic traditions, pantomime performances emerged as a new medium through which this knowledge was presented. Chinese exposure to Mediterranean performances expanded their understanding of the outside world, leading to a fascination among Chinese intellectuals with the eastern Mediterranean region known as *Daqin* (Great Qin).

While the first pair of snapshots demonstrates how imperial interactions primarily facilitated the accumulation of ethnographic knowledge, the second pair emphasizes the agency of performers in shaping this knowledge during the later period. By highlighting the convergence of ethnographic and geographic perspectives between Greek intellectuals in the Roman Mediterranean and Chinese imperial intellectuals, this dissertation explores the evolving modalities through which these knowledge systems took shape. In doing so, it weaves together three major areas of research: the history of the Seleucid Empire, ancient ethnography, and comparative studies of ancient Rome and China.

In traditional Anglophone historiography, given the preponderance of philological interest and the boundary between Ancient Near Eastern studies and Classics, the history of the Near East from Alexander's conquest to the rise of Islam has been relatively neglected in both research on the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds.⁴ However, renewed understandings of the continuity of the Achaemenid empire and the Seleucid empire have begun to change the way in which the Seleucid empire is studied.⁵ Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt's 1993 book *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* directly represents the impact of this new understanding on Seleucid studies. Drawing on traditional Greco-Latin literary sources, Babylonian cuneiform documents, Greek inscriptions,

⁴ For relevant reflection, see Payne (2021): 363-4.

⁵ Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987); Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Kuhrt, and Root (1994).

numismatic evidence, and archaeological data, this monograph provides a robust reappraisal of the role of the Seleucids in Near Eastern history.⁶ Since then, regional focus research from Seleucid Asia Minor to Central Asia has greatly grown, contributing more detailed knowledge of various manifestations of Seleucid imperialism in various regions.⁷

After Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt's fundamental monography on a general survey of the Seleucids, several more topic-focused monographs appear in this century. Laurent Capdetrey's *Le pouvoir séleucide: Territoire, administration, finances d'un royaume hellénistique (312-129 avant J.C.)* reappraises the institutional dynamics of the Seleucid empire in governing the vast territory by attending on the issues of spatial politics, territoriality, urban buildings, administration, finance, and kingship.⁸ With a similar scope but with a different theoretical orientation, Paul Kosmin's *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* focuses on the means by which Seleucid royal authorities managed to articulate spatial ideologies concerning the vast territory they claimed.⁹ In a similar vein, Kosmin's other monograph *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* reveals the hidden cultural impact of the Seleucid empire in contributing the Seleucid Era in the space from Syria to Bactria.¹⁰ With a more case-studied focused approach, David Engels' *Benefactors, Kings, Rulers : Studies on the Seleucid Empire between East and West* reveals the complicated

⁶ Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993).

⁷ For Asia Minor, Ma (1999); Thonemann (2013); Berlin and Kosmin (2019); Capdetrey and Fröhlich (2021); for Judaea, Eckhardt (2013); Honigman (2014); Berlin and Kosmin (2021); Honigman, Nihan and Lipschits (2021); for Phoenicia, Aliquot and Bonnet (2015); Bonnet (2015); for Syria, Grainger (1990); Wright (2012); Neumann (2021); for the broader Levant, Held (2022); for Babylon: Boiy (2004); Clancier (2007): 21-74 and (2017): 53-81; Monerie (2017); Pirngruber (2017); Krul (2018); Stevens (2019); for Iran: Lerner (1999); Plischke (2014); for India: Karttunen (1997); (2015); Stoneman (2018). For Central Asia, see a more specific discussion in the following pages.

⁸ Capdetrey (2007).

⁹ Kosmin (2014).

¹⁰ Ibid, (2018).

facets of Seleucid kingship among different ethnic groups and regions, while highlighting the transformation of the late Seleucid kingship.¹¹

Several new studies have also appeared regarding specific aspects of the Seleucid empire. With a more materialist concern on the function of the Seleucid regime, G.G. Aperghis' *The Seleukid Royal Economy: The Finances and Financial Administration of the Seleukid Empire* examines how Seleucid authorities managed their wealth to support their daily functions using both regional and central perspectives.¹² Rolf Strootman's *Courts and Elites in the Hellenistic Empires: The Near East After the Achaemenids, C. 330 to 30 BCE* offers comparative perspectives of Seleucid courts with other pre-modern royal societies, managements, and rituals.¹³ Boris Chrubasik's *Kings and Usurpers in the Seleukid Empire: The Men who Would be King* challenges traditional narrative of Seleucid decline by arguing that various "usurpers" in Seleucid history represent the nuanced power function between the king and local authorities.¹⁴ Marijn Visscher's *Beyond Alexandria: Literature and Empire in the Seleucid World* offers select case studies of relevant literary productions from the Seleucids, especially during the 3rd century BCE, highlighting a Seleucid initiative in producing Hellenistic literature.¹⁵ Common to these specific thematic studies is efforts to put together fragmentary evidence to highlight the sophistication of the Seleucid regime as a Near Eastern empire.

In spite of different methodologies, all these studies contribute to a better understanding of the internal dynamics of the Seleucid empire as a regime governing the Near East for two centuries.¹⁶ However, there remains a tendency within Seleucid studies to downplay

¹¹ Engels (2018).

¹² Aperghis (2004).

¹³ Strootman (2014).

¹⁴ Chrubasik (2014).

¹⁵ Visscher (2020).

¹⁶ Benefitting from this progress, there is a recently edited volume *Comparing the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires: Integration, Communication, and Resistance* showcasing that Seleucid studies is able to have a systematic

the significant transformations that the Seleucids underwent from the 2nd century BCE onwards. In other words, by not following the traditional Rome-centric point of view, the dynamic of the late Seleucids can be reappraised. In this regard, Rolf Strootman's series of articles highlight the institutional malleability and versatility of late Seleucid practice in dealing with various powers within the Seleucid sphere of influence, even those not under direct control.¹⁷ The edited volume *Le projet politique d'Antiochos IV: journées d'études franco-allemandes* pays attention to king Antiochos IV who is usually considered a transitional royal figure in Seleucid history.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the other edited volume *Les derniers Séleucides et leur territoire* dives into historical details and nuances of various aspects of Seleucid power during the 1st century BCE. Instead of considering the late Seleucids as a decadent regime, these essays study it as a dynamic regime that was not awaiting to be ended by Rome.¹⁹

Scholarship on the Greco-Bactrian kingdom deserves separate mention for the purpose of this dissertation. Ancient historians have a vague sense of the existence of a Hellenistic regime in Central Asia, due to the paucity of evidence.²⁰ Nevertheless, research on Hellenistic Central Asia has grown, in conjunction with the growth of archaeological and epigraphic discoveries. On the basis of this new evidence, historians like Frank Holt, and Omar Coloru have all provided new synthetic political accounts of Hellenistic Central Asia and India.²¹

conversation with research on the Ptolemaic empire, whose research has been more advanced given richer materials, Fisher-Bovet and von Reden (2021).

¹⁷ Strootman (2017): 177-200; Strootman (2019a): 123-80; Strootman (2019b): 173-216; Strootman (2019c): 123-80; Strootman (2020a): 11-37; Strootman (2020b): 201-27.

¹⁸ Feyel and Graslin-Thomé (2013).

¹⁹ Graslin-Thomé and Feyel (2021).

²⁰ After William Tarn and A.K. Narain's monographs on this episode of history (Tarn (1938); Narain (1957)), numismatic and archaeological studies have progressed in the evidence they have uncovered, despite the fluctuating political situations in the regions concerned. On the basis of this new evidence, historians like Frank Holt, and Omar Coloru have all provided new synthetic political accounts of Hellenistic Central Asia and India, Holt (1999); Coloru (2009).

²¹ Holt (1999); Coloru (2009); Mairs (2014).

Laurianne Martinez-Sève's series of articles offer a valuable bottom-up understanding of Hellenistic Central Asia.²² Rachel Mairs' *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia* is an important milestone. This book particularly contributes to a bottom-up view of Hellenistic Central Asia by incorporating excavations of Ai Khanoum and the discovery of the Sophytos epigram. It also takes into account relevant Chinese materials on Bactria and nomads, signaling the potential to use Hellenistic Bactria to contribute to writing on global history.²³

A similar global approach also appears in archaeological and art historical research on the Hellenistic East, such as Milinda Hoo's recent book *Eurasian Localisms: Towards a Translocal Approach to Hellenism and Inbetweenness in Central Eurasia, Third to First Centuries BCE*. Drawing on global studies, this book rethinks the issue of Hellenism in both Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic Asia. Instead of considering Hellenism only as a "global" culture, this book provides a more theoretically robust account of Hellenism as a local culture under the veneer of global idioms.²⁴ Moreover, the recent edited volume *The Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek Kingdoms* by Rachel Mairs incorporates the most updated archaeological materials of this area while offering synthetic reflections.²⁵ Additionally, Olga Kubica's recent publication *Greco-Buddhist Relations in the Hellenistic Far East: Sources and Contexts* integrates Buddhist sources and Gandharan art to explore the cultural exchange between the Greeks and Indians from the Mauryan period to the Indo-Greek kingdom.²⁶ Overall, research on

²² Martinez-Sève (2010); (2010); (2012); (2012); (2014); (2015); (2017).

²³ Mairs (2014). Osmund Bopearachchi's relevant work represents a synthesis of the basics of numismatic research, see Bopearachchi (1991); Bopearachchi (2015). For an updated synthetic account, see Bordeaux (2018); Glenn (2020). Georges Rougemont provides comprehensive sources for relevant Greek epigraphic materials from Iran, Central Asia, and India, Rougemont (2012).

²⁴ Hoo (2022).

²⁵ Mairs (2020).

²⁶ Kubica (2023).

the Seleucid empire in general and Hellenistic Central Asia, in particular, have progressively been incorporated into considerations of writing ancient global history.²⁷

Based on these fruitful results, this dissertation contributes to a more global approach to Hellenistic history in several aspects. First, by highlighting how Rome and China developed respective perceptions of Bactria in the course of their imperial expansions in Part I, this dissertation uses Hellenistic Asia as a lens to write interconnected history from the Mediterranean to China. While current research on the Seleucid empire has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Seleucid authorities in integrating the lands from Syria to Bactria together, Part I demonstrates the way in which the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, as a legacy of Seleucid governance in Central Asia, came to be a region where Greco-Roman and Chinese ethnographic imaginations converged.

Second, by appreciating the role of performance culture in transregional exchange, Part II stresses the way by which performance culture tied together the former Hellenistic landscape in the Roman/Parthian period. Part II not only shows how the lands from Syria to Bactria, which constitute the former landscape of the Seleucid empire, were imagined in the Roman theaters but highlights the role of wandering performers on the Indian Ocean, whether from the eastern Mediterranean or Central Asia, in contributing to Chinese knowledge of Rome.

Drawing on Angelos Chaniotis' concept of the "long Hellenistic period,"²⁸ Part II of this dissertation demonstrates that the idea of a coherent landscape stretching from Syria to Bactria persisted in Roman theater-driven imaginations. Wandering performers also acted as cultural brokers by expanding the frontier of "Hellenic" culture. In doing so, this dissertation

²⁷ This aspect is evident in relevant articles on Hellenistic Central Asia in two recent edited volumes on global antiquity: Boppearachchi (2017): 251-74 in *Eurasian Empires in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*; Morris (2019): 53-94 in the *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economies*.

²⁸ Chaniotis (2018).

aims to bridge the gap between studies of the Hellenistic and Roman East by showing the usefulness of “the long Hellenistic period” as a periodization for historiographical purposes. Traditionally, the Hellenistic East is considered part of Greek history, while the Roman East belongs to Roman history. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate how the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds from the Hellenistic to Roman periods can be better understood by adopting this framework when we lack a better term to organize knowledge production and historical writing.

In addition to research on Hellenistic Asia, this dissertation also uses an ethnographic lens to reconsider cultural exchange facilitated by the Seleucid empire and its impact on the Roman period. Scholars have been examining ancient Greco-Latin ethnographic literary imaginations of foreign people since the 1980s, with works such as Edith Hall’s *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* and François Hartog’s *The Mirror of Herodotus* emphasizing a critical examination of how the Greeks constructed their identities through the lens of representing the other people.²⁹ Homer’s *Odyssey* has been influential in discussing early Greek ethnographic thoughts.³⁰ Echoing this kind of literary scholarship, Emma Dench’s *From Barbarians to New Men: Greek, Roman and Modern Perceptions of Peoples from the Central Apennines* represents a historian’s engagement with this ethnographic interest by highlighting the need to examine the portrayal of other ethnic groups in ancient historiography in a more nuanced fashion.³¹

²⁹ Hall (1988); Hartog (1988).

³⁰ For the *Odyssey* as an archetype of Greek ethnography in the context of Greek colonization in the early Iron age, Dougherty (1993); the story of Odysseus as a nostos motif for diasporic experience in the early Iron age Mediterranean, Malkin (1998); the epic *Odyssey* as a vehicle for expressing transregional exchange, Hartog (2001).

³¹ Dench (1994).

In recent years, research on Greco-Roman ethnography has progressed in this direction. Works such as Phiroze Vasunia's *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander*, Charlotte Lerouge's *L'Image des Parthes dans le monde greco-romain*, Grant Parker's *The Making of Roman India*, Hyun Jin Kim's *Ethnicity and Foreigners in Ancient Greece and China*, Robert Cioffi's *Imaginary Lands: Ethnicity, Exoticism, and Narrative in the Ancient Novel*, Hamish Cameron's *Making Mesopotamia: Geography and Empire in a Romano-Iranian Borderland*, and Randolph Ford's *Rome, China, and the Barbarians* *Ethnographic Traditions and the Transformation of Empires* all provide more focused research on the Greco-Roman construction of self-identities through exploring foreign regions.³² In addition, Susan Stephens' examination of Apollonius' *Argonautica* as a Ptolemaic imperial representation of the Aegean world and Paul Kosmin's discussion of how Megasthenes' *Indica* is a literary site of Seleucid imperial formation demonstrates the transference of relevant methodologies to Hellenistic materials.³³

Moreover, more historically contextualized scholarship has emerged, such as Joseph Skinner's *The Invention of Greek Ethnography: From Homer to Herodotus*, which attends to the nuanced development of Greek ethnography from scattered knowledge represented in archaic Greek poetry and artifacts to a more systematic attempt at writing about the others in Herodotus' work.³⁴ The applicability of the modern notion of "ethnography" rooted in 19th-century colonial anthropology to ancient materials has also been raised.³⁵ In particular, Skinner cautions that contemporary discussions of ancient ethnographical materials by contemporary ancient

³² Vasunia (2001); Lerouge (2007); Parker (2008); Kim (2009); Cameron (2018); Ford (2020). For a comprehensive reflection on the way the "other" is portrayed in Greco-Roman ethnography, see Gruen (2010).

³³ Stephens (2003): 20-73; Kosmin (2013a): 97-115.

³⁴ Skinner (2012).

³⁵ Almagor and Skinner (2013): 1-22; Dench (2013): 257-68.

historians and classicists do not align with progress in contemporary anthropological discussions of ethnographic fieldwork.³⁶

Echoing Skinner's effort to provide a more historical context of ethnographic knowledge formation, Greg Woolf emphasizes the instrumental role of brokers between different areas in contributing to relevant knowledge formation in Roman texts by employing middle ground theory, in the case of the Roman West.³⁷ Concurrently, research on Roman Egypt has made significant contributions by utilizing material evidence to explore ethnographic imaginations, as exemplified in Miguel John Versluys' work *Aegyptica Romana: Nilotic Scenes and the Roman Views of Egypt* and Caitlin Eilís Barrett's *Domesticating Empire: Egyptian Landscapes in Pompeian Gardens*.³⁸ Although Tim Clark's *The Nature of Dominance: Roman Representations of Parthia and Armenia and the Development of New Narratives of Imperial Victory* works in a different intellectual tradition, which does not concern ethnography but focuses on Roman imperial foreign policy, Clark relates Roman perceptions of Parthia and Armenia to Rome's eastern policy from the late republic to the late 2nd century CE.³⁹ In particular, Clark primarily uses non-literary sources, such as numismatic and art historical evidence, as testimonies to Rome's perceptions of Parthia and Armenia while highlighting the social background of producing these artifacts.

The interest in Greek ethnography since the 1980s has also witnessed renewed attention given an increasing interest in the issue of race in antiquity. While the discussion of whether antiquity has the equivalent of the modern notion of "race" has been going on for

³⁶ Skinner (2012): 7.

³⁷ Woolf (2009): 207-17; Wolf (2013).

³⁸ Versluys (2002); Barrett (2019).

³⁹ Clark (2020).

decades,⁴⁰ Sarah Derbew's *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity* represents the most recent scholarship in this area. Although this book frames discussion in the contemporary scholarship on race, the book's examinations of the image of Egyptians, Scythians, and Aethiopians in Greek literature engage with more traditional ethnographic research.⁴¹ The edited volume on *Cultural History of Race in Western Antiquity* also contains several articles on imagining the others from a race perspective.⁴²

From the Chinese side, in addition to the comparative work by Kim and Ford, Haun Saussy's *The Making of Barbarians: Chinese Literature and Multilingual Asia* represents the most recent attempt to critically examine the way Chinese imaginations of the outside worlds are a means by which China positions itself at the center of the world, a worldview differing from ancient Greco-Roman and modern European notions of the world.⁴³ From a historical point of view, Chinese historians mostly take an empirical fashion to tackle relevant materials by using them as evidence of Central Asian history under the rubric of Sino-Western communications as a subfield in the discipline of history in mainland China, which has its intellectual lineage with oriental philology in continental Europe.⁴⁴ From the tradition of sinology in continental Europe, D.D. Leslie's and K.H.J. Gardiner's *The Roman Empire in Chinese Sources* represents a similar attitude toward these materials.⁴⁵ Although the critical discussion of Chinese ethnographic materials relatively lags behind than their Greco-Latin counterparts, we can foresee the future growth of this field. Nevertheless, the future growth of ethnography-oriented scholarship will

⁴⁰ Frank Snowden is a pioneer in relevant research, Snowden (1970) and (1983). Also see Naoise Mac Sweeney's recent distinction between "race" and "ethnicity" in Greco-Roman antiquity, Sweeney (2021): 103-18.

⁴¹ Derbew (2022).

⁴² McCoskey (2021).

⁴³ Saussy (2022).

⁴⁴ Under this rubric, the four volumes of *Zhongxi jiaotong shiliao huibian* (Compendium of Historical Sources on Sino-Western Communications) edited by Zhang Xingliang represents this effort, X.L. Zhang (2003).

⁴⁵ Leslie and Gardiner (1996).

inevitably engulf the increasing tension between empirical-oriented scholars and theory-minded literary scholars.⁴⁶ American sinologists, who advocate transferring critical literary methods in classical studies to sinology while ignoring the internal methodological diversity in the field of classics, tend to dismiss empirical work done by Chinese scholars as a Chinese nationalist project.⁴⁷

From an ethnographic point of view, this dissertation contributes to existing discussions of ethnography in several ways. First, in Part I, the dissertation compares Roman and Chinese knowledge of Bactria, emphasizing the role of Bactria as a double-faced mirror between Rome and China and the influence of Hellenistic and nomadic imperialisms as the political context in which their knowledge of Bactria was formed. This approach contextualizes my ethnographic discussions within the context of imperial encounters in Central Asia. Second, in Part II, the dissertation examines the role of performance in ethnographic knowledge formation and transmission, with a focus on Roman pantomime performance as a cultural broker. While acknowledging the issue of ethnographic materials as a tool for writing about other cultures, I aim to provide more empirical depth by demonstrating how relevant ethnographic knowledge was obtained.

Additionally, as Greco-Roman and Chinese materials are the focus of my dissertation, it relates to comparative research between Rome and China. This thematic scope is similar to Ford's *Ethnographic Identities and the Politics of Empire in Late Roman and Early Medieval Chinese Historiography*. Ford is conscious of how his book engages with existing scholarship on comparative histories between Rome and China. However, unlike social science-

⁴⁶ For examples of literary scholars' critical readings of Chinese ethnographic materials in western academia, see Schaberg (1999): 152-91; Chin (2010): 31-54; Chin (2012): 128-46.

⁴⁷ For a recent rare example of historical discussion on ethnography in Han China in western academia, see Brindley (2018). For more detailed discussion, see chapter 2.

dominated interest in existing comparative studies, Ford points out that comparative ethnographic research inevitably brings in literary analysis when writing history.⁴⁸ Similarly, whereas most comparative studies between Rome and China are inclined toward figuring out a pattern for historical sociological and economic concern, my dissertation emphasizes cultural exchange rather than figuring out the sociological mechanics of ancient civilizations, which is the focus of most comparative studies between Rome and China.

While my dissertation shares Ford's thematic interest in comparing Greco-Roman and Chinese ethnographic representations of foreign people and lands, it focuses more on communications instead of comparisons. The major concern of my dissertation is the way common ethnographic knowledge of former Hellenistic Asia became a vehicle for transregional interactions between Rome and China. The issue of comparison is only relevant when it concerns the different ways in which Rome and China perceived former Hellenistic Asia. Nevertheless, even though my dissertation is more about interaction than comparison, I hope to bring about a "comparison-in-interaction" model to show that studying interaction can be a form of comparison.

As an outline, Part I focuses on Bactria as a converging ground in which common ethnographic knowledge between Rome and China took place. Chapter 1 examines Bactria as a cipher for the imperial expansion and desire for an expanding regime from the mid-republic to the Augustan age. I argue that when Greek authors under Roman rule developed their idiosyncratic understanding of Bactria, their writings on Bactria coincide with Rome's imperial expansion from Greece to the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Moreover, I highlight the way Hellenistic imperialism in Central Asia, from Antiochus III to Indo-Greek kingdoms, served as

⁴⁸ Ford (2020): 13.

the political basis for Greco-Roman ethnographic knowledge of Bactria. Chapter 2 interprets Sima Qian's report on Hellenistic Asia, especially Bactria, within the context of Chinese intellectual debates about the political economy during the late 2nd century and the early 1st century BCE. I emphasize that China's engagement with the nomadic political economic system is the background of Sima Qian's representation of late Hellenistic Asia. In particular, I demonstrate the way Sima Qian rethinks the relationship between nomadic and sedentary areas through outside cases by using the knowledge of the late Hellenistic world.

Part II considers performance as an identifiable carrier of ethnographic knowledge in Rome and China. Chapter 3 discusses pantomime-dominated Roman theater as the institutional mechanism through which Rome imagined former Hellenistic Asia from Syria to Bactria/India as an entity. I suggest that the development of pantomime performance, especially the growing importance of pantomime dancers, affected ethnographic knowledge production. In turn, chapter 4 highlights the agency of wandering performers (from both the Mediterranean and Central Asia) in shaping Chinese knowledge of Rome. I argue that Chinese knowledge of Rome derived from popular narratives of Roman state power on the Indian Ocean. I also highlight that Homeric motives were employed to craft relevant narratives.

Above all, this dissertation addresses the methodological divisions within research on ancient ethnography. It aims to demonstrate that, contrary to prevailing notions, the knowledge found in Greek and Chinese ethnographic traditions cannot solely be attributed to the literary imagination of writers in imperial metropolises. Instead, it reveals the existence of historical agents who actively transmitted and shaped knowledge about the outside world. These agents, whether nomads or performers, played a significant role in the formation of this knowledge. Moreover, this dissertation acknowledges that the knowledge originating from these

interactions was influenced by the imperial agendas of Rome and China. Consequently, it seeks to establish that an empirical approach and a post-modern literary approach need not be mutually exclusive. By combining both methodologies, historians can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Chapter 1: The Late Hellenistic World and the Making of Roman Greek Knowledge of Bactria: From Antiochus III to the Indo-Greek Kingdoms

Introduction

From the 2nd century BCE onward, Greek and Chinese intellectuals became aware of Bactria, which was not only due to Rome's and China's simultaneous imperial expansions but also signaled the formation of the trans-Eurasian network. The network connected the Mediterranean, the Near East, Central Asia, and China. Bronze Age archaeologists have demonstrated the intense communication from Mesopotamia to China during the late 3rd century millennium BCE, which is known as the Middle Asian Interaction Sphere.⁴⁹ However, based on literary testimonies, the first time a similar dynamic was observed is the 2nd century BCE when both Greek intellectuals in the Roman Mediterranean and Chinese intellectuals displayed awareness of Bactria as a place between these two empires. This common knowledge of Bactria demonstrates the way the geographical horizons of Greco-Roman and Chinese elites converged. The next chapter will explore how Chinese knowledge of Bactria and beyond took shape during China's engagement with the nomadic political-economic system, while this chapter examines how Rome developed knowledge of Bactria in conjunction with its engagement with the Hellenistic empires from the west.

The general contour of Greek knowledge of Bactria in the Roman political system was defined by Hellenistic imperialism in Bactria, from Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign to the Indo-Greek kingdoms. It is argued that Greek knowledge of Bactria from the mid-republic to the Augustan age is a cipher of Roman imperial development. The evolving image of Bactria in

⁴⁹ For this notion, see Possehl (2007): 40-2; for research on Central Asia from this perspective, Lyonnet and Dubova (2020): 11-2; for South Asia, see Mutin and Lamberg-Karlovsky (2020): 551-3; for East Asia, see Li (2018): 87-9.

Greek historiography from the 2nd century BCE to the early 1st century CE registers Rome's imperial development. Although research on Hellenistic Bactria has benefited from increasing archaeological and numismatic discoveries,⁵⁰ an ethnographic perspective of relevant literary sources that considers them as Greco-Latin geographical representations of the eastern world remains to be included.⁵¹

As will be demonstrated, two Greek authors under foreign rule are instrumental in shaping Greek knowledge of Bactria: Polybius and Apollodorus of Artemita. As a Greek hostage growing up in Rome, Polybius aimed to use his historical work to account for the rise of Rome and is well-known to ancient historians and classicists. In contrast, Apollodorus of Artemita from Mesopotamia is not so well-known. His account of Parthia is primarily known based on the quotations of his work in Strabo's and Pompeius Trogus' writings on Parthia and Bactria. In general, we can be certain that he lived in the second of the 2nd century BCE, but the question about the aim of his historical writing remains a further elucidation.⁵² As I suggest, even though we only have some fragments of Apollodorus' work, we can gauge his aim in explaining the rise of Parthia, similar to Polybius' agenda in providing a rationale for Rome's success. In turn, the other two Greek authors, Diodorus and Strabo, perceive Bactria as Greece's mirror based on Polybius' and Apollodorus' work, respectively. Regarding Strabo as an Augustan author, it will

⁵⁰ See Introduction.

⁵¹ The only published piece with this aim of probing how Central Asia challenged Seleucid authority is Mairs (2022): 231-45. For the ethnographic approach versus traditional empirical approach, Emma Dench has a very clear elucidation in her research on the Central Apennines in Greco-Latin imagination: "The question that is then asked is whether Livy is right or wrong when he talks about the Samnites as *montani atque agrestes*. This question is clearly simplistic, and it is important to recognize that the subject of 'ways of seeing' in ancient literature is too complex to be approached in this way. Such citations need rather to be considered within their immediate literary and social contexts, within a long tradition both of history-writing and of developing ways of considering and framing information about 'other peoples' in antiquity." Dench (1995): 14.

⁵² For a major research on Apollodorus within the Parthian context, see Tada (2008).

be highlighted that his view of Bactria as a Greek regime contradicts the understanding of Bactria as an eastern regime among imperial Augustan poets.

Antiochus I's Eastern Anabasis and Bactria in Republican Roman Greek Historiography

In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that the Chinese perception of the late/post-Hellenistic world, especially Bactria, was influenced by the nomadic political economic system. This section focuses on how Bactria's successful handling of nomads during the late 3rd century BCE shaped Greek knowledge of Bactria. According to Polybius, a major author who provides an account of the incident, Antiochus III's two-year siege of Bactra, the capital of Bactria, between 208 and 206 BCE, was one of the greatest military incidents comparable to the sieges of Sardis, Carthage, and Corinth.⁵³ I argue that the successful dealing with nomads between Antiochus III and the Greco-Bactrian king Euthydemus I was a major factor in this qualification. Furthermore, Polybius's comparison of Antiochus III's siege of Bactra with two significant incidents in Roman military history and imperial expansions effectively shows the role of Bactria in the Greco-Roman ideological system.

Bactria's connection with the nomadic world is the starting point for its role in the Greco-Roman ideological system when Polybius considers the Siege of Bactra as a significant military incident. From a Central Asian point of view, Bactria's and Sogdiana's engagements with the nomadic world go back to the Achaemenid period.⁵⁴ Alexander's major obstacle in the Central Asian campaign came not only from indigenous sedentary elites alone but from their alliance with Central Eurasian nomads.⁵⁵ Pliny's account of Antiochus I's rebuilding of a city in

⁵³ Plb, 29.12

⁵⁴ For Sacae's presence in Xerxes' army with Bactria, Hdt, 31.4. After the late Achaemenid satrap Bessus assumed the title of Artaxerxes IV as the king of Asia while his main supporters were some Persians and many local Bactrians; meanwhile, Bessus attempted to obtain support from the Scythians, Arr. Ana. 3.25.3.

⁵⁵ This aspect has usually been neglected in mainstream discussions on Alexander's campaign; for discussions, see Holt (1988): 56-7; Olbrycht (1996): 150-8; Harmatta (1999): 129-36; Bosworth (1999); Rapin (2013): 43-82; (2017): 37-121; (2018): 257-98; Martinez-Sève (2020): 83-118.

Margiana after its sacking by “barbarians” provides a glimpse into the tension between Greco-Macedonian colonizers and nomadic people.⁵⁶ Antiochus I’s general Demodamas’ dedication to Apollo of Didyma on the Jaxartes river, the boundary between Sogdiana and the nomadic world, is a clear symbolic statement on the Seleucids’ claim of Central Asia from Central Eurasian nomads under the rubric of Seleucid colonial ideology.⁵⁷

Though these accounts come from later sources, the Uzundara fortification in today’s Uzbekistan whose coins date from Antiochus I’s time is particularly revealing of the Seleucids’ defense against the nomadic world.⁵⁸ In particular, the Greek graffiti in Uzundara shows that the soldiers were Greek immigrants but not indigenous Bactrians.⁵⁹ As a comparison, the northern Chinese kingdom Zhao began to fortify the northern Chinese frontier from the early 3rd century BCE onward. We can consider the Chinese military practice as a parallel to the Uzundara fortification.⁶⁰ It must not be a coincidence when the Seleucids and China simultaneously responded to the steppe world by investing in military defense.⁶¹

As far as surviving fragments on Antiochus III’s Bactrian campaign show, Polybius’ account of Bactria starts by describing a nomadic group called Aspasiae on the Oxus River.⁶² Given the fragmentary status of evidence, it is not immediately clear how the report on nomads

⁵⁶ *In qua Alexander Alexandriam condiderat; qua diruta a barbaris Antiochus Seleuci filius eodem loco restituit Syrianam interfluente Margo qui corrivatur in Zotha lacu*, Pln. HN. 6.47

⁵⁷ Plin. HN. 6.18.49. For relevant discussions of this Seleucid ideology, see Kosmin (2014): 61-7; Visscher (2020): 16-70. For more historically contextualized discussion from a Milesian perspective, see Bearzot (2017): 143-54.

⁵⁸ Rtveladz, Dvurechenskaya, Gorin, and Sheiko (2014): 151-60. In the case of the Gorgan Wall for Sasanian Iran, Richard Payne suggests that the building of the wall proved economically the local aristocrats’ ability to marshal the labor force and ideologically create an Iranian space, Payne (2017): 179–217. Payne’s idea is inspiring for the situation in Bactria.

⁵⁹ Dvurechenskaya (2021).

⁶⁰ Di Cosmo (2002): 163–170. Attendant to this expansion is the debate on what was the essence of “Chinese” at the Zhao court when the king decided to order the Zhao people to wear nomadic costumes and to learn archery. This ideological incident has not received the due attention it deserves.

⁶¹ In this regard, even though Uzundara fortifications demonstrated other purposes probably due to civil wars (Stančo (2020): 262)), defense against nomadic southern migration must still be one of its functions.

⁶² Plb. 10.48

is related to Antiochus III's Bactrian warfare. However, Euthydemus I's justification for his kingship in front of a Magnesian Greek named Teleas provides a hint:

παρακαλέσαντα τὸν Ἀντίοχον μὴ φθονῆσαι τῆς ὀνομασίας αὐτῷ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ προστασίας, ὥς γ' ἐὰν μὴ συγχωρῆ τοῖς ἀξιουμένοις, οὐδετέρῳ τῆς ἀσφαλείας ὑπαρχούσης: πλήθη γὰρ οὐκ ὀλίγα παρεῖναι τῶν Νομάδων, δι' ὧν κινδυνεύειν μὲν ἀμφοτέρους, ἐκβαρβαρωθήσεσθαι δὲ τὴν χώραν ὁμολογουμένως, ἐὰν ἐκείνους προσδέχωνται.

(Euthydemus I) encouraged Antiochus [III] not to envy the name of his kingship and attire. If (Antiochus III) did not grant the worth of his kingship, neither side would have security. There were quite a few nomads present. If they admitted them, both sides would be barbarized as we can all agree.⁶³

The justification by Euthydemus I concerns the legitimacy of his kingship, which he claims he did not usurp but rightfully attained by crushing rebellious forces.⁶⁴ Euthydemus I must refer to his previous dealings with the Diodotid family to make this case.⁶⁵ However, what is most crucial about his justification is the concern for security due to the nomadic threat in Bactria. In this regard, we gain a contextualized understanding of Polybius' report on the Aspasicae on the Oxus. By evoking this nomadic threat, Euthydemus highlights the porous boundary between the nomads and sedentary urban foundations in Bactria.⁶⁶ From the phrase ἐὰν ἐκείνους προσδέχωνται, we can detect both kings' intention to hire nomads as mercenaries when the siege had gone for two years. The rhetoric about "barbarization" thus entails a justification for Euthydemus I's kingship: he would act as a bulwark to keep them out of Bactria on behalf of the

⁶³ Plb. 11.34.3-5

⁶⁴ It involves the complicated history between Euthydemids and Diodotids. For recent appraisals, see Jakobsson (2011): 17-34; Jakobsson (2020): 499-509; Wenghofer (2017): 151-72; Wenghofer and Houle (2017): 191-208.

⁶⁵ Based on the Soter epithet on the Diodotus coin, Wolski also points out that Diodotus may have successfully encountered the nomadic threat, Wolski (1960): 116.

⁶⁶ For relevant issues, see the discussion in the next chapter.

Seleucids. It is in this context that Antiochus III agreed to Euthydemus I's peaceful treaty when the Seleucid king was also trying to find a solution.⁶⁷

On the surface, Antiochus III was not as successful in dealing with Bactria as he was in Armenia and Parthia.⁶⁸ However, Polybius highly praises Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign, calling him a great king not only of Asia but also of Europe.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Polybius compliments Antiochus III's consideration of security. I contend that this recognition arises from the king's dealing with nomads in Bactria. In particular, Polybius highlights that Antiochus III secured his kingdom (ἠσφαλίσατο τὴν βασιλείαν).⁷⁰ I thus consider Polybius' report on the Peace of Naupactus in 217 BCE as an echo with Antiochus I's dealing with Bactria. In Naupactus, the Acarnanian envoy Lyciscus gave the famous warning about the "Cloud of the West" in his speech as follows:

βουλόμενοι γὰρ περιγενέσθαι Φιλίππου καὶ ταπεινῶσαι Μακεδόνας, λελήθασιν αὐτοῖς ἐπισπασάμενοι τηλικούτο νέφος ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσπέρας, ὃ κατὰ μὲν τὸ παρὸν ἴσως πρώτοις ἐπισκοπήσει Μακεδόσι, κατὰ δὲ τὸ συνεχὲς πᾶσιν ἔσται τοῖς Ἑλλησι μεγάλων κακῶν αἴτιον.

They would like to prevail over Philip [V] and disparage the Macedonians. They did not realize that they had drawn themselves such a cloud from the west. This cloud may cast a shadow over the Macedonians but would eventually be a cause of great evil for all the Greeks.⁷¹

The Social War between 220-217 BCE, which resulted in the Peace of Naupactus, marked the starting point for Rome's involvement in mainland Greek affairs during the First Macedonian

⁶⁷ The mediator Teleas was likely a Magnesian envoy in Bactria to announce the festival of Artemis Leucophryneia. For further information about Teleas' Magnesian background, see Holt (2002): 129.

⁶⁸ Plb. 8.23; 10.28. Rolf Strootman argued that Antiochus III was a king-maker by employing Persianism, Strootman (2019): 143-5.

⁶⁹ διὰ γὰρ ταύτης τῆς στρατείας ἄξιος ἐφάνη τῆς βασιλείας οὐ μόνον τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Εὐρώπην, Plb. 11.34.15

⁷⁰ Ibid, 11.34.14; cf. Michèle Lowrie's discussion of security as an important theme in later Roman political thought, Lowrie (2020): 31-46.

⁷¹ Plb. 9.37.10

War.⁷² When Polybius recounts the negotiation between Antiochus III and Euthydemus I in Bactria, he likely had this Greek past in mind.⁷³

Although we cannot definitely attribute Euthydemus I's warning on the nomadic threat to the Xiongnu, the eastern Eurasian steppe world underwent significant changes throughout the 3rd century BCE.⁷⁴ Given the high level of interconnectedness in the Central Eurasian steppe during the pre-modern period, it is not surprising that Bactria and China demonstrated similar responses to nomadic affairs around the same time. By the time of Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign, China already had faced a challenge from the Xiongnu.⁷⁵ Thus, Euthydemus I's justification for his kingship based on the nomadic threat has a wider Central Eurasian background, concerning the interactions between nomads and sedentary regimes in Central Asia.

Polybius' understanding of this eastern Eurasian dynamic is shaped by a parallel development in western Eurasia: the rise and expansion of Rome. As a Greek hostage from Megalopolis taken to Rome after the Third Macedonian War, Polybius's personal trajectory involved Rome's conquest of Greece, prompting him to write about the interconnected history of the Mediterranean world.⁷⁶ During the conference of Naupactus, Agelaus from Aetolia similarly

⁷² For a detailed discussion of the speech, see Lévy (1994): 33-50. For relevant historical background, see Mackil (2013): 122-3.

⁷³ Although scholars usually recognize that the agenda of Polybius' historiography is closely intertwined with Roman imperialism (Walbank (1964): 239-260; Richardson (1979): 1-11; Hartog (2007): 89-113; Erskine (2013): 115-129), Polybius evidently fails to incorporate the Seleucid's view on Bactria into the Roman imperial knowledge, which was probably a task too early to undertake. For a counterview that Polybius actually disguises the Roman regime by looking at it as barbarian, see Champion (2004).

⁷⁴ See discussions in chapter 2.

⁷⁵ An incident in China in 215 BCE also sheds light on Euthydemus I's concern: "The First Emperor inspected the northern frontier, departing from the Shangjun. A Confucian scholar named Lu from the region of Yan served [the emperor] based on his ability to do divinity. He submitted a book with a picture saying that: "It is the Hu [foreign/"barbarian"] people who will destroy the Qin." The First Emperor thus dispatched the general Meng Tian to lead three-hundred thousand people to attack the Hu in the north and took the territory roughly to the south of the [Yellow] river [i.e., the Ordos]." *Shiji*, Volume 6, 252.

⁷⁶ For the most recent appraisal of universal historical writing in Polybius' work, see Wiater (2022): 36-68.

stressed the need for different regimes in Greece to collaborate, drawing on Rome's defeat of Carthage. Polybius records this as follows:

ὅς ἔφη δεῖν μάλιστα μὲν μηδέποτε πολεμεῖν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀλλήλοις, ἀλλὰ μεγάλην χάριν ἔχειν τοῖς θεοῖς, εἰ λέγοντες ἕν καὶ ταῦτὸ πάντες καὶ συμπλέκοντες τὰς χεῖρας, καθάπερ οἱ τοὺς ποταμοὺς διαβαίνοντες, δύναιντο τὰς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐφόδους ἀποτριβόμενοι συσσωζέειν σφᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ τὰς πόλεις.

He said that it is necessary above all for Greeks not to wage war against one other any longer, but rather to have gratitude toward the gods. If they were to speak as one and join their hands, just as people do when they are crossing rivers, they would be able to brush off the incursions of barbarians and save both themselves and their city-states.⁷⁷

Polybius' rhetorical representation of the conference in Naupactus further supports his idea of Romans being barbarians. This is consistent with the negotiation between Euthydemus I and Antiochus III, in which the phrase ἐκβαρβαρωθήσασθαι is used. In this regard, although Bactria is geographically distant from the Mediterranean world, Polybius's interest in the Seleucid "hinterland" was piqued by the Seleucids' confrontation with Rome, which marked Rome's engagement with the trans-Eurasian continental network.⁷⁸

When Polybius viewed the Siege of Bactra as a military incident comparable to Rome's dealings with Corinth and Carthage, he recognized that Central Asia mattered for the Mediterranean world. The collaboration between two Hellenistic kings to address the common concern with nomads contrasts with the situation during the Social War in Greece, which eventually created a conducive condition for Rome's conquest of Greece. In other words, Polybius highlights the contrasting political situations between the Greek cities in the mainland and the Hellenistic kingdoms in Asia. While the latter managed to cease hostilities, the Greek poleis in the mainland continue to be plagued by civil wars. In this context, Polybius implicitly

⁷⁷ Plb. 5.104.1

⁷⁸ In some sense, we may assert that traditionally Rome-focused Hellenistic research inherits this view regarding Seleucid upper satrapies.

uses Bactria as a comparative reference for Greece, drawing attention to Bactria's successful handling of nomads during the late 3rd century BCE.⁷⁹

Roman imperial expansion into the eastern Mediterranean became the political context in which Polybius paid attention to Bactria. Polybius' account of Bactria reflects how Hellenistic imperialism in Bactria was the political context in which Greek knowledge of Bactria took shape in the Roman framework. In other words, when Hellenistic imperialism brought Greece and Bactria under the same power structure dominated or overshadowed by the Macedonians. Under this rubric, Polybius easily found a parallel between the nomadic threat to Bactria and Roman expansion into the Greek world.

Greek ethnography of Bactria under Roman rule further developed in the late republican period, as evidenced by Diodorus' report on Bactria. Among extant Greek writings, Diodorus has the richest accounts of Bactria, from its mythic history to the Diadochi Wars after Alexander's death. In general, Diodorus develops a comparison between Bactria and Greece. As will be demonstrated, this perception arises from Bactria's fraught relationship with a Near Eastern empire from Semiramis to Alexander. By writing about Bactria's effort to escape from the Near Eastern imperial system, Diodorus engages with Roman anxiety about Rome's increasing involvement in the trans-Eurasian network since the 1st century BCE when Rome had converted Syria as the first Roman province in the Near East in 64 BCE.

Although Diodorus is an outsider of the Roman elite system, his view should not be untypical.⁸⁰ This aspect especially manifests in Diodorus' detailed portrayal of Semiramis. In Cicero's accusation of Gabinius, the Roman governor in Syria, Gabinius is considered to be a

⁷⁹ From a narratological point of view, Polybius recounts the conference in Naupactus before Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign. He may want to remind readers to keep this mainland Greek affair in mind when reading about a conflict in the Hellenistic frontier. I appreciate Emily Mackil for this insightful suggestion.

⁸⁰ For recent reappraisals of Diodorus and late republic Rome, see Sacks (1990); Yarrow (2006); Muntz (2017).

new Semiramis in the East.⁸¹ As will be presently shown, Diodorus' account of the Semiramis legend provides a full intellectual context behind Cicero's accusation. Concerning Bactria, as will be presently shown, Diodorus writes about Semiramis' conquest of Bactria in light of Greece's dealing with Near Eastern powers from Persia to Alexander.

As recent scholarship has shown, the first four books in Diodorus' *Libraries* are the most crucial parts to understanding Diodorus' authorial agenda.⁸² After recounting the Semiramis story in book 2, Diodorus briefly narrates *translatio imperii* in Babylonian intellectual traditions, mentioning early Hellenistic imperial rulers Antigonos and Seleucus I.⁸³ *Translatio imperii* is a governing scheme of Diodorus' composition of his work. The mention of early Hellenistic imperial authorities in book 2 has two implications: 1.) Diodorus' account of Semiramis is not for antiquarian interest but arises from a desire to understand the eastern world that Rome was engaging with;⁸⁴ 2.) Hellenistic imperialism in Asia is a particular concern for his account of Semiramis.⁸⁵

The Semiramis story in Diodorus' work outlines how Semiramis successfully brings Bactria into the Near Eastern empire that she and her husband Ninus build, but ultimately fails to conquer India. I argue that Diodorus rewrites Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign and the Seleucid

⁸¹ *En vero in Syria diutius est Semiramis illa retinenda*, Cic. Proc. 9; for Gabinius in Syria, see Van Wijlick (2021): 66-80, 216. A similar ethnographic device of conceiving the East through female body can be found for late republican and early imperial knowledge of Caria, see Bresson (2007): 209-28.

⁸² Sulimani (2011); Muntz (2018): 365-89; Ring (2018): 389-406.

⁸³ Diod. Sic. 2.31.2. In conjunction with this, Diodorus also has a "digression" on comparing Greek and Babylonian intellectual traditions where Diodorus uses Babylonian scholarly culture to reflect on the issues of Greek intellectuals, Diod. Sic. 2.29-30. This digression reflecting on the limitation of Greek intellectual traditions, especially an emphasis that Greek intellectuals have to make living to make their intellectual pursuit a profit-driven activity (Diod. Sic. 2.29.5), may be a reflection on the issue of Roman patronage of Greek intellectuals during the late republic. Cf. Dugan (2005): 37-9; Muntz (2017): 5; König and Wiater (2022): 20-21.

⁸⁴ The most crucial part is the image of Pompey in Diodorus' representation as a new "eastern" king concerning the list of lands Pompey conquered in the dedicatory inscription, Diod. Sic. 40.4. For Diodorus' praise of Pompey, see Westhall (2018): 91-130.

⁸⁵ Concerning Semiramis in Diodorus' accounts, scholarly interpretations vary. For a Neo-Assyrian interpretation, see Weinfeld (1991): 99-103; Melville (2004): 34-57; Stronk (2017): 525-42. For an Iranian interpretation, Eilers (1971); Nagel (1982); for a Hellenistic interpretation, Briant (1982): 23-32; Dalley (2005): 12-22.

king's subsequent confrontation with Rome, with Bactria serving as a mirror for Greece in the same that Scythia did for Greece in Herodotus' narrative.⁸⁶ While the legendary Syrian king Ninus had already conquered all the lands from Syria to Media,⁸⁷ Bactria posed a unique challenge due to its rugged terrain and large population (ειδῶς δὲ τὰ τε πλήθη καὶ τὴν ἀλκὴν τῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἔτι δὲ τὴν χώραν ἔχουσιν πολλοὺς τόπους ἀπροσίτους διὰ τὴν ὀχυρότητα).⁸⁸ Diodorus intentionally compares Ninus' preparation for conquering Bactria, which involves enlisting an unprecedented number of soldiers, to Xerxes' Greek campaign, suggesting that the former is more magnificent.⁸⁹ By doing so, Diodorus emphasizes the significance of Ninus' Bactrian campaign, demonstrating that long before Greece faced the large empire of Persia during the Greco-Persian War, Bactria had already encountered a similar challenge.

Within the framework of Diodorus' *translatio imperii*, he portrays Bactria's dealing with the legendary empire built by Ninus and Semiramis as a remote echo of Greece's encounter with Persian imperialism. While we can gauge the perception of Bactria as a mirror of Greece in Polybius' work, Diodorus fully develops this perspective. Although the surviving fragment of Polybius' account of Antiochus III does not pay much attention to urbanism in Hellenistic Bactria,⁹⁰ Diodorus, on the other hand, is keenly interested in the cities in Bactria:

ἡ γὰρ Βακτριανὴ χώρα πολλαῖς καὶ μεγάλαις οἰκουμένη πόλεσι μίαν μὲν εἶχεν ἐπιφανεστάτην, ἐν ἣ συνέβαινε εἶναι καὶ τὰ βασιλεία· αὕτη δ' ἐκαλεῖτο μὲν Βάκτρα, μεγέθει δὲ καὶ τῇ κατὰ τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ὀχυρότητι πολὺ πᾶσῶν διέφερε. βασιλεύων δ' αὐτῆς Ὁξυάρτης κατέγραψεν ἅπαντας τοὺς ἐν ἡλικίᾳ στρατείας ὄντας, οἱ τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἠθροίσθησαν εἰς τετταράκοντα μυριάδας

For the country of Bactriana, populated by many large cities, had one which was the most famous, in which the royal palace also happened to be located; This city was

⁸⁶ Hartog (1988): 3-208.

⁸⁷ Diod. Sic. 2.2.1

⁸⁸ Ibid, 2.5.3

⁸⁹ Ibid, 2.5.5

⁹⁰ Polybius notices Greek cities founded by Alexander in Media, Plb. 10.27.3. The absence of the mention of Greek cities in Bactria may be due to the fragmentary status of Polybius' writing.

called Bactra, and in size and in the strength of its acropolis it surpassed them all. The king of the country, Oxyartes, had enrolled all the soldiers who were in the prime of life, who when gathered amounted to four hundred thousand men.⁹¹

Given that Diodorus does not mention the Indo-Greek kingdoms in his writing, it is unclear how much he knew about 1st-century Bactria.⁹² However, his account does demonstrate his knowledge of urban foundations in Bactria during the 3rd century BCE, probably by appropriating Polybius' account of Bactria.⁹³ According to this description, Bactria was a land of many large cities, with Bactra as the leading city. In line with Diodorus' previous comparison between Ninus' Bactrian campaign and Xerxes' Greek war, his use of the Greek words polis and acropolis further present Bactria as a similar landscape to Greece, with both lands are dotted with many cities and Bactra as Athens in Bactria.

The mobilization of Bactrians to fight against Ninus' Assyrian army under the mythic Bactrian king Oxyartes also evokes the convening of the Delian league during the Greco-Persian war.⁹⁴ As it turns out, Bactra became the sole area unoccupied by the Syrians:

μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα πάσης τῆς δυνάμεως εἰσβαλοῦσης, κρατούμενοι τοῖς πλήθεσι κατὰ πόλεις ἀπεχώρησαν, ἕκαστοι ταῖς ἰδίαις πατρίσι βοηθήσοντες. τὰς μὲν οὖν ἄλλας ὁ Νίνος ἐχειρώσατο ῥαδίως, τὰ δὲ Βάκτρα διὰ τε τὴν ὀχυρότητα καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ παρασκευὴν ἠδυνάτει κατὰ κράτος ἐλεῖν.

But later, when the whole Assyrian force entered their country, the Bactrians, overpowered by the multitude of them, withdrew city by city, each group intending to defend its own homeland. And so Ninus easily subdued all the other cities, but Bactra, because of its strength and the equipment for war which it contained, he was unable to take by storm.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Diod. Sic., 2.6.1-2, trans. C.H. Oldfather

⁹² Nevertheless, as the next chapter will show, Diodorus has more knowledge of nomads in Central Asia during the 2nd century BCE.

⁹³ Based on the archaeological progress until 1994, there are 272 sites in Bactria that have been identified as Hellenistic foundations while only 68 sites belong to the Achaemenid time, Lyonnet (1994): 544. Nevertheless, we should be aware of earlier archaeologists' preference for identifying Hellenistic foundations. For more updates about archaeology in Achaemenid Bactria, see Wu (2020): 594-617.

⁹⁴ Diod. Sic. 11.70.2

⁹⁵ Diod. Sic. 2.6.4, trans. Oldfather

The scenario closely resembles Antiochus III's experience in Bactria. While Antiochus III manages to conquer most of Bactria, Bactra proves to be the most difficult region to conquer.⁹⁶ Moreover, Diodorus' description of the retreat of Bactrians to cities during the Assyrian attack is consistent with the social structure that Polybius presents when he describes Bactrian cavalry.⁹⁷ Therefore, we can be certain that Polybius' report on Antiochus III's Siege of Bactra is the literary basis of Diodorus' presentation of Bactria's mythic history. Nevertheless, the portrayal of how the fragmented political landscape in Bactria provides a favorable situation for Ninus' campaign is also consistent with the Greek experience with Persia. The initial failure of collaboration between different Greek cities resulted in Persia's subjugation of most of Greece.⁹⁸

However, despite Greece's successful resistance against Persia, Bactria fails to deal with Syria. Diodorus presents the mythic story of Semiramis' success in capturing the Bactra acropolis when Syrian male generals and soldiers have no means to tackle Bactra. Diodorus highlights how Semiramis' design of a garb under which the wearer masks their identity is instrumental in her capture of the acropolis in Bactra. Diodorus also specifies that this costume later becomes the standard Median and Persian dress.⁹⁹

Diodorus thus implicitly suggests Semiramis as the founder of the first Near Eastern empire from Syria to Bactria. In particular, through the lens of dress, Diodorus develops a feminine understanding of eastern regimes. As the prototype of a Near Eastern king, Semiramis' use of garb to hide her femininity indicates a Greco-Roman perspective that eastern kings are essentially females who are masqueraded as males.¹⁰⁰ This gender fluidity is particularly evident

⁹⁶ Martinez-Sève (2016): 271-302.

⁹⁷ τοὺς γὰρ ἰππεῖς ἐπυθάνετο τῶν ὑπεναντίων τὰς μὲν ἡμέρας ἐφεδρεύειν παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τοῦ ποταμοῦ, τὰς δὲ νύκτας ὑποχωρεῖν πρὸς τινα πόλιν οὐκ ἔλαττον εἴκοσι σταδίων διέχουσαν, Plb, 10.49.4.

⁹⁸ Thebes' defection, Diod. Sic. 11.33.3; Potidaia, Diod. Sic. 11.34.3

⁹⁹ Diod. Sic. 2.6.6.

¹⁰⁰ For costume fashion and Roman identity, see Olson (2008); Edmondson and Keith (2008); Croom (2010).

in Diodorus' following vivid portrait of Semiramis' descendant Sardanapalus as a feminine male.¹⁰¹ Here, Diodorus engages with late republican Roman ideology about the potentially corrupting effect of Rome's eastern engagements, which opened the door for the wider Eurasian world, when eastern exotica flowed into the city of Rome. Semiramis' ability to use garb as eastern exotica to cover her identity particularly registers this anxiety. In this respect, Diodorus presents an irony that Bactria, as a land of warriors, is brought into an eastern empire by a female who masks her gender status.

Diodorus thus develops a nuanced understanding of Bactria. Instead of considering it as an inherent part of an eastern empire, he shows Bactria's historical attempt to avoid being incorporated into the eastern regime. In particular, when recounting Sardanapalus' vices, Diodorus emphasizes Bactria's revolt against Syria.¹⁰² This aspect is further evident in Diodorus' account of Greek settlers' revolt against the Macedonians in Bactria after Alexander's death as follows:

Οἱ δ' ἐν ταῖς ἄνω καλουμέναις σατραπείαις κατοικισθέντες Ἕλληνες ὑπ' Ἀλεξάνδρου, ποθοῦντες μὲν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ δίαιταν, ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἐσχατιαῖς τῆς βασιλείας ἐξερριμμένοι, ζῶντος μὲν τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπέμενον διὰ τὸν φόβον, τελευτήσαντος δὲ ἀπέστησαν. συμφρονήσαντες δὲ καὶ ἐλόμενοι στρατηγὸν Φίλωνα τὸν Αἰνιάνα δύναμιν ἀξιόλογον συνεστήσαντο. πεζοὺς μὲν γὰρ εἶχον πλείους τῶν δισμυρίων, ἵππεῖς δὲ τρισχιλίους, πάντας δὲ τῶν κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἀγῶνων πολλάκις πείραν εἰληφότες καὶ διαφόρους ταῖς ἀνδραγαθίαις.

The Greeks who had been settled by Alexander in the upper satrapies, as they were called, although they longed for the Greek customs and manner of life and were cast away in the most distant part of the kingdom, yet they submitted while the king was alive through fear; but when he was dead they rose in revolt. After they had taken counsel together and elected Philon the Aenianian as general, they raised considerable force. They had more than twenty thousand foot soldiers and three thousand horses, all

¹⁰¹ Sardanapalus "degenerates" into a female: spinning, make-up, and female voice, Diod. Sic. 2.23.2. For Sardanapalus, see Burkert (2009): 502-15. These aspects more fit Greek stereotypes of easterners who reverse gender norms. For effeminate males in Greek thoughts, see Gherchanoc (2003): 739-91.

¹⁰² Diod. Sic. 2.26.4.

of whom had many times been tried in the contests of war and were distinguished for their courage.¹⁰³

Hellenistic historians noted the simultaneous revolts against the Macedonians by Athens and Bactria after Alexander's death.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, although there is a chronological coincidence between these two incidents, Diodorus deliberately highlights this aspect to further show how Bactria mirrors Greece when the trajectories of these two regions are connected through Alexander's conquest.

In the passage above, Diodorus uses the poetic verb *ποθοῦντες* to emotionally capture the Greek diasporic experience in Bactria caused by Alexander's eastern campaigns.¹⁰⁵ As the phrase *τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ διαίταν* displays a panhellenic dimension, the Greek homeland and lifestyle are subject to reimagination, remaking, and essentialization at the edge of the earth.¹⁰⁶ Diodorus uses the phrase *ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἐσχατιαῖς τῆς βασιλείας* to emphasize this remoteness. To demonstrate the possibility of reproducing Greek political practice in distant Bactria, Diodorus shows the collective decision-making rooted in democratic practice when these Greeks elect Philon as their leader after deliberation.¹⁰⁷

Regarding Athens' Lamian War during the same time, Diodorus highlights Alexander's death as a stimulus for this incident.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, Diodorus adds a pan-Hellenic dimension to the Greeks' revolt in Bactria through the Lamian War and vice versa. Although

¹⁰³ Diod. Sic., 18.7.1-2, trans. Oldfather

¹⁰⁴ Holt (1988): 88.

¹⁰⁵ For this word and its cognates as a poetic verb from *Iliad* onward, see Austin (2021): 17-49; 155-68. It is also a word frequently used in Alexander historians. For Homeric impact on Alexander historians, especially Arrian, see Liotsakis (2019): 163-225.

¹⁰⁶ For Greek diasporic identity revealed from Xenophon's *Anabasis* and its resemblance to the Hellenistic experience, see Ma (2003): 330-45.

¹⁰⁷ See Cinzia Berzot's discussion of writing political collaboration in Diodorus, Bearzot (2018): 329-46. For democracy in Diodorus, see Galvagno (2015): 137-69.

¹⁰⁸ Diod. Sic. 18.11.1. Diodorus particularly highlights the role of returning mercenaries in the revolt. For returning mercenaries as a problem during the Diadochi Wars as reflected in Menander's comedies, see Lape (2004).

these two revolts had no coordination, Greeks, whether in an old Greek center or at the far eastern region, simultaneously rebelled against the common enemy in the critical moment of *translatio imperii* from Persia to Macedon. In particular, the conflict with the Macedonians is the common issue that faces both Athens and the Greeks in Bactria.¹⁰⁹ It is only the Hellenistic experience that brought both Athens and Bactria into the same imperial framework that makes it possible for Diodorus to use Bactria as a mirror for Greece. In turn, Hellenistic kingdoms succeeded the enterprise of Ninus and Semiramis. By writing Bactria as a mirror of Greece in the late republic, Diodorus further engages with the Roman anxiety about Roman expansion when the transition from Macedonian rule to Roman rule is another moment of *translatio imperii*.

In this light, while Polybius' interest in Bactria aligns with the reality of Rome's political subjugation of Greece during the 2nd century BCE, Diodorus' reports on Bactria echo Roman imperial developments in ending Hellenistic imperialism in the eastern Mediterranean world during the 1st century BCE. However, in contrast with Polybius' implicit suggestion that Rome is a force external to the Greek world, Diodorus' Hellenic understanding of Bactria speaks of Roman imperial anxiety about the potentiality that Rome would become another eastern empire in the line of Semiramis' enterprise.

Bactria in an Empire: Imagining Indian Elephants in Late Republican Rome

While Diodorus portrays Bactria as the mirror image of Greece by highlighting its resistance to being incorporated into an empire, his report on Semiramis' Indian campaign explores Bactria's role in an empire through the lens of Indian elephants. Although Bactria falls

¹⁰⁹ Diodorus' account of Eumenes as the only Greek among the Macedonian diadochi is revealing of this aspect. Eumenes' ambiguous role as a Greek among Macedonians has been a historiographical debate on Diadochi Wars, see Anson (2014): 539-58; Anson (2015). Though the accounts by Hieronymus of Cardia, on which Diodorus' report on the Diadochi Wars should be reliable in general, for historiographic discussion, see Hornblower (1982); Roisman (2014): 9-30.

under Semiramis' conquest, the queen fails to subjugate India, an eastern region that Ninus also planned to conquer. Rome's knowledge of India was mainly gained through its participation in the Indian Ocean trade from the Augustan period, but its initial understanding of India derived from the Hellenistic experience, particularly Antiochus III's Indian campaign following the Siege of Bactra. Polybius briefly mentions this campaign, whereas Diodorus delves deeper into the matter.

Diodorus reimagines Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign into the myth of Semiramis, and likewise revisits Antiochus III's Indian campaign when he recounts Semiramis' attempt to conquer India. Although Rome had no direct contact with Bactria and India before the first century CE, Antiochus III's elephants at the Battle of Magnesia, which he had brought back from Bactria and India, provided Rome with an intimate experience with the vast expanse of the Seleucid empire and its access to Indian elephants.¹¹⁰ This experience resulted in Rome's prohibition of the Seleucids from owning elephants, as outlined in the treaty of Apamea.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, Antiochus III did not surrender all of his elephants to Rome.

According to Appian, after Antiochus IV died in 164 BCE, the Roman senate dispatched envoys to Syria:

πυθνανόμενοι δ' ἐν Συρίᾳ στρατόν τ' ἐλεφάντων εἶναι καὶ ναῦς πλείονας τῶν ὠρισμένων Ἀντιόχῳ, πρέσβεις ἔπεμπον, οἱ τοὺς ἐλέφαντας συγκόψειν ἔμελλον καὶ τὰς ναῦς διαπρήσειν. οἰκτρὰ δὲ ἡ ὄψις ἦν ἀναιρουμένων θηρίων ἡμέρων τε καὶ σπανίων, καὶ νεῶν κατεμπιπραμένων· καὶ τις ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ Λεπτίνης τὴν ὄψιν οὐκ ἐνεγκών, Γναῖον Ὀκτάουιον τὸν τῶνδε τῶν πρέσβεων ἡγεμόνα, ἀλειφόμενον ἐν τῷ γυμνασίῳ, διεχρήσατο.

¹¹⁰ As Livy recounts: "But also because of the elephants that towered so high among the soldiers. The beasts were huge themselves and were made the more striking by their ornaments and crests and by towers set on their backs, with four armed men plus the driver standing in each of them." (*perinde cum alia specie tum eminentibus tantum inter armatos elephantis magnum terrorem praebebat. ingentes ipsi erant; addebant speciem frontalia et cristae et tergo impositae turres, turribusque superstantes praeter rectorem quaterni armati*), Liv. 37.40.3-5, trans. B.O. Foster. Livy also mentions a general named Philip who is the elephants' master (*magistro elephantorum*), Liv. 37.41.1.

¹¹¹ Plb. 21.43.8

When they learned that there was an army of elephants in Syria and more ships than had been allowed in the treaty with Antiochus, they sent a mission with instructions to hamstring the elephants and burn the ships. It was a sad sight to see the destruction of these gentle and rare animals, and the burning of the ships, and in Laodicea, a man called Leptines, unable to bear what he was seeing, killed Gnaeus Octavius, the leader of the Roman mission, as he was oiling himself in the gymnasium.¹¹²

From an empirical point of view, regardless of whether these elephants were the same ones that Antiochus III brought from Bactria and India, they were ultimately transported from India and end up in Syria.¹¹³ The experience of being forced to leave their original Indian inhabitation, their long march from India to Syria, and their final rest in a place far from their original Indian forest epitomizes the environmental impact of the Hellenistic regime.¹¹⁴

From a Hellenistic perspective, Antiochus III's transportation of Indian elephants from India to the Mediterranean was part of the Seleucid tradition of using Indian elephants, which started with Seleucus I.¹¹⁵ This Seleucid interest in Indian elephants resulted from Mauryan intervention in the Hellenistic world when the Indian king Chandragupta sent 500 elephants to Seleucus I.¹¹⁶ This Seleucid military practice also influenced the Ptolemies' initiative to hunt elephants from eastern Africa.¹¹⁷ We can argue that Hellenistic warfare reshaped the eastern Mediterranean environmental landscape, where elephants had been extinct since the mid-first millennium BCE.¹¹⁸

¹¹² App. Syr. 11.46, trans. Brian McGing

¹¹³ Euthydemus I and the Indian king Sophaesagenus both surrendered elephants to Antiochus III, Plb, 11.34.10-11.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Engseng Ho's discussion on the anthropology of death and tomb in transregional context, Ho (2006).

¹¹⁵ There was complicated dynamic of Alexander and his successor's use of elephants before the Seleucids, which requires a separate study.

¹¹⁶ For Seleucus I's acquisition of elephants from India, see Strab. 16.10; for transportation of elephants from Bactria to Syria during the time of Antiochus I, see the entry in *Babylonian Astronomic Diaries, Astronomical Diaries, No.-273, 30-31*. For Mauryan intervention in Central Asia, Laurent Capdetrey is one of the very few scholars who brings up this aspect, Capdetrey (2007): 25-50. Also see Aperghis' numismatic discussion of Seleucid elephants, Aperghis (2019): 3-30.

¹¹⁷ For a recent synthetic account, see Burstein (2016): 135-48.

¹¹⁸ Trautman (2015): 1-49.

Diodorus' account of Semiramis' design of dummies based on Bactrian camels to counter Indian elephants thus registers a Greek understanding of this dynamic in late republican Rome. In Diodorus' account, when Semiramis is informed about India, elephants come into focus: the Indian king Stabrobates owns many richly decorated elephants that strike terror in warfare (ὑπῆρχον δ' αὐτῷ καὶ ἐλέφαντες πολλοὶ καθ' ὑπερβολὴν λαμπρῶς κεκοσμημένοι τοῖς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον καταπληκτικοῖς); the land of India enjoys innumerable elephants that are stronger than the African elephants (ἔχει δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐλεφάντων ἄπιστον πλῆθος, οἱ ταῖς τε ἀλκαῖς καὶ ταῖς τοῦ σώματος ῥώμαις πολὺ προέχουσι τῶν ἐν τῇ Λιβύῃ γινομένων).¹¹⁹ From the beginning, the account emphasizes Indian elephants' use in warfare and introduces a comparison between Indian elephants and African elephants,¹²⁰ representing a Mediterranean perspective that favors Indian elephants. From Diodorus' understanding of India as a land of countless elephants, we can detect the way the early Hellenistic practice of using elephants impacted Greek ethnography of the Far East in late republic Rome by considering elephants as an Indian exotica.

As Diodorus reports, she is aware that a lack of elephants will put her at a disadvantageous (ἐν τῇ τῶν ἐλεφάντων χρεία πολὺ λειπομένην) if she wants to wage a war with India. She then decides to build dummies that imitate elephants (ἐπενοήσατο κατασκευάζειν εἴδωλα τούτων τῶν ζώων). She assumes that these dummies will intimidate Indian soldiers since they cannot believe that elephants exist outside India (μηδ' εἶναι τὸ σύνολον ἐλέφαντας ἐκτὸς τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἰνδικήν).¹²¹ As discussed, Semiramis' design of gender-neutral clothes implies a perception of the femininity of the Hellenistic regime by highlighting the role of the female in

¹¹⁹ Dio. Sic. 2.16.2-4.

¹²⁰ This comparison is a trope in imperial literature, see Pliny's comment that "African elephants are afraid of an Indian elephant, and do not dare to look at it, as Indian elephants are indeed of a larger size (*Indicum Africi pavent nec contueri audent, nam et maior Indicis magnitudo est*) (Plin. HN. 8.9.27).

¹²¹ Dio. Sic. 2.16.8

the making of the first Near Eastern empire, which Rome engaged when it dealt with the Seleucids, the most recent successor of Semiramis' enterprise. Semiramis' intelligence contributes to another invention that was against nature: creating dummies in imitation of elephants.¹²²

In addition to elephants' potential military value, the reason that the Greco-Macedonian generals were addicted to using elephants arose from elephants' visual effects when they had gone extinct in the eastern Mediterranean. In doing so, the Hellenistic kings remapped the natural order through state power.¹²³ Semiramis' consideration entails a Greek understanding of this environmental reverse in the late republic. Through human intelligence, combined with state capacity, Semiramis' plan to create elephant-like dummies based on Bactrian camels resembles the Seleucids' acquisition of Indian elephants via Bactria. Semiramis' dummies-making thus also suggests a perception of the Seleucid effort to transport elephants from India to Syria via Bactria, an initiative recalling the creation of human-made dummies.

As the rich evidence from the Ptolemies shows that transporting elephants from Nubia/Ethiopia to Alexandria is an extremely consuming process,¹²⁴ we can infer that the Seleucids' initiative of transporting elephants from India to Syria involves conceivably even greater infrastructural and human resources given the longer distance from India to Syria than from Nubia to Alexandria. In turn, the story of Semiramis' making of dummies entails an understanding of this dynamic when the account shows how Semiramis' plan is also a state-dominated process that is resources consuming.

¹²² Bosak-Schroeder (2020): 76-83.

¹²³ When *1 Maccabees* recounts the Battle of Beth-Zechariah between Judas and Antiochus V in 162 BCE, it focuses on Seleucid elephants. This document provides solid evidence on how the Jewish as Seleucid subjects after the Fifth Syrian War perceived the Hellenistic state power through the lens of elephants. It is also interesting to compare with how the Jews in Alexandria subverted the Ptolemaic imperial ideology by showing out-of-controlled elephants after getting drunk in *3 Maccabees*, see Dyer (2019): 371-82; cf. Johnson (2005).

¹²⁴ Casson (1993): 247-60; Burstein (2008): 135-48.

First, this plan requires three hundred thousand black oxen that have double functions: their meat will be distributed to the artisans and the laborers assigned to creating the dummies and their hides will be used to build the dummies.¹²⁵ Though not explicitly stated, we can imagine that this initiative marshal an unusual number of laborers and artisans to complete this task. Moreover, all of these artisans are congregated in a court that is carefully safeguarded by soldiers.¹²⁶ If Semiramis is a designer who comes up with the idea of creating dummies, considerable human resources, plus military protection, are required to put this idea into practice. Similarly, if Hellenistic empires lacked elephants, it was easier to think about bringing elephants from India or East Africa, but only state power was able to make it happen. While Semiramis' body is a site for a late republican Greek author to reflect the Hellenistic state power, the process of creating dummies under Semiramis' vision and arrangement shows how the Hellenistic power operates in Diodorus' understanding of the Seleucids.

While Bactria played the first station in transporting elephants to Seleucid Syria, Ptolemaic imperial authorities assimilated this geographical imaginary by considering Nubia and Ethiopia as Ptolemaic upper satrapies, a dynamic that we can observe from the Adulis inscription.¹²⁷ Bactria also features in Semiramis' Indian campaign. Bactria is the place where the activity of building dummies takes place.¹²⁸ However, Antiochus III's Indian elephants did not help the Seleucid warfare with Rome. In the same vein, Semiramis fails in the Indian

¹²⁵ Dio. Sic. 2.16.9

¹²⁶ Ibid, 2.16.10

¹²⁷ In Ptolemy III's inscription on the Red Sea coast recounting his deeds of conquering Seleucid lands by using his elephants, the inscription highlights that the conquest extends to Bactria (OGIS 54). This inscription shows Ptolemaic spatial ideology considering eastern Africa as Ptolemaic "upper satrapies". The Ptolemies thus engaged with Seleucid spatial ideology in conceiving Ptolemaic southern expansion as an analogy to Seleucus I's earlier eastern anabasis, which Ptolemy I had sponsored. Cf. Kosmin (2018): 193.

¹²⁸ Diod. Sic. 2.16.6

campaign, even though she successfully makes dummies. Semiramis' son Ninyas soon forces her to give up her throne.

Bactria thus features heavily in Semiramis' career. Narratologically, Bactria constitutes a loop of Semiramis' unusual trajectory as a queen. This respect reveals Diodorus' understanding of the instrumental role of Bactria in the making of the Seleucid empire, including its mediating role in transporting elephants from India to Syria, by rewriting Rome's experience with Antiochus III's elephants at the battle of Magnesia.

Diodorus' account also indicates that a direct motive for writing on Semiramis' failure in dealing with India is Rome's subjugation of the Hellenistic Mediterranean:

τὸ παραπλήσιον δὲ πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν ὕστερον ἔπραξε Περσεὺς ὁ τῶν Μακεδόνων βασιλεὺς, ὅτε πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἔμελλε διακινδυνεύειν ἔχοντας ἐκ Λιβύης ἐλέφαντας. ἀλλ' οὐτ' ἐκείνῳ ῥοπὴν ἐνεγκεῖν εἰς τὸν πόλεμον συνέβη τὴν περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα σπουδὴν καὶ φιλοτεχνίαν οὔτε Σεμιράμιδι· περὶ ὧν ἀκριβέστερον ὁ προῖὼν λόγος δηλώσει.

A similar thing was also done many years later by Perseus, the king of the Macedonians, before his decisive conflict with the Romans who had elephants from Libya. But neither in his case did it turn out that the zeal and ingenuity displayed in such matters had any effect on the conflict, nor in that of Semiramis, as will be shown more precisely in our further account.¹²⁹

Although Semiramis' use of dummies is a myth, Diodorus reveals a historical incident involving dummies being used to counter elephants during the Third Macedonian War. Diodorus compares Perseus' use of dummies to Semiramis, suggesting that the story of Semiramis' dummies models the practice of Perseus.¹³⁰

In this context, Semiramis' defeat under Stabrobates can be interpreted as an allusion to Antiochus III's struggles against Roman imperialism in the eastern Mediterranean.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Dio. Sic. 2.17.3, trans. C.H. Oldfather

¹³⁰ Polyaeus, 4.20.

¹³¹ See Kosmin's discussion on the way Antiochus III is perceived as a new Xerxes I in Greek literary traditions, Kosmin (2020): 71-9.

Diodorus thus dismisses the strength of Seleucid elephants that intimidated the eastern Mediterranean world by rewriting Antiochus III's failed campaign in India. The emphasis on Semiramis' dummies being human-made allusions, rather than real elephants, reflects the understanding of the decorative purpose of Seleucid Indian elephants. This helps to explain why Rome did not continue the Hellenistic practice of using elephants for warfare but instead incorporated them into the Roman venation system of beasts hunting as entertainment.¹³² Megasthenes, a Seleucid writer, justifies Seleucids' failure in India,¹³³ and Diodorus engages with this ideology by implicitly building an analogy between Seleucids' loss in India and their defeat under Rome. Regarding Bactria, while Antiochus III's later campaign in Greece was the precondition for the Seleucids' encounter with Rome, Semiramis' conquest of Bactria exposed her to India. Diodorus thus discusses Bactria's operation under an imperial framework, viewing it through the lens of Indian elephants.

Bactria as an Empire: Imagining Bactria in the Principate

During Rome's Parthian warfare in the late republic, particularly after its loss in the Battle of Carrhae, Roman writers began to share more knowledge of Bactria in the Augustan period.¹³⁴ While Polybius and Diodorus described Bactria as a mirror of Greece by narrating the Siege of Bactra, Augustan poets viewed the Hellenistic experience in Bactria through the lens of Parthia, imagining it as part of an eastern empire. However, two Augustan authors from the

¹³² The Roman use of elephants was more part of Rome's conquest of North Africa. In particular, to commemorate Pompey's victory in Numidia in North Africa, he staged a triumph in the recently completed Roman theater in 55 BCE, where the fight of elephants constituted a major violent and visual spectacle for the audiences (Plut. Pomp., 52.4). Its impact can be gauged from Cicero's letter to his friend in which he mentioned that it was the first time he became acquainted with elephants (Cic. Fam. 7.1.3). cf. Wiedemann (1992): 60. For Roman beast hunting, see Epplert (2013): 504-19; Kyle (2020): 254-65.

¹³³ Kosmin (2014): 31-58. For a different interpretation, see Bosworth (1996): 113-27.

¹³⁴ No specific discussion of Bactria in Augustan poetry exists yet. The most approximate discussion is Parthia in Augustan poetry, Wissemann (1982); Parker (2011): 1-16; Nabel (2015): 304-25; Babnis (2017): 5-44. Nevertheless, Pierre Leriche collects sample sources of Bactria in Roman accounts, Leriche (2007): 121-55.

peripheries of the Roman empire, Pompeius Trogus and Strabo, presented Bactria as Rome's mirror based on Bactria's experience during the 2nd century BCE. As I argue, the changing depictions of Bactria, from being the mirror of Greece to the mirror of Rome, signify an use of Greek knowledge of Bactria to reinforce Roman Augustan ideology.

Given the frequent passing mentions of Bactria in Augustan poems, this chapter cannot provide a full survey of these references by situating them into their immediate literary complexity.¹³⁵ Instead, for the main agenda of this dissertation, I offer analyses of Propertius' Arethusa elegy and Virgil's account of the Aeneid Shield. The Arethusa elegy is a direct reception and rewriting of Antiochus III's siege of Bactra in conjunction with Rome's experience with Parthia:

*ne, precor, ascensis tanti sit gloria Bactris,
raptave odorato carbasa lina duci,
plumbea cum tortae sparguntur pondera fundae,
subdolos et versis increpat arcus equis!
sed (tua sic domitis Parthae telluris alumnis
pura triumphantis hasta sequatur equos)
incorrupta mei conserva foedera lecti!
hac ego te sola lege redisse velim:
armaque cum tulero portae votiva Capenae,
subscribam salvo grata puella viro.*

Let not the glory of scaling Bactra's walls, I pray, be worth too high a price, or the snatching of linen robes from some perfumed potentate, when leaden missiles are discharged from the whirling sling and the treacherous bow twangs from a horse that flees. Above all—so may the headless spear follow your triumphal chariot when the sons of Parthia have been vanquished—keep inviolate the pledge of my marriage-bed! Only on this condition should I desire you to return; and when I offer up your arms at the Capene Gate, I shall write below: from a grateful girl on her man's safe return.¹³⁶

In the form of a letter, the elegy depicts a Roman woman named Arethusa writing to her absent husband Lykotas, expressing her longing for him while he is on campaign. The mention of

¹³⁵ For a general study on ethnography in Augustan poetry, see Thomas (1982).

¹³⁶ Prop. 4.3.63-72, trans. C.P. Goold

Bactra, the capital of Bactria, in the quoted lines echoes the beginning of the elegy, where Arethusa says, “now you were seen by Bactra amid drawn bows” (*te modo viderunt intentos Bactra per actus*),¹³⁷ conveying a sense of remoteness that intensifies Arethusa’s longing for her husband.

In addition to presenting Bactria as a distant region, the account of climbing Bactra’s wall demonstrates Propertius’ knowledge of Bactrian military history, specifically Antiochus III’s Bactrian campaign in Polybius’ account which serves as the literary basis of the plotline of Semiramis’ story.¹³⁸ However, unlike Diodorus’ recognition of Bactria as a mirror of Greece, Propertius’ knowledge of Bactria is part of the poet’s concern about Parthia. The following lines not only vividly describe Parthian archery, which had intimidated Rome since the Battle of Carrhae, but also directly mention the name Parthia. Propertius thus revisits Rome’s Parthian campaigns,¹³⁹ using Bactria as a rhetorical strategy of *pars pro toto*.

Regarding the main agenda of the elegy, the couplet *ne, precor, ascensis tanti sit gloria Bactris/raptave odorato carbasa lina duci* draws a parallel between the conquest of Bactria and the acquisition of luxury, as represented by fine linen.¹⁴⁰ This parallel reveals how Roman conquest brings material wealth, a dynamic that Andrew Wallace-Hadrill characterizes as Rome’s cultural revolution.¹⁴¹ However, Arethusa mentions her labor of weaving clothes for the Roman army’s logistical needs twice in previous lines,¹⁴² highlighting the irony that female labor

¹³⁷ Prop. 4.3.7-8

¹³⁸ Alexander’s commanding of climbing Sogdian rocks can be another parallel to this part of legend but the sack of Bactra is more consistent with Antiochus III’s experience. In contrast, Alexander took Bactra smoothly.

¹³⁹ The most explicit reference to this battle among Augustan poets is Horace’s famous Regulus ode on the fate of Roman captives in Margiana by expressing the anxiety about the ethnic “purity” of the lost Roman soldiers (Hor. Od. 3.5.1-12; cf. Nisbet and Rudd (2004): 84-7).

¹⁴⁰ Janan (2000): 53-70.

¹⁴¹ Wallace-Hadrill (2008).

¹⁴² Prop. 4.3.18; as Emily Mackil suggests in commenting on this chapter, weaving is also the paradigmatic activity of chaste Roman wives, which portrays Arethusa as an ideal Roman matron.

provides subsistence for Roman soldiers and lay a material foundation for Roman conquest, while Roman conquest generates luxuries. Through the voice of Arethusa, Propertius explores the dialectic relationship of subsistence economy, conquest, and luxury economy in Augustan Rome.¹⁴³

Propertius' elegy also has a meta-poetic aspect regarding the interlocked process of military expansion and geographical knowledge accumulation. Propertius describes Arethusa's research on world geography to illustrate this aspect.¹⁴⁴ This meta-poetical device sets geographical evocations in his elegies as a "map". It also demonstrates that the mention of Bactria in Augustan poets is not a mere display of their knowledge of Alexander's campaigns but is related to republican Rome's dealing with Parthia when Parthia was occupied with its eastern border.¹⁴⁵ Propertius' elegy thus reveals a Roman perception of Bactria as an eastern region in conjunction with its dealings with Parthia in the Augustan age.

Whereas Propertius provides a snapshot into an official elite Roman author's concern with Bactria in conjunction with Rome's experience with Parthia in the guise of Hellenistic experience of the siege of Bactria,¹⁴⁶ Virgil directly relates Bactria to Rome's civil war between Octavius and Antony. Virgil's writing develops the dimension of viewing Bactria as part of imagined Cleopatra and Antony's empire. His ekphrastic depiction of Antony and Cleopatra on the shield of Aeneid, in which Bactria is involved, goes as follows:

Hinc ope barbarica variisque Antonius armis,

¹⁴³ Cf. Neil Coffee's cultural poetics-informed reading of money in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Coffee (2009).

¹⁴⁴ Prop. 4.3.37

¹⁴⁵ For Parthia's dealings with Central Asia, see the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ In the first elegy in book 3 where Propertius mentions: "many who sing that Bactria will be the imperial limit add your glories to the annuals." (*multi, Roma, tuas laudes annalibus addent/qui finem imperii Bactra futura canent*, Prop. 3.1.15-6.) At the end, the poet writes that he will be praised among later generations in Rome (*meque inter seros laudabit Roma nepotes*, Prop. 3.1.35). This elegy is a highly self-conscious meta-poetic piece in which Propertius lays out the interrelationship between Roman expansion and literary production.

*Victor ab Aurorae populis et litoro rubro
Aegyptum virisque Orientis et ultima secum
Bactra vehit, sequiturque (nefas) Aegyptia coniunx.*

On the other side comes Antony barbaric might and motley arms,
A victory from the nations of the East and the ruddy sea,
Bringing in his train Egypt and the strength of the East and the farthest
Bactra; and there follows him illegal Egyptian wife.¹⁴⁷

The episode of the shield of Aeneid is one of the most thoroughly studied topics in Virgilian studies. Nevertheless, based on my discussion, some new insights still can be obtained. In echoing Horace's Regulus Ode, which laments the fate of Roman soldiers in Margiana following the Battle of Carrhae, the depiction of "orientalized" Antony speaks to the anxiety of Romanness during a time of expansion.¹⁴⁸ The emphasis on the appearance of all eastern ethnic groups from Egypt to Bactria in Antony's army recalls Herodotus' description of the multi-ethnic component in Xerxes' army during the Greco-Persian war.¹⁴⁹ Through this implicit resemblance, Virgil understands the Battle of Actium from the perspective of the Persian War, as a battle in which the "West" defeats the "East."¹⁵⁰ In other words, Virgil perceives Rome's Civil War past through the lens of Rome's dealing with an imagined Hellenistic empire from Egypt to Bactria. Within this context, Bactria is viewed as the eastern limit of an "oriental" empire, similar to Propertius' Arethusa elegy.¹⁵¹

My analysis demonstrates that Augustan poets viewed Bactria as an inherent part of an eastern empire, which is different from Diodorus and Polybius. By engaging with Roman

¹⁴⁷ Verg. A. 8.685-88, trans. H.R. Fairclough and C.P. Goold

¹⁴⁸ For Romanness, see Dench (2005): 93-151; Ramgopal (2016): 30-102.

¹⁴⁹ Hdt, 9.31-2.

¹⁵⁰ See Michèle Lowrie and Barbara Vinken's recent critical discussion of this dynamic of inner orientalism by writing Roman civil war as the clash between the imagined "East" and "West," Lowrie and Vinken (2022): 34-7.

¹⁵¹ The allusion to Cleopatra in the poetry further develops the monstrous image of an eastern woman. While scholars' attention dwells upon Dido, which alludes to Cleopatra, in Virgil as a cipher for Rome's concern with eastern conquest (Benario (1970): 2-6; Xinyue (2018): 218-40). The image of Semiramis in Diodorus' writing is ignored.

imperial ideology, both Propertius and Virgil demonstrate the same anxiety about the potential “corrupting” effect of the conquest, as seen in the corruption of Roman soldiers in Bactria in Arethusa’s eyes and the imagined Antony’s return from Bactria. Unlike Diodorus’ understanding of Bactria as a region defying the Near Eastern empire from the Far East, however, Augustan poets considered Bactria as an integrated part of the eastern empire, ignoring its past during the 2nd century BCE.

In contrast, Strabo and Pompeius Trogus, two authors from two “peripheral” regions in the Roman empire, Gaul and Pontus, who write in two different languages, engage with the discourse of Roman conquests differently by writing on the Hellenistic past of Bactria, which took place in the 2nd century BCE. Whereas Antiochus III’s Bactrian campaign shaped subsequent Greco-Roman understanding of Bactria, Strabo and Trogus pay keen attention to Bactria during the 2nd century BCE, which cannot be found in other existing writings. In contrast to Augustan poets, who are more concerned about Bactria as a conquered region, the image of Bactria in Trogus and Strabo is a conquering regime. Both authors use Bactria as Rome’s mirror in doing so. Their interest in the previous eastern “periphery” of the Hellenistic world provides a snapshot of how Hellenistic Central Asia mattered to intellectuals from the periphery regions in the Roman world in the Augustan age.¹⁵²

While Antiochus III’s Bactrian campaign set the parameter for Greco-Roman ethnographic knowledge of Bactria as represented by Polybius, Diodorus, and Propertius, Strabo and Trogus accessed updated knowledge of Bactria concerning its conquest of India during the 2nd century BCE. This new knowledge is thanks to the work of *Parthica* by Apollodorus of

¹⁵² For Trogus’ identity as a Roman Gaul, see Johnston (2017): 137-9; 185-8; for Strabo’s identity from the Roman periphery, see Dandrow (2017): 113-24.

Artemita, a Greek author under Parthian rule around the turn of the 1st century BCE.¹⁵³

Apollodorus probably shared a similar agenda with Polybius: to explain the reason of Parthia's rise while reflecting on the deficiency of a Hellenistic regime such as the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. In particular, while Polybius experienced the arrival of Roman imperialism to the Greek world, Apollodorus witnessed the early expansion of Parthia toward both Bactria and Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Trogus incorporates Apollodorus' materials into his Latin historical writing to demonstrate his understanding of Bactria in the context of Roman imperialism. Although Trogus recognizes Parthia as Rome's equal power, his report on early Parthian history shows that Parthia faced various challenges in achieving domination in the East during the late 2nd century BCE.¹⁵⁵ Trogus compares Parthia and Bactria, indicating his understanding of Bactria as another power in the East in the earlier time.¹⁵⁶ When Parthia posed a major challenge to Rome, Bactria's previous defeat under Parthia could have potentially provided a lesson for Rome, demonstrating how a mighty power may decline in the course of dealing with Parthia. In other words, echoing Trogus' previous direct comparison between Romulus and Arsaces as founders of Rome and Parthia, respectively,¹⁵⁷ his emphasis on Mithridates I and Eucratides as two great men alludes to the contemporary dealing between Augustus and Phraates IV circa 30 BCE, which Trogus also recounts.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Gardiner-Garden (1987); Nikonorov (1998): 107-22; Chaumont (2011); Nawotka (2017): 47-58; Wolski (2003): 373-80.

¹⁵⁴ For the Greeks under the Parthian rule, see Olbrycht (2017): 3-29.

¹⁵⁵ For a recent effort to dig out early Parthian history during the 3rd century BCE by combining archaeological sources and literary sources including Justin's epitome of Trogus' work, see Olbrycht (2021).

¹⁵⁶ Trogus emphasizes Bactria's exemplary role of leading other eastern regimes including Parthia to defect from the Seleucids and Parthia's earlier fear of Bactrian power (Just. Epit. 41.4).

¹⁵⁷ Just. Epit. 41.5

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 42.5. For discussions, Nabel (2017): 85-6; Clark (2020): 68-9.

In Trogus' presentation, Rome is occupied with warfare around the Mediterranean, Gauls in the north, Carthaginians in the south, the Hellenistic world (Macedonians, Achaeans, and the Seleucids) in the east, and eventually Iberia in the southwest during the time of his writing.¹⁵⁹ In this light, Trogus' report on Bactria's wars during the time of Eucratides in the 140s BCE, in addition to providing potential empirical value for Bactria's outside dominations,¹⁶⁰ vividly portrays Bactria's exhaustion from various wars against its neighbors----Sogdiana, Arachosia, Drangiana, Ariana, and India---reminiscent of Rome's expansions in all directions resulting in a Mediterranean empire. In particular, as will be demonstrated, as Strabo explicitly puts Bactria at the center of the "civilized" world while Sogdiana and Scythia are on the periphery,¹⁶¹ Trogus' list of these regions implicitly suggests Bactria's central role when Bactria once managed to establish an empire.¹⁶²

While the civil war is an important theme among Augustan poets,¹⁶³ Trogus recounts a Greek civil war in the Far East: between Eucratides from Bactria and Demetrius from India; after Eucratides' victory, the king's son commits royal patricide.¹⁶⁴ I contend that the stress on a battle between two Greek kings in the Far East alludes to Rome's civil war past: between Caesar

¹⁵⁹ Just. Epit. 31.2; 33.1-2; 34.2-4; 42.5; 43.5.

¹⁶⁰ *Bactriani autem per varia bella iactati non regnum tantum, verum etiam libertatem amiserunt, siquidem Sogdianorum [et Arachotorum] et Drangarum et Ariarum Indorumque bellis fatigati ad postremum ab invalidioribus Parthis velut exsanguis oppressi sunt.* Just. Epit. 41.6; Omar Coloru makes attempt to discuss Bactria's expansion in this regard, Coloru (2009): 223-230.

¹⁶¹ Strab. 11.11.2

¹⁶² Moreover, from an empirical perspective, Polybius' passing report on Antiochus III's march after the Bactrian campaign from Arachosia to Drangiana via Carmania may also reflect Bactria's domination over these regions then.

¹⁶³ Lowrie (1997): 138-86; Oliensis (1998): 64-101; Lowrie and Vincken (2022).

¹⁶⁴ *Multa tamen Eucratides bella magna virtute gessit, quibus adtritum cum obsidionem Demetrii regis Indorum pateretur, cum CCC militibus LX milia hostium adsiduis eruptionibus vicit. Quinto itaque mense libertatus Indiam in potestatem redegit. Unde cum se reciperet, a filio, quem socium regni fecerat, in itinere interficitur: qui non dissimulato parricidio, velut hostem, non patrem interfecisset, et per sanguinem eius currum egit et corpus abici insepultum iussit.* Just. 41.6.5-6. For the survey of Eucratides's rule, see Coloru (2009): 209-212; Widemann (2009): 167-201. The most important research on Indo-Bactrian communication during the time of Eucratides is still Rapin (1996). The story about Eucratides' death has enjoyed an afterlife in medieval European fairytales in Chaucer, see Bivar (1950): 7-13.

and Pompey and between Octavius and Antony. Whereas Augustan poets tend to externalize the civil war past by blaming Rome's internal discordant elements as the "orient," a dynamic that we discussed, Trogus uses the Hellenistic past of Bactria to reflect on Rome's experience: Augustus' desire for India may potentially bring about another civil war.¹⁶⁵ In other words, Augustan poets defamiliarize Rome's civil war past by highlighting the conflict between Augustus and Antony as the struggle between the "West" and the "East," which is evident in Virgil's portrait of the shield of Aeneas, but Trogus makes readers familiar with the East by recounting its Hellenistic past.

While sharing Trogus' interest in Hellenistic Bactria during the 2nd century BCE, Strabo demonstrates a much more optimistic view of Roman expansion. Among the former Hellenistic kingdoms, Strabo pays particular attention to the Greco-Bactrian kingdom by emphasizing its Hellenicity as follows:

Ἕλληνας αὐτὴν διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς χώρας ὥστε τῆς τε Ἀριανῆς ἐπεκράτουν καὶ τῶν Ἰνδῶν, ὡς φησὶν Ἀπολλόδωρος ὁ Ἀρταμιτηνός, καὶ πλείω ἔθνη κατεστρέψαντο ἢ Ἀλέξανδρος, καὶ μάλιστα Μένανδρος (εἶ γε καὶ τὸν Ὑπανὶν διέβη πρὸς ἔω καὶ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰμάου προῆλθε) τὰ μὲν αὐτὸς τὰ δὲ Δημήτριος ὁ Εὐθυδήμου υἱὸς τοῦ Βακτρίων βασιλέως: οὐ μόνον δὲ τὴν Παταληνὴν κατέσχον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἄλλης παραλίας τὴν τε Σαραόστου καλουμένην καὶ τὴν Σιγέρδιδος βασιλείαν. καθ' ὅλου δὲ φησὶν ἐκεῖνος τῆς συμπάσης Ἀριανῆς πρόσχημα εἶναι τὴν Βακτριανήν: καὶ δὴ καὶ μέχρι Σηρῶν καὶ Φρυγῶν ἐξέτεινον τὴν ἀρχήν.

Benefiting from the advantage of this land, the Greeks became strong to such an extent that they prevailed over Ariana and some of the Indians, as Apollodorus of Artemita said. They subdued more ethnic groups than Alexander, especially Menander (if he indeed crossed Hypanis and went to Imaus). He had accomplished some, and Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus who was the king of the Bactrians, had conquered the others. He (Menander) not only occupied Patalin but also the one called Sarastos and the Sigerdis kingdom of the other coast. Altogether, he (Apollodorus of Artemita) said that Bactria is the ornament of Ariana. Furthermore, it stretched the rule to the Seres and Phrynes.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Augustus' ideological interest in India manifests in *Res Gestae: ad me ex India regum legationes saepe missae sunt non visae ante id tempus apud quemquam Romanorum ducem*, Aug. Anc. 31. Nicholas of Damascus recounts Augustus' hearing of Indian embassy in Antioch around the 20s BCE, FGrHist 674 F100=Strab. 15.1.73.

¹⁶⁶ Strab. 11.11.2

Strabo exhibits a perceptive understanding of the economic foundation of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, in contrast to Sima Qian's focus on the military morale of the Yuezhi prince in Bactria, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Strabo recognizes Bactria's fertility as the basis for the growth of Greek power in Central Asia, as demonstrated by the phrase διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς χώρας. This phrase also reveals the Hellenistic colonization of the Bactrian landscape during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE.¹⁶⁷ Strabo emphasizes that the exploitation provides an opportunity for the Greeks to dominate Central Asia and northwestern India, using the result clause particle ὥστε.¹⁶⁸ He also glorifies Bactria's conquest of India by recounting the earlier campaigns during the time of Demetrius I and Menander.¹⁶⁹ While inheriting the *imitatio Alexandri* ideology from Indo-Greek kings,¹⁷⁰ Strabo actively engages with the Augustan ideology of conquering India by setting Bactria as Rome's precursor.¹⁷¹ In contrast with Trogus' emphasis on the consequences of Bactria's over-expansion, Strabo finds no problem with it.

¹⁶⁷ As the Achaemenids' manipulation of the landscape of Bactria is trivial, this contrast will not be fundamentally altered even though there are more Achaemenid sites discovered in these two decades. In conjunction with the appearance of new Hellenistic sites, population growth can be construed. Only for eastern Bactria between the Oxus and Kokcha rivers (the hinterland of Ai Khanoum), there are 30 spots identified as Hellenistic foundations, which is a sign that Bactria was densely populated. Without the irrigation system, it is hard to imagine the existence of those Hellenistic residential clusters. Lyonnet (1994): 541-4; Mairs (2014): 34-39. For economic exploitation, see Gardin (1979): 1-29.

¹⁶⁸ For Strabo's interest in the economy, see García Morcillo (2017): 137-49.

¹⁶⁹ The elephant calp on Demetrius' coins points to his Indian campaign (For Demetrius I's coins, see Joseph (2016)). The Kuliab inscription that defines Demetrius as *kallinikos* may also speak to Demetrius' Indian campaign (IGIAC, 151). Nevertheless, Greco-Bactrianists have usually assumed that this campaign only began after Antiochus III had departed from Bactria. In contrast, I propose that this campaign may have started before Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign. In this light, what Antiochus III's renewal of friendship with Sophasagenus suggests is that Sophasagenus had a conflict with Bactria before Antiochus III's arrival. This understanding will also explain Euthydemus I's ownership of elephants which are military exploits. My understanding of this episode is slightly different from Kosmin's, Kosmin (2014): 135-6.

¹⁷⁰ Agathocles and Pantaleon's commemorative coins provide evidence for historical consciousness among Greeks in Central Asia: Diodotids had a due place in this memory, Alexander, Diodotus I and II, Antiochus Nikator, Euthydemus I, Demetrius I, and Pantaleon are the seven kings represented in the commemorative series. Holt (1984): 69-91; Bopearachchi (1991): 177-79.

¹⁷¹ Strabo's account reads similar to Horace's assertion about the conquest of the Seres and India (Hor. Od. 1.12), especially the account *sive subiectos Orientis orae Seras et Indos, te minor laetum reget aequus orbem*.

We can gain a better understanding of Strabo's mention of Bactria's expansion into Seres and Phrynes in the context of his engagement with the Augustan ideology concerning the edge of the earth. While we are relatively uncertain about Phrynes,¹⁷² Seres refers to Rome's vague understanding of China through the consumption of Chinese silk products.¹⁷³ Starting from Virgil's *Georgics*, all major Augustan poets show some knowledge of Seres or Serica.¹⁷⁴ While Strabo's mention of Hellenistic Bactria's expansion into Seres is not empirical evidence of actual Sino-Bactrian connection,¹⁷⁵ it aligns with Strabo's engagement with Augustan ideology concerning the edge of the earth: before Rome noticed Seres, Bactria had already actively expanded into it. The account of Bactria's expansion into Seres is a putative conquest that plays with Roman imperial elites' desire for expansion.¹⁷⁶ Like Trogus, Strabo sets Bactria as the mirror of Rome, but in a positive light.

Strabo's interest in the Hellenistic past of Bactria is consistent with Diodorus' use of Bactria as a mirror for Greece. As discussed earlier, Diodorus pays close attention to Bactria's uneasy relationship with a Near Eastern empire, from Bactria's defiance against Ninus' campaign to the Greeks' revolt against the Macedonian Diadochi after Alexander's death. Strabo further develops this dimension. Although scholars have questioned the traditional narrative about Bactria's independence from the Seleucids during the mid-3rd century BCE, this narrative is rooted in Augustan historiography.

Strabo's summary of this aspect in the chapter on India is particularly revealing:

¹⁷² Christopoulos (2012).

¹⁷³ Silk products constitute a significant type of burial goods in the Palmyrene tombs from the late 1st century BCE onward, Schmidt-Colinet and al-Ad'ad (2000): 61-93; Von Falkenhausen (2000): 58-81. For archaeology in Palmyra, see Henning (2013); De Jong (2017). For historical account, see Smith II (2013).

¹⁷⁴ *Velleraque ut foliis depectant tenuia Seres*, Verg. *Geo.*, 2.121. For commentary, see Thomas (1988): 175-8.

¹⁷⁵ Nickel (2009): 43-49; Christopoulos (2012): 12.

¹⁷⁶ In an ode by Horace, Bactria and Seres are mentioned together by considering them as Persian (or Parthian) territories: *quid Seres et regnata Cyro/Bactra parent Tanaisque discors*, Hor. *Od.* 3.29.27-8. For commentary, Niesbet and Rudd (2004): 354-5.

Ἀπολλόδωρος γοῦν ὁ τὰ Παρθικὰ ποιήσας, μεμνημένος καὶ τῶν τὴν Βακτριανὴν ἀποστησάντων Ἑλλήνων παρὰ τῶν Συριακῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ Σελεύκου τοῦ Νικάτορος, φησὶ μὲν αὐτοὺς ἀξιεθέντας ἐπιθέσθαι καὶ τῇ Ἰνδικῇ· οὐδὲν δὲ προσανακαλύπτει τῶν πρότερον ἐγνωσμένων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐναντιολογεῖ, πλείω τῆς Ἰνδικῆς ἐκείνους ἢ Μακεδόνας καταστρέψασθαι λέγων. Εὐκρατίδαν γοῦν πόλεις χιλίας ὑφ' ἑαυτῷ ἔχειν

Apollodorus who wrote *Parthica* recounted the Greeks' revolt in Bactria from the Syrian kings beginning from Seleucus Nicator. He said that these Greeks invaded India after the growth of power. However, he discloses nothing more than what is already known but he contradicts existing knowledge by saying that they conquered more parts of India than the Macedonians. He also said that Eucratides has one thousand cities under governance.¹⁷⁷

This passage is a summary of the chapter on Bactria in Strabo's work. However, there are several aspects that require attention. First, Strabo acknowledges the value of Artemidorus' *Parthica* for Mediterranean readers. He explains that although the history of Indo-Greek kingdoms was already known, Apollodorus' account adds value with his unique perspective that the Greeks in Bactria achieved more than Alexander. Strabo's summary of Demetrius' and Menander's Indian campaigns in the Bactrian chapter supports this view. This indicates how a text by a Parthian Greek author was weaved into ethnographic knowledge in Augustan Rome.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, Strabo makes a clear distinction between the Seleucids and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, referring to the former as Syrian and the latter as Greek. By calling the Seleucids Syrians, Strabo aligns with Diodorus' view of considering them as successors of Semiramis' Near Eastern empire. This view is exemplified in Cicero's accusation of Gabinius as Semiramis and Diodorus' detailed account of Semiramis.¹⁷⁹ However, Strabo emphasizes the

¹⁷⁷ Strab. 15.1.3=Artemita F7b, trans. Duane Roller

¹⁷⁸ For Strabo and Roman indebtedness to Hellenistic knowledge, see Clarke (2002). For Strabo and Apollodorus, see J. Engels (2017): 29-46. For Strabo's attitude toward Rome, see Purcell (2017): 22-35.

¹⁷⁹ For Semiramis in Augustan poetry, in the *Babylonica* episode (Pyramus and Thisbe) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when Dionysus comes to Thebes, Minya's daughters decide to tell stories while weaving. The first narrator deliberates between the Semiramis story and the mulberry story. Given that the mulberry story is less well-known, she chooses to narrate it (*quoniam vulgaris fabula non est/talibus orsa modis lana sua fila sequente*, Ov. Met. 4.53-4). This deliberation indicates certain popularity of the Semiramis story among Roman audiences in the time of Augustus. In particular, the mulberry story is an aetiology of red mulberry producing Chinese silk in a Babylonian

Greekness of the Hellenistic regime in Bactria by referring to its residents as Greeks, in contrast to Augustan poets' understanding of Bactria. Trogus' report on the death of Eucratides from a Parthian perspective underscores Apollodorus' reflection on the decline of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, in contrast with the rise of Parthia, as a Parthian Greek author. This view echoes Polybius' agenda of explaining why Rome dominates Greece. While highlighting the Greekness in Bactria, we can further detect a Parthian Greek author's exploration of Greek identity in Parthia.¹⁸⁰ As a Greek author writing in the Augustan period who actively uses his work to engage with contemporary official Roman ideology, Strabo incorporates with Apollodorus' emphasis on the Greekness in Hellenistic Bactria into Greek ethnography in Augustan Rome.

When reading Strabo's account of Bactria, it is important to consider Diodorus' relevant reports. While Diodorus recounts Bactria's inability to escape from an empire from Semiramis to Alexander, Strabo's presentation of Hellenistic Bactria is a success story of the Greeks' defection from an "oriental" empire.¹⁸¹ By defining the Seleucids as Syrians and the Greco-Bactrian kings as Greeks, Strabo implies that these diasporic Greeks not only manage to escape from an "oriental" empire but also establish an empire by conquering more Indian lands than Macedonians/Alexander.

In Diodorus' account of the Greek revolt after Alexander's death, which was discussed previously, the report on the collective deliberation during the Greeks' revolt in the Diadochi Wars echoes Xenophon's *Anabasis*: how Greeks in the East try to survive in a foreign

context (cf. Holzberg (1988): 265-77). This story should derive from Near Eastern folklore like Semiramis'. For an attempt to argue that Ovid's representation of women telling stories reflects real female story-telling practice, see Heath (2011): 69-104.

¹⁸⁰ The most revealing evidence for this aspect is the Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax, another Greek author from Parthian Mesopotamia. This text constantly identifies Greek cities in Parthia, i.e. Kandahar as Alexandria, FGrHist 781 F2, 19; cf. Olbrycht (2021): 215.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Under the rubric of late Hellenistic Greek literature, the dialogue between Diodorus and Strabo is most notable for their shared universal horizons, König (2022): 119-48; Gray (2022): 149-77. The "escaping from an empire" metaphor is from Sheidel (2019).

land by reproducing Greek political institutions.¹⁸² Strabo's version of Greeks in Bactria displays an outcome of this diasporic experience: a Greek empire that none of the other Greek people manage to build since Alexander's conquest. Strabo, as a Black Sea Greek, effectively shows that his fellow diasporic Greeks already conquered these lands more than one century earlier. In contrast, the contemporary Augustan poets only display an imperial desire for India and Seres by engaging with imperial ideology.

Conclusion

Imperial Greco-Roman knowledge of Bactria continued to develop from the 1st century CE onward. An important new knowledge is the emergence of the Kushan empire, documented in the first-century text *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, which simply calls them “Bactrians” but recognizes them as especially bellicose:

Ἐπίκειται δὲ κατὰ <νώ>του τῆς Βαρυγάζης μεσογείας πλείονα ἔθνη, τό τε τῶν Ἀρατρίων καὶ <Ἀ>ραχουσ<ί>ων καὶ Γανδαραίων καὶ τῆς Προκλ<α>ΐδος, ἐν οἷς ἡ Βουκέφαλος Ἀλεξάνδρεια. Καὶ τούτων ἐπάνω μαχιμώτατον ἔθνος Βακτριανῶν, ὑπὸ βασιλέα ὄντων ἰδιόν [τοπον]. Καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος ὀρμηθεὶς ἀπὸ τῶν μερῶν τούτων ἄχρι τοῦ Γάγγουσι διήλθε, καταλιπὼν τὴν τε Λιμυρικὴν καὶ τὰ νότια τῆς Ἰνδικῆς, ἀφ' οὗ μέχρι νῦν ἐν Βαρυγάζοις παλαιαὶ προχωροῦσι δραχμαὶ, γράμμασιν Ἑλληνικοῖς ἐγκεχαραγμένα ἐπίσημα τῶν μετ' Ἀλέξανδρον βεβασιλευκότων Ἀπολλοδότου καὶ Μενάνδρου

Inland behind Barygaza there are numerous peoples: the Aratrioi, Arachousioi, Gandharioi, and the people of Proklais, in whose area Boukephalos Alexandreia is located. And beyond these is a very war-like people, the Bactrians, under a king....Alexander, setting out from these parts, penetrated as far as the Ganges but did not get to Limyrike and the south of India. Because of this, there are to be found on the market in Barygaza even today old drachms engraved with the inscriptions, in Greek letters, of Apollodotus and Menander, rulers who came after Alexander.¹⁸³

Compared to the literary texts written by elite authors discussed in this chapter, the value of the *Periplus* lies in the fact that it provides a more bottom-up perspective on how Roman merchants

¹⁸² Cf. John Lee's logistic research based on Xenophon, Lee (2008).

¹⁸³ PME 47, trans. Lionel Casson

engaged in long-distance trade via the Indian Ocean and perceived the eastern regions based on their need for overseas commerce.¹⁸⁴ This passage encapsulates several major aspects discussed in this chapter.

First, this passage provides hints about how knowledge about the Hellenistic past of Bactria circulated via the trans-Indian Ocean trade, in which Rome actively engaged. In relation to our concern here, the “warlike Bactrians” in this passage were the nomadic rulers in Bactria, also known as the Kushans, who were actively conquering India in the first century CE when the *Periplus* was written.¹⁸⁵ However, this text immediately turns to the Hellenistic past by mentioning the prominent kings who conquered India. This passage also endows us with a unique perspective on how the northern Indians perceived the conquest they were experiencing. In other words, the northern Indians situated the contemporary events into their broader experience of previous conquests with Greek rulers, both the Macedonians and the Greco-Bactrians. As the text indicates, the Indo-Greek coins bearing the image of Greek letters and kings’ images were an important medium bearing such memory.¹⁸⁶

In this regard, while Strabo’s and Trogus’ accounts of Indo-Greek kingdoms represent literary interest shaped by Greek texts from Parthia, this passage shows that the knowledge went beyond antiquarian interest. The awareness of the Hellenistic past in Bactria and India was circulated among Roman merchants engaged in long-distance trade. When the Indian Ocean journey represented a collapse of time and space benefitting from human mastery of the monsoon winds, representations of the Hellenistic past in the Far East indicate the process through which Roman merchants made sense of the Indian Ocean world with which they were

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 4.

¹⁸⁵ *Hou Hanshu*, Volume 88, 2921, for relevant discussion, see Yu (2015): 47-53.

¹⁸⁶ This issue could be further illustrated by the cultural memory theory, see Assmann (2011).

engaged.¹⁸⁷ To return to the point of Trogus' and Strabo's perception of Hellenistic Bactria as a self-image of Rome, the passage in the *Periplus* provides a bottom-up perspective on the function of this dynamic. The Hellenistic past in Bactria and India mattered to some people in the Roman Mediterranean

However, Strabo and Trogus were not the first Greco-Roman authors to use the Hellenistic past in Bactria to address contemporary Roman problems. Polybius and Diodorus did that before them. In the moment of Rome's conquest of Greece, Polybius' account of Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign served as a lens to reflect on Greece's inability to counter Roman eastern expansion when the Social War was taking place. In turn, Diodorus' reports on Bactria's defiance against imperial rule took place at a time when Rome had conquered Syria and inherited the former Seleucid imperial heartland. Bactria became a means for Diodorus to disclose the essence of Hellenistic imperialism with which Rome engaged. In Diodorus' report, Bactria is a region attempting to escape from an empire, whether in Semiramis or Alexander's time. Concerning the Augustan age, Bactria became a cipher of Augustan authors' concerns about further Roman expansion. The major difference, however, is that Augustan poets tend to perceive Bactria through the lens of Parthia, but Strabo's and Trogus' knowledge comes through Bactria's Hellenistic past. Nevertheless, all authors use Bactria to reflect on the issue of Roman expansion during the late republic and Augustus' desire for the Far East.

¹⁸⁷ For monsson, see Hatcher (2013): 19-29.

Chapter 2 Nomadic Political Economy and Sima Qian's Knowledge of Late/Post-Hellenistic Asia

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how Greco-Roman knowledge of Bactria arose from Hellenistic imperialism in Bactria. As demonstrated, Bactria's active defense against the nomadic world was a major factor for Polybius to consider Bactria as a mirror for Greece. This chapter examines Chinese knowledge of Bactria and the regions further west. Echoing Greco-Roman knowledge of Bactria during the 2nd century BCE, China similarly demonstrated awareness of Bactria during the same period. While Greco-Roman knowledge of Bactria was shaped by Hellenistic imperialism, a different dynamic underpins the Chinese ethnography of Bactria.

As I will show, Chinese knowledge of Bactria is embedded within China's dealings with Central Eurasian nomads from the 2nd century BCE onward. This chapter discusses the way the nomadic political economy in the eastern steppe world enlightens the Chinese historian Sima Qian's global horizon when he employs knowledge of late Hellenistic Asia to engage with contemporary political economic debates in the Chinese court. Sima Qian is considered the "father" of Chinese historiography, and like Herodotus, he actively used foreign regions to engage in intellectual debates in the Chinese context. For Sima Qian, as I will demonstrate, he develops a unique Chinese understanding of late Hellenistic Asia, especially Bactria, within the context of Chinese political culture. In turn, the nomadic political economy was the driving force of this horizontal expansion of Chinese elites.

Given that major pre-modern and early modern nomadic empires from the Xiongnu to the Zunghars were based in the eastern steppe in today's Mongolia, Inner Mongolia (in PRC), and southern Siberia (in Russia), the most important research on nomadic political economy focuses on these regimes. Traditionally, modern researchers have inherited a bias in textual sources about these empires written in Chinese, by considering these nomadic empires as China's northern "frontier" regimes.¹⁸⁸ As a consequence, traditional anthropological research on nomadic empires regards them as economically dependent upon Chinese empires.¹⁸⁹

However, benefiting from archaeologists' rethinking of the independence of material culture from texts, contemporary anthropology-driven nomadic archaeology, especially concerning the Xiongnu, has provided abundant insights into rethinking nomadic political economy: 1.) in contrast with traditional views that nomadic empires were economically dependent on sedentary states, nomadic archaeology emphasizes the agency of nomadic states in sustaining their existences and operations; 2.) in contrast with traditional views that the agency of trans-Eurasian imperial interactions arose from sedentary regimes, nomadic archaeology fleshes out the role of nomadic empires in facilitating trans-regional communications; 3.) in contrast with traditional equation between nomadic political economy and pastoral economy, nomadic archaeology emphasizes the complexity of nomadic economic practice integrating pastoral, agricultural, and commercial strategies.¹⁹⁰ In particular, for the third aspect, while recognizing nomadic regimes' needs for products from sedentary neighbors, nomadic

¹⁸⁸ This is more the case for the Xiongnu and the Turks than for later empires. Jonathan Skaff coins the term "frog in the well syndrome" based on the research on the Turks to address this phenomenon, Skaff (2012): 4-5.

¹⁸⁹ Owen Lattimore's phrase "Chinese Inner Asian frontier" is an early manifestation of this view, Lattimore (1988/1940); Thomas Barfield's book is exemplary of this view, Barfield (1989).

¹⁹⁰ For nomadic regimes with their own social and political complexities, see Honeychurch (2013): 283-321; (2014): 277-326; (2017): 513-32; for the nomadic agency in trans-regional exchange, see Honeychurch (2015): 50-88; Brosseder (2015): 199-332; Brosseder and Millar (2018): 162-83; for different strategies in nomadic political economy, see Krادين (2021): 77-96; Makarewicz (2021): 181-192.

archaeology considers this need as a dynamic nomadic political economic capacity to assemble diverse economic practices instead of their dependence on sedentary regimes.

Anthropological archaeologists are not alone in recognizing the autonomy of nomadic regimes. Historians have also contributed new insights to the study of nomadic Central Eurasian/Inner Asian history.¹⁹¹ Applying these insights, in conjunction with the agenda in this dissertation, this chapter emphasizes how nomadic political economy not only enlightens a Chinese intellectual such as Sima Qian about the outside world but provides him with a comparative/global dimension to reflect on different types of political regimes based on the knowledge of the late Hellenistic world. Meanwhile, scholars who work on post-Hellenistic Central Asia have also actively highlighted nomads as a major factor in post-Hellenistic Central Asian political and economic developments.¹⁹²

In particular, it is known that Chinese engagement with the Xiongnu led China to discover the world from Syria to India. Yet, instead of considering this knowledge formation to be simply a byproduct, I demonstrate that this knowledge formation is entwined with the nomadic political economy. In doing so, I stress on nomadic imprint on Chinese knowledge of late Hellenistic Asia.

While the nomadic political economy is the overarching historical framework in this chapter, emphasizing Sima Qian's intellectual engagements with political debates during his time through recourse to nomadic developments inevitably engages with research on Sima Qian. Unlike the Classics counterpart, where historians and literary scholars are free to approach

¹⁹¹ Nomadic empire as a barometer of Eurasian regimes, Beckwith (1993): 173-82; nomadic empires as synonyms of the silk road economy, Beckwith (2009): 26-8; Inner Asia-derived nomadic political culture *vis-à-vis* the Near East and the Mediterranean, Kim (2013); De la Vaissière (2014): 175-92; Payne (2014): 282-300; Payne (2016): 4-41; periodization in Inner Asian history, Di Cosmo (1999) and (2018): 35-53; Inner Asiannes in Chinese history, Luo (2022).

¹⁹² Senior (2001); Abdulaev (2007): 73-98; Rapin (2007); 29-72; Mairs (2014): 146-76; Bernard (2017): 101-21; Bopearachchi (2017): 251-74; Stark (2020): 78-105.

ancient historical texts like Herodotus and Thucydides based on different methodologies, the underdevelopment of early Chinese history in western academia these years discourages a historical approach to a text such as *Shiji*, owing to the preponderance of philological approaches informed by post-modern literary theories, especially that of authorship, in Western Sinology.¹⁹³ Although this kind of scholarship helps unpack nuances in our current literary sources and their complicated afterlives, the inherent suspicion of relating these sources to broader historical context that rises from considering this practice simply to be “Chinese nationalism” essentially dismisses the *raison d’être* of the entire discipline of history.¹⁹⁴

By sharing philologists’ reminders of the literary complexity of these sources, this chapter reads *Dayuan liezhuan* (Parallel Accounts of Great Yuan) as Sima Qian’s intellectual comments on political and economic debates during his time when China actively engaged with nomadic political economy, as a compromise between traditional empirical historical and overt post-modern literary approaches to Sima Qian. While intellectual historians and literary scholars have appreciated Sima Qian’s knowledge of economics as evidenced in *Huozhi liezhuan* (Parallel Accounts of Merchants ([lit. Parallel Accounts of the Accumulation of Goods]),¹⁹⁵ his political philosophy is still being evaluated. Although scholars of political thought and

¹⁹³ For some recent authorship-informed research on *Shiji*, see Zhang (2018); Klein (2018); Y. Chen (2020).

¹⁹⁴ While the established practice in Chinese academia of relating early Chinese texts to archaeology can be criticized as Chinese nativism (cf. Kern (2020): 83-98), western classicists (historians, art historians, and literary scholars) have developed much more nuanced understanding of the relationship between texts and material culture (Squire (2009); Hall (2014a); Neer and Kurke (2021)). As shown, interpreting texts against material culture is encouraged, though not done in a traditionally mechanical way. Also see Jonathan Hall’s vivid illustration of the evidence rule for historical research: the difference between playing piano creatively (historical research assimilating insights from post-modern theories) and using a chainsaw to play piano (mechanically applying post-modern literary theories upon texts by dismissing everything as imagination and memory), Hall (2014b): 13. However, from an anthropological archaeological perspective, Min Li develops a unique perspective of revisiting texts based on archaeology, Li (2018).

¹⁹⁵ i.e. Chin (2014): 144-6; Zhang (2015): 39-95; Nylan (2015): 131-68; L’Hardion (2015): 171-92.

philosophy in China have increasingly considered Sima Qian as a political philosopher,¹⁹⁶ a more intellectual-historical approach to Sima Qian's work is justified.

Regarding *Dayuan liezhuan*, based on the existing historical discussion of this text as Sima Qian's comparison between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles,¹⁹⁷ I contend that Sima Qian's representation of the outside world based on Zhang Qian's ethnographic report is part of Sima Qian's political thought. Concerning five major sedentary regimes (Bactria, India, Parthia, Syria, and Dayuan), as I will show, Sima Qian considers Bactria (economically linked to India) and Parthia (exerting political subjugation of Syria) as two mirrors for China---a weak state and a strong state---when China was experiencing a critical transformation during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han. To return to the main theme of nomadic political economy and Sima Qian's ethnographic knowledge in this chapter, when late imperial Chinese historians demonstrated the possibility of analyzing the Qing dynasty's knowledge of the outside world in relation to the Eurasian information system,¹⁹⁸ there is no reason to argue that Sima Qian's accounts inherently escape the category of historical discussion, even supposing Sima Qian to be not an author but an invented authorial persona.

Nomadic Political Economy and Chinese Ethnography of Bactria

¹⁹⁶ W. Chen (2015); Dong (2019). In particular, the political philosopher Liu Xiaofeng's essay "What Is the Chinese Moment in World History?" provides a new reading of *Dayuan liezhuan* from a Hellenistic perspective by portraying Emperor Wu as a hero who "carved out a space for the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*)" (Liu (2019): 1-44). In Liu's writings as a whole, Emperor Wu's fighting against the Xiongnu in this essay is presented as analogous to Nietzsche's effort to challenge European modernity, Antigone's defiance against Athenian burial customs, and Mao Zedong's challenge to the emerging *Pax Americana* by helping North Korea in the Korean War, all of which Liu had previously written about. On Liu Xiaofeng as a Chinese cultural celebrity and public intellectual since the 1980s, especially concerning his promotion of western classics in China and his self-identified intellectual lineage with the former Chicago political philosopher Leo Strauss, see Bartsch (2023). Though Liu's essay is ideology-charged, its global perspective should be recognized.

¹⁹⁷ Meng (2020): 1-10.

¹⁹⁸ Mosca (2010): 147-207; Mosca (2013).

This section first focuses on Sima Qian's use of Bactria to reconsider the relationship between state and economy in a nomadic context by examining it alongside Sima Qian's account of the Han imperial writer Sima Xiangru. In doing so, I will emphasize that *Dayuan liezhuan* and the biography of Sima Xiangru are two important documents for understanding Sima Qian's motives in portraying Bactria under a nomadic political economic system. Nevertheless, the entangled relationship among China-Nomads-Bactria/Parthia is the broader background to Sima Qian's accounts of both Bactria/India and Parthia/Syria.

Before proceeding to analyze Sima Qian's representation of Bactria/India, it is important to first discuss the nomadic conquest and expansion in eastern Eurasia, from present-day Inner Mongolia/Mongolia/Siberia to Bactria, from a *longue-durée* perspective. Greek ethnography was ahead of Chinese ethnography in developing a systematic account of the nomads, as evidenced by Herodotus' Scythian logos.¹⁹⁹ Analogous to the Scythian logos in Herodotus, Sima Qian's Xiongnu chapter responds to the emergence of the first nomadic empire in the eastern steppe, represented by the Xiongnu since the late 3rd century BCE.²⁰⁰ As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Mediterranean and Chinese histories intertwined for the first time during the late 3rd century BCE when Euthydemus I warned Antiochus I about the nomadic threat.

¹⁹⁹ François Hartog's interpretation of the Scythian logoi as Athens' mirror in the Persian War is still the starting point for approaching it, Hartog (1988): 3-208.

²⁰⁰ Shiji, Volume 27, 1347; for relevant discussion, see Di Cosmo (2002): 359-365. In some sense, Sima Qian creates the "mirror" of imperial China by writing Xiongnu. At the beginning of Sima Qian's Xiongnu chapter, Sima Qian mentions that the ancestors of the Xiongnu came from the descendants of King Jie of Xia, the last king of the legendary Xia dynasty and an evil king in Chinese tradition, who flees to the steppe. It entails a strong sense that the ancestors of the Xiongnu originate from the marginal people who cannot manage to survive in China proper. From an anthropological point of view, this account may contain some degree of reality indicating Chinese migration to the steppe in early times (for relevant linguistic discussion, see Starostin (2008): 254-262).

While classical and Hellenistic Greek authors have a relatively vague sense of the eastern steppe nomads,²⁰¹ Roman Greek authors demonstrate much clearer awareness of them during the 1st century BCE. Overall, we can identify the way the entangled relationship among nomads/Bactria/Parthia influenced this new knowledge formation. After Polybius' mention of eastern steppe nomads in his account of Bactria, knowledge became much more elaborate during the 1st century BCE. In contrast with Herodotus' focus on Scythian nomads in the west of Mt. Ural, in Strabo's chapter on Scythia, the focus shifts from the western steppe to the eastern steppe when he reports on the Sacae. Strabo notes the geographical proximity between Bactria, Sogdiana, and the Scythians at the beginning of the chapter on Hyrcania. Strabo also introduces three branches of "Scythian" nomads on the east of the Caspian Sea: Dahae, Massagetae, and Sacae.²⁰²

Then Strabo recounts the nomadic migrations to Bactria as follows:

μάλιστα δὲ γνώριμοι γέγονασι τῶν νομάδων οἱ τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀφελόμενοι τὴν Βακτριανήν, Ἄσιοι καὶ Πασιανοὶ καὶ Τόχαροι καὶ Σακάραιλοι, ὀρμηθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς περσείας τοῦ Ἰαξάρτου τῆς κατὰ Σάκας καὶ Σογδιανούς, ἣν κατεῖχον Σάκαι.

The nomads who had become extremely well-known are the ones who took away Bactria from the Greeks, and they are: the Asians, the Pasianoī, the Tocharians, and the Sakaraulians. They came from the border of the Jaxartes river near the Sacae and the Sogdiana, which the Sacae were ruling.²⁰³

In contrast to Strabo's indifference to the end of Seleucid rule in Syria, the end of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom is seen as a fact of regime change.²⁰⁴ This passage illustrates how the nomadic conquest of Bactria enlightened the Mediterranean world about the eastern steppe world.

²⁰¹ As mediated by the Persian empire (e.g. the mention of Sacae in the Behistun inscription), Herodotus has passing mention of the Sacae in Xerxes' army, Hdt. 9.31.3. For a comparison with Greek knowledge of India as mediated by the Persians, see Parker (2008): 11-32.

²⁰² Strab. 11.8.2

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Strabo has no mention of the ending of Seleucid rule in Syria. For the ending of the Seleucids as a historiographic issue, see Eckhardt (2021): 21-36.

Strabo's account of earlier nomadic history also has a Hellenistic dimension. After reporting on the end of Hellenistic rule in Central Asia, Strabo moves to the pre-Achaemenid period. Echoing Herodotus' famous statement on the Scythians' rule in Asia for more than twenty years,²⁰⁵ Strabo notes Sacae's earlier occupation of Bactria. According to Strabo's account, the Sacae extended their rule to the Pontic region and Cappadocia, but their reign ended when Persia ended them.²⁰⁶ Strabo also pays attention to Spitamenes' fleeing from Bactria/Sogdiana to the Attasii and the Chorasmii, whom he considers part of the Massagetae and Sacae by comparing this dynamic with Arsaces' withdrawal to the Apasiacae from the Seleucids.²⁰⁷ By presenting these episodes, Strabo implicitly presents a circular development in the eastern steppe world: Sacae previously governed Bactria, Persia challenged the nomadic rule, the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and Parthia struggled for control of Central Asia, and Sacae's reconquest of Bactria. This shows how the eastern steppe world reoriented a Greek writer's interest in the nomadic world from the western steppe to the eastern steppe.²⁰⁸

Similarly, after narrating the Semiramis story, Diodorus recounts the Parthian revolt and the Sacaes' involvement in it: "During that time, the Parthians revolted and entrusted the Median territory and city to the Sacae (ἐπι δὲ τούτου Πάρθους ἀποστάντας Μήδων Σάκαις τὴν τε χώραν καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐγχειρίσαι)."²⁰⁹ Although Diodorus focuses on the pre-Achaemenid legend, this account has a clear Hellenistic background by referring to Parthia's relationship with Central

²⁰⁵ Hdt. 1.104. For a more cautious view on this problem, see Vaggione (1973): 523-30; Ivantchik (1999): 497-520. For a bolder approach that there was a Scythian empire during the 7th century BCE while the Persians, imperial China, and the Xiongnu were the successor states of the Scythians like Mongol impact on post-14th century CE Eurasia, see Beckwith (2023). Also see Taylor, Havlicek and Beckwith (2020): 616-26.

²⁰⁶ Strab. 11.8.4

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 11.8.8

²⁰⁸ For nomadic invasion as a topos, see Kulikowski (2018): 151-65.

²⁰⁹ Diod. Sic. 2.34.1-2

Eurasian nomads in the reference to the Sacae.²¹⁰ In this context, Diodorus introduces the Sacae queen Zarina. As Parthia is the background in which the Sacae is introduced, Diodorus' digression on this Sacae queen must reflect some knowledge about Parthia's dealing with nomads in Central Asia during the 1st century BCE. Echoing Diodorus' portrayal of Semiramis, Diodorus highlights Zarina's distinction in courage, practical ability, beauty, planning, and undertaking among Sacae women (τόλμη τε καὶ πράξει πολὺ διαφέρουσιν τῶν ἐν Σάκαις γυναικῶν... ταύτην δὲ λέγεται τῷ τε κάλλει γενέσθαι πασῶν ἐκπρεπεστάτην καὶ ταῖς ἐπιβολαῖς καὶ τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ἐγχειρήμασι θαυμαστήν).²¹¹

In Diodorus' report, Zarina contributes both to warfare and building projects:

τῶν μὲν γὰρ πλησιοχώρων βαρβάρων τοὺς ἐπηρμένους τῷ θράσει καὶ καταδουλουμένους τὸ ἔθνος τῶν Σακῶν καταπολεμήσαι, τῆς δὲ χώρας πολλὴν ἐξημερῶσαι, καὶ πόλεις οὐκ ὀλίγας κτίσαι, καὶ τὸ σύνολον εὐδαιμονέστερον τὸν βίον τῶν ὁμοεθνῶν ποιῆσαι

For when some of the neighboring barbarian peoples who are proud of their boldness have been enslaved, she was trying to subjugate the Saka ethnic group, she tamed much of the territory, she founded no small number of cities; in all, she made her fellow peoples' lives happier.²¹²

In this passage, Diodorus employs the participle γὰρ to explain why Zarina embodies certain characteristics. She not only conquers neighboring peoples but also introduces a civilized lifestyle to her own people and is a city-builder. What is particularly noteworthy about Diodorus' account is that it highlights the transition of nomads into a sedentary lifestyle, something that is not commonly found in Greco-Latin sources on eastern steppe nomads.

²¹⁰ See the discussion on Parthia and nomads in the next section.

²¹¹ Diod. Sic. 34.3-4. Numismatic evidence is major source for Hellenism in post-Hellenistic Central Asia, see Senior (2001); Fröhlich (2008).

²¹² Ibid. 34.4-5, trans. Oldfather

As will be discussed, Sima Qian's report on Bactria captures the way the nomadic rule created a favorable environment for commerce. Diodorus' account shares a similar imagination of the dynamic interaction between nomadic rule and urbanization under the rubric of nomadic political economy in Central Asia.²¹³ In Diodorus' account, Zarina is remembered as a benefactor (τὴν τελευτὴν αὐτῆς χάριν ἀποδιδόντας τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς μνημονεύοντας τάφον οἰκοδομήσαι πολὺ τῶν ὄντων παρ' αὐτοῖς ὑπερέχοντα),²¹⁴ which aligns with Hellenistic euergetism.²¹⁵

Diodorus' account also demonstrates an awareness of nomadic domination in Central Asia, as he considers the Scythians to be on the border of India.²¹⁶ Similar to Strabo's accounts of Sacae, Diodorus extends his horizon to the eastern steppe world. Diodorus recounts a legend about Scythian power expanding from the eastern sea to the Caspian/Azov Seas (πολλὰ δὲ καὶ μεγάλα τῶν ἀνὰ μέσον τούτων ἔθνῶν καταδουλωσαμένους προβιβάσαι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τῶν Σκυθῶν τῇ μὲν ἐπὶ τὸν πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ὠκεανόν, τῇ δ' ἐπὶ τὴν Κασπίαν θάλατταν καὶ Μαιῶτιν λίμνην).²¹⁷ Unlike Herodotus' portrayal of Scythians as stateless people,²¹⁸ the phrase τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τῶν Σκυθῶν suggests that Diodorus considers Scythia to be a powerful entity.²¹⁹ The phrase πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ὠκεανόν likely refers to today's eastern Chinese sea, and possibly beyond, indicating a vague knowledge of the Xiongnu' geographic position.²²⁰

²¹³ This account echoes Cyrus' warning that the Persians should avoid a "civilized" lifestyle to avoid being corrupted at the end of Herodotus; see Ruobing Xian's recent discussion of this account, Xian (2020): 16-26.

²¹⁴ Diod. Sic. 2.34.5

²¹⁵ In actual historical practice, Seleucus I's Bactrian-Sogdian wife is portrayed as a benefactor of rebuilding the Didymean sanctuary in a Milesian decree, IDidyma 479. Rolf Strootman recently had a synthetic discussion of this dynamic, especially taking into account the Milesian decree for Apama, Strootman (2021): 137-78.

²¹⁶ Diod. Sic. 2.43.1

²¹⁷ Ibid, 2.43.5

²¹⁸ See Hartog (1988). Cf. contemporary anthropological reflection on Central Eurasian nomads, see Sneath (2007).

²¹⁹ See Bryan Miller's combined textual and archaeological discussion of the bureaucratic sophistication of the Xiongnu, Miller (2014): 1-43; in contrast, see the view that the Xiongnu is a stateless regime, Krادين (2011): 77-96.

²²⁰ Central Asianists usually only consider Ptolemy's *Geography* as the first Greco-Latin text with some geographical knowledge of the regions beyond Bactria and India, cf. Beckwith (1977).

Diodorus also notes the division of the Scythian power into various branches: the Sacae, Massagetae, Arimaspi, and Sauromtae.²²¹ The Sacae are highlighted by Diodorus as a central point of reference in Asia, demonstrating how the nomadic role in Central Asia facilitated transregional communications.²²²

However, while Roman Greek authors possess more knowledge of the eastern steppe world than their classical and Hellenistic precursors, the Chinese intellectual world had a more profound understanding of the nomadic political economy.²²³ From a sedentary perspective, Sima Qian presents a vivid portrayal of the nomadic political economy, especially in regard to its influence on Chinese intellectual debates. In Sima Qian's Xiongnu chapter, the debate on the superiority of sedentary and nomadic lifestyles, presented by Zhongxing Yue, a Chinese defector from Han to the Xiongnu, is exemplary of this debate. According to Sima Qian, Zhongxing Yue initially served as a Chinese envoy to Xiongnu during Emperor Wen's reign, but he defected to the Xiongnu and remained with them. Sima Qian's account reads as follows:

“At the beginning, the Xiongnu were fond of Han clothes and food. Zhongxing Yue advised (the Chanyu): ‘The population of the Xiongnu is not equal to one prefecture in the Han. The reason that Xiongnu are mighty is that Xiongnu people have different clothes and food, without reliance on Han. Now, the chanyu has changed the custom by being fond of Han goods. Through Han goods...the Xiongnu would be subjugated to the Han.’”²²⁴

Sima Qian's simplified equation of nomadic political economy to the pastoral economy at the beginning of the Xiongnu chapter is consistent with Zhongxing Yue's anxiety about the

²²¹ Diod. Sic. 2.43.5

²²² As highlighted, this view must reflect Diodorus' appreciation of historical dynamics during his time, Muntz (2017): 32-3. For a historical survey of the Sacae, see Daffinà (1967).

²²³ Though not an attempt to write on connected history, Siep Stuurman helpfully considers the writing on the Xiongnu as an anthropological turn in Chinese historiography as opposed to Persians in Greek historiography, Stuumann (2010): 1-40.

²²⁴ Shiji, Volume 110, 2898.

potentially corrupting effect of the Xiongnu's fondness for Chinese goods.²²⁵ Nevertheless, the account captures the actual operation of the nomadic political economy. It encompasses diverse economic practices and accumulates wealth from different regions. This is evident in Zhongxing Yue's later debate with Han envoys that agriculture and urban foundations are not conducive to military morale.²²⁶

However, a reading of Zhongxing Yue's idealistic view of Xiongnu against Xiongnu archaeology reveals an irony. While we are uncertain about the historicity of Zhongxing Yue and his views, the Xiongnu's adoption of Zhongxing Yue into its political system recalls Xiongnu manipulation of agriculture and city-founding. The site of Ivolga in today's Buriat highlights this aspect.²²⁷ Zhongxing Yue's warning about the chanyu's fondness of Han goods is a misunderstanding of Xiongnu wealth accumulation on the basis of the Chinese binary view of sedentary and nomadic lifestyles.²²⁸ Though Sima Qian's representation of the debate certainly has its literary complexity,²²⁹ this literary representation, even if distorted, would not have come into being without the Chinese encounter with the nomadic political economy.

Sima Qian's account of Yuezhi-dominated Bactria echoes this debate between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles. His ethnography of Bactria explores a comparative case outside China when Chinese officials developed an unprecedentedly wider horizon of the outside

²²⁵ Ibid, for a discussion of Sima Qian's simplified understanding of nomadic lifestyle by comparing with later sources, see Kradin (2021): 83-4. Sima Qian embeds the Han-Xiongnu dichotomy view in the philosophical concepts of Yin and Yang, Shiji, Volume 27, 1347; for relevant discussion, see Di Cosmo (2002): 359-365.

²²⁶ Shiji, Volume 110, 2899.

²²⁷ Batsaikhan (2021): 122.

²²⁸ If Zhongxing Yue is a real historical figure with this view, we may inquire how much Han immigrants to Xiongnu participated in nomadic-sedentary discourse by reversing it to emphasize the superiority of the nomadic lifestyle over the sedentary lifestyle. Cf. Sören Stark's discussion of later Turkic elites' cultural cosmopolitan outlook helps understand this aspect of nomadic political culture, Stark (2018): 333-55.

²²⁹ For recent literary discussions of this debate, see Chin (2010): 311-54; Li (2015): 79-102.

world since the late 2nd century BCE. Although the original aim of Emperor Wu's commissioning of Zhang Qian's western journey was to ally with the Yuezhi,²³⁰ the knowledge of the Hellenistic world that Zhang Qian brought back to the Chinese court is embedded within the nomadic political economy. Though the Xiongnu domination in Central Asia did not exceed beyond the Pamir mountains, the empire enjoyed prestige in western Central Asia, a dynamic that Sima Qian recounts as follows:

“The regions from the west of Wusun to Anxi (Parthia) are close to the Xiongnu; since the Xiongnu had troubled the Yuezhi, as soon as a Xiongnu chanyu's letter carried by Xiongnu envoys had arrived in these countries, these countries transmitted it without any delay. On the contrary, when Han envoys arrived, these envoys would not be hosted without giving money and stuff and would not get horses without trading flocks (with these countries). The reason that (these countries did so) is due to that they were far from Han; as Han is wealthy, they wanted to trade with Han to get what they desired.”²³¹

As will be discussed shortly, this power dynamic in Central Asia was a significant motive for Emperor Wu's Dayuan campaign during the 110s BCE. The Central Asian regions considered the Xiongnu rather than the Han to be the crucial power that they needed to subjugate. In this analysis, the passage vividly illustrates Xiongnu imperialism, which exerted control of the Tarim Basin and had hegemonic status in western Central Asia due to its defeat of the Yuezhi.²³²

The ethnographic knowledge that Zhang Qian brought back arose from the Xiongnu domination in Central Asia. In particular, the anecdote about Zhang Qian's marriage to a Xiongnu wife when the Xiongnu chanyu would like to detain Zhang Qian implies a Xiongnu intermediary role in Zhang Qian's journey.²³³ Although Zhang Qian's difficulty in arriving in

²³⁰ Shiji, Volume 123, 3157.

²³¹ Ibid, 3173.

²³² For the Xiongnu in the Tarim Basin, see Wang (2016). This dynamic resembles the political structure that a vassal rules a vassal which Herodotus describes for the case of the Medes, Hdt. 1.134.3

²³³ Shiji, Volume 123, 3158.

Yuezhi-Bactria due to Xiongnu obstacles is shrouded in legend, this passage sheds light on the Xiongnu's role in Zhang Qian's journey.

As previously mentioned, the debate between Zhongxing Yue and Han officials on the merits of sedentary and nomadic lifestyles entails a dichotomous nomadic/sedentary view among Chinese intellectuals. This dichotomy similarly defines Zhang Qian's representation of the outside world. The ethnographic report first introduces the Dayuan, which helped Zhang Qian navigate to the Yuezhi and Bactria. Then the narrative comes to four major nomadic regimes: Wusun, Kangqu, Yancai, and Yuezhi.²³⁴ Common to them is an emphasis on their tens of thousands of archers. The focus on the number of archers is consistent with the Xiongnu's self-representation in Maodun's letter to Emperor Wen in 176 BCE, after the Xiongnu defeated the Yuezhi, by emphasizing that *zhu yingong zhimin bingwei yijia* (all bow-drawing peoples are united into one family).²³⁵ This self-representation recalls the way bow, quiver, and archery mattered for the self-identities of nomadic elites as revealed by material evidence that bows were material indices of nomadic elites' superiority.²³⁶ In this regard, interest in the number of archers in each regime reflects a nomadic way of understanding of state power: Wusun (tens of thousands), Kangqu (eighty or ninety thousand), Yancai (more than one hundred thousand), Yuezhi (one or two hundred thousand). These numbers speak of the state power of each regime.

Moreover, the report of these regimes reveals their power affiliations: Wusun was sometimes subjugated to Xiongnu, though not always obedient; Kangqu was simultaneously subjugated to Yuezhi in the south and Xiongnu in the east; and Yuezhi was forced to migrate

²³⁴ Shiji, Volume 110, 3160-1.

²³⁵ Ibid, 2895.

²³⁶ See Daragan (2020): 103-124; Loades (2020): 258-67.

westward by the Xiongnu. Putting aside the Yancai,²³⁷ all these nomadic regimes have a certain affiliation with the Xiongnu power. While the Yuezhi were defeated by the Xiongnu, Yuezhi's domination over Bactria shifts the focus of the ethnographic report to the secondary world, which ranges from Syria to Bactria/India. From a secondary point of view, Sima Qian uses Bactria to explore the potential for China to be part of the nomadic imperial system, as opposed to Emperor Wu's ambition of defeating the Xiongnu.

Sima Qian highlights that the Yuezhi prince has no intention of revenge for the defeat of his father under the Xiongnu but enjoys his domination of fertile Bactria.²³⁸ This mention shows how the new Yuezhi king is part of Sima Qian's representation of the dialectical relationship between conqueror and conquered. As discussed, Zhongxing Yue's attribution of nomadic power to their simplicity is a misunderstanding of the actual complexity of the nomadic political economy. In a similar vein, the emphasis on the Yuezhi prince's oblivion of revenge due to the fertility in Bactria derives from the point of view of a Chinese intellectual.

Echoing the Xiongnu's need for Chinese agricultural products and silk, the Yuezhi interest in Bactria is contingent upon the Yuezhi's manipulation of a new agriculturally rich landscape to satisfy Yuezhi elites' needs. However, Chinese imperial authorities understood an inter-nomadic conflict (between the Xiongnu and the Yuezhi) in light of China's existing experience with the Xiongnu as a nomadic-sedentary conflict. They assumed that Yuezhi elites must share a similar urgency to "avenge" their defeat by the Xiongnu.²³⁹ In a similar vein, Sima

²³⁷ Yu Taishan related Yancai to the Aorsi/Alani people in Greco-Latin sources (Yu (2012): 118-30). Even though the correlation has always entailed stakes, Yancai's location around the Caspian sea should be closer to the truth when Yancai is reportedly located north of Parthia.

²³⁸ *Shiji*, Volume 123, 3158

²³⁹ In Zhang Qian's story and Yuezhi's addiction to Bactria, we can identify a motif similar to the lotus-eating motif Homer. Though as will be discussed in chapter 4, we can attribute Gan Ying's exposure to shipwreck warning to Homeric motifs on the Indian Ocean, we are uncertain if this account really has a Homeric motif or simply shares a motif similar to the *Odyssey*.

Qian perceives nomadic elites' engagement with the sedentary world as a dialectic of "simply" nomadic conquerors being assimilated to a conquered "complex" sedentary regime.

Similarly, Sima Qian's reports early Qin's "conquest" of the *Rong* people in the northwest during the time of Duke of Mu in the 7th century BCE, depicting Qin as spreading "civilization" there and thus destroying the Rong people's simplicity. This account suggests that military campaigns were always not the default means for China to deal with "barbarians."²⁴⁰ Sima Qian's mentioning the Yuezhi king's indulgence in the sedentary lifestyle in Bactria explores an alternative means by which Han would subjugate the Xiongnu, not through military campaigns but through China's inherent "superiority" as a sedentary regime.²⁴¹

The Yuezhi, Bactria, and Sichuan: Sima Qian's World Economics

Sima Qian's exploration of the relationship between sedentary and nomadic regimes based on the case of Bactria has a unique Chinese context during the time of Emperor Wu. Five features characterized Emperor Wu's reign, as well as the Xiongnu campaigns and attendant outside expansions from Central Asia to the Korean Peninsula: political centralization by eliminating several vassal states, increased political control over the economy, patronage of literary production to craft a centralized imperial ideology, and promotion of various talents from humble backgrounds. These features were interlinked, especially since political and economic centralization served the Xiongnu campaigns. In this light, while I will more focus on Sima Qian's *Kaiserkritik* in the next section, I interpret Sima Qian's portrayal of Bactria and its

²⁴⁰ Shiji, Volume 5, 194-5. The debate between Duke Mu and the rong king Youyu echoes the debate between Zhongxing Yue and Han officials. Though we are uncertain whether this early Qin case is a total later fabrication or reflects some early Qin practice, we can be certain that early Qin demonstrated conservative Zhou ritual culture after inheriting the old Western Zhou heartland in the northwest, see Von Falkenhausen and Shelach (2014): 37-52.

²⁴¹ For traditional research on the Yuezhi migration, see Enoki, Koshelenko, and Haidary (1994): 165-83; Nakao (2017/2010). For reflections on the limitation of using Chinese sources to study the Yuezhi, see Thierry (2005): 421-539.

economic links with India as Sima Qian's exploration of the economic performance of a sedentary regime under nomadic control.

Sima Qian's report on Bactria goes as follows:

Great Xia (Bactria) is located some two thousand *li* southwest of Great Yuan, south of the Gui River (Oxus). As regards its customs, [the people] practice agriculture, they have cities and houses, and their customs are the same as Great Yuan. They have no great lord or chieftain, but only minor chieftains set up in every city and town. Their soldiers are weak and they fear battle. They are skilled in commerce. After the Great Yuezhi moved west, they attacked and defeated them, subjugating all the Great Xia (Bactrian people) and herding them (like cattle). The people of Great Xia (Bactria) are numerous, more than one million. Their capital is called Lanshi *cheng* ('Blue Market City', i.e., Bactra) and there is a marketplace where various kinds of goods are bought and sold. To its southeast is the country of Yuandu (India). Zhang Qian said (to the emperor): "When your subject was in Great Xia (Bactria), I saw bamboo walking-sticks from Qiong and cloth from Shu (both in what is now Sichuan). When I asked 'Where did you get these [things]?', the Bactrians ('people of the country of Great Xia (Bactria)) said: 'Our merchants go to Yuandu (India) to engage in trade. Yuandu (India) is located some several thousand *li* from Great Xia (Bactria). Regarding its customs, [the people] practice agriculture, and their customs are in large part the same as Great Xia (Bactria), but it is said to be in a lower place, humid, and very hot in summer. Its people ride elephants to do battle. Their country is situated on a great river."²⁴²

From an empirical standpoint, Sima Qian's depiction of the decentralized political structure in Bactria aligns with similar images in Greek sources.²⁴³ It is evident that the Greco-Bactrian king was only a *primus inter pares* by establishing Hellenistic governance over the existing political structure in Bactria.²⁴⁴ However, by interpreting this passage within the context of Chinese political culture, we can observe Sima Qian's implicit comment on Emperor Wu's centralization policies.

²⁴² Shiji, 123.3165-66, trans. William Nienhauser, modified.

²⁴³ See chapter 1.

²⁴⁴ The Kuliab inscription from today's Tajikistan further corroborates our picture by calling Euthydemus I as "the greatest among the kings" (τὸν πάντων μέγιστον Εὐθύδημον βασιλέων). The plural form of βασιλέων indicates that Euthydemus I was not the only king in the Greco-Bactrian kingdom but there were other power structures within it. These βασιλέων must be those chieftains in Zhang Qian's report. Again, the Greco-Bactrian king is the *primus inter pares* in Bactria. IGIAC, n.151; for discussion of this inscription, see Bernard, Pinault, Rougemont (2004): 345-51; For an archaeological survey of Tajikistan during the Hellenistic period, see Lindström (2020): 295-7. For political structure in Bactria, see Leriche (1981): 65-79.

In contrast to Emperor Wu's attempts to reduce the power of vassal states, Sima Qian presents Bactria as a land dotted with city-based petty kings without an overarching ruler. This political fragmentation strongly resembles the Warring States, which was derived from Western Zhou's vassal-state system called *fengjianzhi* or *fenfengzhi*.²⁴⁵ The decentralization of the Western Zhou is blamed for resulting in ceaseless wars among warring states: this prompted the First Emperor to establish unanimous prefectures (*junxian*) around China after a debate on whether Qin would adopt *fengjianzhi* or *junxianzhi*.²⁴⁶ Despite this, early Western Han rulers attributed Qin's short reign to over-centralization and instead adopted a limited vassal state system by sending members of the royal clan to establish vassal states in the east and the south.²⁴⁷

However, Emperor Wu significantly reduced the power of vassal states by converting many states into prefectures so as to recentralize the imperial power, leading to renewed debates on the superiority between *fengjianzhi/fenfengzhi* and *junxianzhi*.²⁴⁸ Sima Qian engages in this debate by introducing the political structure of Bactria. In evaluating the relative strength of political systems based on vassal states or on a centralized state, Sima Qian's criterion is economic vitality. Though Bactria is subjugated to nomads and lacks an overarching authority, it demonstrates a dense population and vibrant commerce.²⁴⁹ In particular, the "hero" of this presentation is Bactrian merchants undertaking long-distance trade with India.

²⁴⁵ As mediated by the modern Japanese translation of the term "feudalism" based on the ancient Chinese term *fengjian*, this term comes to be a modern Chinese translation of "feudalism." For cultural historical research on it, see Feng (2007).

²⁴⁶ Shiji, Volume 6, 238-9. Excavated documents on Qin administration from central China reveal the stunning degree of Qin's local control, see Kudo (2010/1998).

²⁴⁷ As decided in 201 BCE, Shiji, Volume 8, 378. See Loewe (1986): 472-3.

²⁴⁸ The literati Zhufu Yan's suggestion during the early reign of Emperor Wu is instrumental in this debate, Shiji, Volume 112, 2961.

²⁴⁹ The figure of a more than one million population in Bactria is definitely exaggerated. According to the more reliable *Hanshu*, it had a population of one hundred thousand: *Hanshu*, Volume 96a, 3890.

Sima Qian's report on the congruence of political weakness and economic vibrancy in Bactria is consistent with Sima Qian's understanding of Warring States China. Although contemporary scholars emphasize that the Qin empire introduced nothing radical but inherited the developed bureaucratic system common to most states during the Warring States period,²⁵⁰ Sima Qian shares a view from early Western Han intellectuals that the Qin empire brought radical change to the Zhou-based ritual order.²⁵¹ Furthermore, while Warring States cities existed primarily for political purposes, Sima Qian has an exaggerated understanding of Warring States cities as pure economic centers. In particular, his *Huozhi liezhuan* is primarily dedicated to many pre-Qin great merchants who possessed enormous wealth and many clients. As regards Bactria, its affiliation with the nomadic political economy provides a comparative dimension for Sima Qian to engage with relevant intellectual debates in China after Chinese officials became aware of other sedentary regimes outside China.

After illustrating the politically fragmented landscape in Bactria under nomadic imperialism, Sima Qian further shows economic performance under this structure. While Emperor Wu's ongoing Xiongnu campaigns required enormous mobilization of economic resources, Bactria demonstrates economic prosperity under Yuezhi domination, despite its military weakness.²⁵² In particular, Bactria's economic connections with India through the

²⁵⁰ Tian Cangwu and Zang Zhifei's social historical account of the transition from kinship-based states to territorial states is still the best scholarship on this issue in Chinese language, Tian and Zang (1994); for English scholarship, see Mark Lewis' cultural historical research on spatial politics in early China, Lewis (2005): 135-88.

²⁵¹ This is a discursive construction to consider the Qin as the despotic "other" contrasted with the Confucian ideal as represented by the essay *Guo Qinlun* (On Qin's Malices) by the early Western Han intellectual Jia Yi. It is interesting to compare Greek political thought to consider Persia as the despotic other while China did not consider Parthia in the same way as will be demonstrated soon. However, in reality, as a conservative state, Qin was a latecomer that did not embrace the bureaucratic model first developed in central and east China until Shang Yang's reform during the 4th century BCE, Pines (2017): 7-24. Martin Kern has the most important challenge to this view inherited from Western Han scholars by arguing that Qin is a conscious follower of the Zhou ritual order, Kern (2001).

²⁵² The Pinghuaishu chapter in Shiji emphasizes the aspect of economic resources in Emperor Wu's campaigns, Shiji, Volume 30, 1421.

agency of merchants epitomize the economic cosmopolitanism that Zhang Qian experiences at the Bactrian bazaar in Sima Qian's portrayal.²⁵³

Furthermore, Zhang Qian's report of Sichuan goods suggests a direct link between Bactria and China. From an empirical perspective, the appearance of Sichuan goods in Bactria is the first clear evidence of the existence of the "Southern Silk Road" that connected southwest China to Central Asia through Southeast Asia/India.²⁵⁴ From an archaeological point of view, the Sichuan Basin demonstrated its maritime network, as evidenced by a large number of cowries dating from the late 2nd millennium BCE.²⁵⁵ In terms of material evidence from the Hellenistic period, the use of Yunnan copper in striking Indo-Greek coins, as revealed by chemical analysis, is the most significant material example of this connection.²⁵⁶ However, there is still no archaeological evidence of Sichuan silk and bamboo in Bactria during this time.

In light of my concerns about Sima Qian's political-economic thought, I argue that the economic connection between Bactria and Sichuan provides another opportunity for Sima Qian to compare the economies of Bactria and China as two models: nomadic domination and increasing Chinese state control. It is well known that Zhang Qian's observation of Sichuan goods led to an awareness of the Chinese connection to Bactria through the southwest, which prompted Emperor Wu's subsequent southwestern campaigns from today's Sichuan to today's Yunnan/Guizhou.²⁵⁷ For my analysis, while showing the pre-existing economic link between Sichuan and Bactria before Chinese imperial authorities noticed it, Sima Qian emphasizes the

²⁵³ This is the social imaginary behind the setting of the *Milindapañha* (The Questions of Milinda), a Pali text that recounts the conversation between the Indo-Greek king Menander and Indian monk Nāsenā dated to the 2nd century CE (Kubica (2020): 43045); also see the discussion on bazaars' information order in 19th-century Afghanistan, Karimi (2020): 613-33.

²⁵⁴ This aspect has been constantly highlighted in an edited volume named *Xinan Sichou Zhilu* (The Southwestern Silk Road) edited and contributed by scholars from southwest China, Jiang (1995).

²⁵⁵ Yang (2018): 94-123.

²⁵⁶ See Widemann (2009): 101-23.

²⁵⁷ Shiji, Volume 123, 3166.

agency of merchants in creating trans-regional communications, demonstrating their little reliance on the state.

While Sichuan goods in Bactria show what happens on the main “stage,” the “backstage” is Sima Qian’s narrative of one great Sichuan merchant family, the Family of Zhuo, in the biography of Sima Xiangru.²⁵⁸ The biography of Sima Xiangru is an overlooked document that shed lights on Sima Qian’s agenda in writing about Bactria’s economic link to Sichuan. Sima Qian presents a contrast between Bactrian merchants’ autonomy under a nomadic political economic system, as implied in Sima Qian’s description of Bactria, and how this merchant family from Sichuan increasingly became subject to Emperor Wu’s imperial agenda when the emperor manipulated Sichuan’s economic connection with Bactria for military purposes.

It is not my intention to prove that the Family of Zhuo in Sichuan actually engaged in long-distance trade beyond Yunnan. Instead, I aim to discuss Sima Qian’s exploration of the decreasing autonomy of Sichuan merchants during Emperor Wu’s southwestern campaign. When Sima Qian highlights the Bactria-Sichuan connections, he presents a contrasting example in which economic vibrancy benefits merchants in Bactria under nomadic governance. In this regard, we can further understand the way Sima Qian’s account of Sichuan goods in Bactria is Sima Qian’s exploration of the “world economy” under a nomadic political economic system, an underappreciated aspect in current research on Sima Qian’s economic thought.

Sima Qian’s reports on the Zhuo family can be found in both *Huozhi liezhuan* and the biography of Sima Xiangru. While Sima Qian focuses on the imperial writer Sima Xiangru’s

²⁵⁸ For scholars of Chinese literature, Sima Qian’s writing on Sima Xiangru is notable since he copies Sima Xiangru’s major rhapsodes (*fu*) compositions into it. Meanwhile, Ban Gu’s writing on Sima Xiangru in *Hanshu* has an almost identical account to Sima Qian’s. Though Ban Gu’s writing is surely later than Sima Qian’s, detailed philological analyses of these two texts show that the rhapsodies incorporated into Sima Qian’s are later versions than Ban Gu’s (Hervouet (1974): 55-76; Chien (1980): 61-72). From a skeptical point of view, Martin Kern suggests that the existing version of Sima Xiangru in the *Shiji* attributed to Sima Qian should be no earlier than the late 1st century BCE, Kern (2003): 310-1.

relationship with his father-in-law Zhuo Wangsun in the biography of Sima Xiangru, he introduces the background of the Zhuo family in *Huozi liezhuan*:

“The ancestors of the Family Zhuo in Shu (i.e. Sichuan) are Zhao people. (Their ancestors) made fortune based on the iron industry (in Zhao). After Qin’s conquest of Zhao, (Qin authorities) forced the Zhuo Family to move to (Sichuan). The family of Zhuo had been plundered (by Qin). Only the couple of Zhuo... moved to their new residence (in Sichuan). Many forced immigrants (from Zhao) still keep a little wealth and they struggle to bribe officials so that they will move to a place close (to the north) and live in Xiamen (in northern Sichuan). Yet, only the Family Zhuo says: ‘This place (i.e. Xiamen) is narrow and has thin soil. But I heard the plain under Mt. Wen is fertile and is home to *dunzhi* (a taro). So we will not suffer starvation. The people there are also specialized in the market and it is conducive for commerce.’ Thus, they asked for emigrating to a farther place. After they arrived in Linqiong, they were very happy. Relying on the iron mountain, they developed the iron industry and managed it while involving people from Dian (Yunnan) and Shu (Sichuan). They were eventually so rich that they had one thousand servants. Their pleasure in hunting in mountain and river is comparable to that of royalty.”²⁵⁹

Sima Qian’s account reveals two important aspects. Both the Zhuo and Cheng families engaged in long-distance commerce: Zhuo’s iron industry involved people from Yunnan, which was outside the purview of both Qin and Han, while the Cheng family actively traded with ethnic groups in the southwest. Regarding Zhang Qian’s notice of Sichuan objects in Bactria, he adds: “It is informed that several *li* west of Kunming (it is today’s Dali in western Yunnan but not today’s Kunming as the Yunnan capital) there is an Elephant-riding Country (*chengxiang guo*) which is called *Dianyue* (in today’s Baoshan; later Yongchang County in Eastern Han). Sichuan (Shu) traders sometimes smuggled objects there.”²⁶⁰ I do not intend to rely on this single line to try to reconstruct actual economic connections between Bactria and Sichuan. Instead, I interpret this line as Sima Qian’s presentation of transregional economic exchange beyond state control:

²⁵⁹ Shiji, Volume 129, 3277.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, Volume 123, 3166.

Sima Qian highlights Sichuan's transregional connections to explain the trafficking of goods in Bactria.

Empirically, both the Zhuo and Zheng families were Qin-contracted merchant families. Qin used them to remap the Sichuan landscape during Qin's colonization of the region in the 3rd century BC.²⁶¹ In other words, the Qin state authorities made use of the talents they found in the east to remap the Sichuan landscape.²⁶² However, Sima Qian deliberately highlights the economic "rationality" and choice of the Zhuo family when they rebuilt their enterprise in Sichuan outside the state purview.²⁶³ To highlight Emperor Wu's control of the economy, Sima Qian constructs the image of individual merchants acting only for their interests, similar to Sima Qian's portrayals of other Warring States merchants.

The story of Sima Xiangru, Emperor Wu's most favored imperial writer, provides a rich mine for gauging Sima Qian's exploration of the relationships between economic capital, cultural capital, and political capital. According to the story, Sima Xiangru originally worked for King Xiao of Liang but he returned to his Sichuan homeland after King Xiao's death. Zhuo Wangsun's daughter Zhuo Wenjun fell in love with Xiangru, whom her father looked down upon

²⁶¹ For the instrumental of Sichuan in Qin's unification enterprise, Sage (1996). The city of Linqiong in which both families resided is one of three cities that Qin built after conquering the Sichuan Basin in 316 BCE, *Huayang Guozhi* (The Gazette of the Regions South of Mt. Hua (i.e. Southwest China)), Volume 3, 100. On Qin's urban control in general, see Emura (2005): 195-203; on increasing urbanization in China during the second half of the first millennium BCE, see Von Falkenhausen (2022): 15-51. Moreover, *Huayang Guozhi* recounts that Emperor Wen (r.180-157 BCE) assigned an official called Deng Tong to supervise coins production in Sichuan and Deng collaborated with Family Zhuo to undertake this enterprise, both making a huge fortune, *Huayang Guozhi*, Volume 3, 125. For an introduction to the text of *Huayang Guozhi* as the first attested Chinese local history composed during the 4th century CE in the context of discussing Greek local historical writings, see Tober (2013): 54-7.

²⁶² The Zhao capital Handan, where Family Zhuo was from, is a very important iron-production center in Warring States China (Yang (2019): 59). For Qin's iron industry, see Tang (2019): 75-80; Von Glahn (2016): 96-7. On the Chinese iron industry during the 3rd century BCE, see Wagner (1993): 247-65. Also, *Huayang Guozhi* quotes a lost source Qin official annals *Qinji* (The Annals of Qin) that Bo (a southwestern ethnic group) slaves were rich (*Huayang Guozhi*, Volume 3, 146). It is conceivable that some slaves made fortune by engaging in trade on behalf of their masters. It is not unusual for merchants to entrust their enterprises to their slaves in the Warring States period, see He (2013): 360.

²⁶³ There is an effort to correlate Sima Qian with Adam Smith, McCormic (1999): 85-7. Cf. Josiah Ober's recent discussion of merchants' economic calculation in Plato's *Republic*, Ober (2022): 298-306.

due to his poverty. Nevertheless, Zhuo Wangsun agreed to their marriage, and Emperor Wu discovered Xiangru's literary talent and promoted him to the court. Xiangru was then sent back to Sichuan for Emperor Wu's southwestern campaigns, and Zhuo Wangsun thought highly of his son-in-law.²⁶⁴ Based on several hints, a more realistic scenario is that Sima Xiangru was a slave/servant musician sent by the Zhuo family to the court as a tribute and discovered by Emperor Wu.²⁶⁵ However, for my analysis here, this story provides a rich mine for gauging Sima Qian's exploration of the relationships among economic capital, cultural capital, and political capital.

We can identify two major aspects of this story. The first aspect is Sima Xiangru's changed affiliation from a regional court to the central court, epitomizing Emperor Wu's centralization by reducing the number of vassal states.²⁶⁶ In particular, in the first audience between the emperor and Sima Xiangru, Xiangru tells the emperor that his original writing had been done for a regional lord and that he will compose a new piece matching the emperor's

²⁶⁴ Shiji, Volume 117, 3002-47; Hanshu, Volume 57b, 2533-81.

²⁶⁵ Both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* highlight that Sima Xiangru's original name is Quanzi, which means "dog's son." (Shiji, Volume 117, 2999; Hanshu, Volume 56, 2529) The name Quanzi strongly suggests Xiangru's original lower-class origin. The Sichuan writer Wang Bao (90-51 BCE) has a treaty *Tongyue* (A Slave-Boy's Contract) where he imagines a slave named "Bianliao" responsible for all types of household chores (*Quan Hanwen*, Volume 42, 359). The name Bianliao which has no real meaning is similar to Sima Xiangru's original name Quanzi by being not elegant. Nevertheless, both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* also note that Sima Xiangru adopts the name Xiangru from the Warring States literati Lin Xiangru in the Zhao kingdom in the north (Shiji, Volume 81, 2439). Lin Xiangru is famed as a client of the Zhao eunuch head Lao Xian but is promoted to the highest literati rank given his talent in oratory. If we trust the historicity that Sima Xiangru's admiration for Lin Xiangru prompted him to change his given name from Quanzi to Xiangru, his identification with Lin Xiangru is another strong indicator of Sima Xiangru's original humble background when Lin's promotion from a humble background to the high hierarchy based on literary talent resonates with Sima Xiangru's trajectory. As I contend, if we want to find some real history from the story of Sima Xiangru, the most likely scenario is that Sima Xiangru was originally a client, even probably a slave, affiliated with the Family of Zhuo in Linqiong in Sichuan but his literary and performative talent was later discovered by imperial authorities. This trajectory was not impossible during the time of Emperor Wu. Given the original Zhao background of the Family of Zhuo, Sima Xiangru's admiration for Lin Xiangru also indicates that Lin Xiangru's story was very likely a popular lore among the clients/slaves in the Family of Zhuo, registering their desire for escaping from their enslaved status.

²⁶⁶ In general, our existing story of Sima Xiangru aims to show that Xiangru has a middling background, despite an emphasis on his poverty.

grandeur.²⁶⁷ The result is the *Rhapsode of the Shanglin Park* in which Xiangru shows how the emperor uses his imperial establishment of the Shanglin park to intimidate regional lords.²⁶⁸

Whereas Sima Qian uses Bactria's political fragmentation to refer to pre-imperial China, Xiangru's rhapsode fits the emperor's desire for political centralization.

Furthermore, Sima Qian's story of Sima Xiangru touches on the problem of literary patronage in Emperor Wu's time. Sima Qian displays the possibility of mercantile patronage as a substitute for political patronage through the anecdote of Lü Buwei, a great Warring States merchant cum politician who exemplifies literary patronage under merchants. According to Sima Qian, Lü's mercantile wealth not only helped him gain the chancellorship at the Qin court but also supported the literary production of *Lüshi Chunqiu* (The Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lü) by gathering various literary talents at his home.²⁶⁹ After accomplishing this work, Lü displayed the writings outside the gate of Qin's capital Xianyang and offered one thousand ounces of gold to anyone who could modify one character in the work.²⁷⁰ Through the anecdote

²⁶⁷ "(One day), his majesty reads *The Rhapsode of Zixu* (by Sima Xiangru) and likes this piece. He says: 'I myself hate not to be contemporary with this person (who writes it).' Deyi says: 'My fellow people Sima Xiangru declares that he composes this rhapsode.' His majesty is surprised and he summons Xiangru. Xiangru says: 'It is true that (I wrote it). However, this piece was written for a vassal lord (i.e. King Xiao of Liang) and does not deserve to be read. I implore you to allow me to write a rhapsode about the Son of Heaven's wandering and hunting. I will submit it after finishing it.'" Shiji, Volume 117, 3002; Hanshu, Volume 57a, 2533. The phrase *shangdu zixufu* (the emperor reads the *Rhapsode of Zixu*) is the sole direct reference to the emperor as a reader in *Shiji* if this phrase has already existed in Sima Qian's original writing (Kern (2003): 308) This phrase sets the emperor as an imagined reader and audience of rhapsode. Moreover, this episode resembles Sima Qian's writing on the late Warring States political philosopher Hanfeizi on how the Qin king discovers Hanfeizi's talents after reading his treatises (Shiji, Volume 63, 2155). Also common to Sima Xiangru and Hanfeizi is that both of them have the problem of stuttering (*kouchi*) (Shiji, Volume 117, 3053; Shiji, Volume 63, 2146). The stuttering may be a literary topos; yet, this aspect may lead Sima Xiangru to transform *fu* from a relatively low-register performative genre into a high-register literary genre (for another *fu*-writer Mei Sheng's *fu* performance similar to the jester, see *Hanshu*, Volume 51, 2336-7).

²⁶⁸ For relevant discussion, see Chin (2014): 88-91. This transition indicates shifting literary patronage from the local to the imperial center in conjunction with the centralization of imperial power during Emperor Wu's time, Xu (2008): 128-34; Wu (2008): 20. The literary patronage of Liu An, King of Huainan, in the southeast is the most notable example of local patronage, see Kern (2014): 124-50.

²⁶⁹ As Sima Qian highlights, Lü feels shame that Qin did not have a similar institution of clientship as Wei, Chu, Zhao, and Qi, Shiji Volume 85, 2510.

²⁷⁰ "(The volumes of work written on bamboo strips) are displayed at the gate of Xianyang while hanging one thousand of gold above them. The traveling literati and clients from various states are invited to add or delete one character; once they do so, they will be awarded one thousand gold." Shiji, Volume 85, 2510.

of Lü Buwei, Sima Qian displays the possibility of mercantile patronage as a substitute for political patronage.²⁷¹

In Sima Qian's famous letter to the Sichuan governor Ren An, he lists several "authors" whose literary productions are contingent upon their sufferings as a reference to his own composition of *Shiji*. In particular, Sima Qian mentions Lü Buwei and notes that: "Only after Buwei's (forced) migration to Shu (Sichuan) did the world transmit the work of Lülan."²⁷² As another anecdote about Lü,²⁷³ the picture Sima Qian presents is consistent with the trajectory of the Zhuo family. While not acknowledging Qin's forced immigration to Sichuan as part of Qin's colonial initiative, Sima Qian imagines the land of Sichuan as a place of individual opportunity.

Nevertheless, in Sima Qian's portrayal, although the Zhuo family manages to rebuild its family fortune in Sichuan, they fail to convert their economic capital into cultural capital when Wenjun falls in love with Xiangru. When Sima Qian emphasizes that the hunting park in the family of Zhuo is comparable to a royal park, he entertains the possibility that Xiangru could write a rhapsode to glorify the family wealth of his father-in-law but his literary talent is eventually channeled to the imperial court.²⁷⁴

The biography of Sima Xiangru is arguably the most meta-poetic piece in *Shiji*: Sima Qian undertakes literary criticism by setting up Xiangru as his antithesis.²⁷⁵ At a time when

²⁷¹ For Lü's literary patronage, Vankeerberghen (2010): 477; Klein (2018): 29-30.

²⁷² Hanshu, Volume 62, 2735.

²⁷³ *Shiji*, Volume 85, 2512. Yet, the excavation of weapons bearing the name Lü Buwei from Sichuan testifies to this deportation, Li (1979): 17; Huang (1992): 93-5.

²⁷⁴ They are eventually so rich that they have one thousand servants. Their pleasure in hunting in mountain and river is comparable to royalty." *Shiji*, Volume 129, 3277.

²⁷⁵ Sima Qian's preface comments on Xiangru as follows: "The story about Zixu and the rhapsode is over-flamboyant and full of exaggerations. Yet, the rhapsode still takes the function of imperial persuasion and returns to non-action. I thus compose the Biography of Sima Xiangru as the fifty-seventh biography." (*Shiji*, Volume 117, 3073.) In the preface, Sima Qian provides a rationale for composing every *Shiji* chapter in this way. What is unique to his characterization of the biography of Sima Qian has to do with a strong literary critic component in it. He

he had lost imperial favor, as will be discussed, Sima Qian's interest in the merchant is meant to explore an alternative form of literary patronage. The importance of the Zhuo family arises from their mercantile background and their participation in transregional economic exchange outside the state's control. Although Sima Qian highlights the appearance of Sichuan goods in the Bactrian bazaar, his account of Sima Xiangru and the Zhuo family is about what happens "backstage." Sima Xiangru's mission for Emperor Wu is to teach the Sichuan people, who are exhausted from the southwestern campaign, that they should collaborate with the imperial enterprise of the "western campaign" (*xizheng*).²⁷⁶ As mentioned, Emperor Wu's interest in the southwestern campaign, according to Sima Qian's representation, ultimately has to do with his aim to reach Bactria.²⁷⁷

Bactria and Sichuan maintain unofficial economic links in Sima Qian's account, but they are subject to two different economic systems: nomadic loose control versus sedentary centralization. According to Sima Qian, in contrast with Bactrian merchants who may continue to undertake commerce with India, Sichuan merchants faced increasing imperial intervention in the course of the emperor's southwestern campaign. Zhuo Wangsun's eventual pride for having Sima Xiangru as his son-in-law, given the latter's imperial favor, is a microcosm of this subjugation.²⁷⁸

considers the genre of rhapsode whose invention is closely entwined with Emperor Wu's imperial ideology as flamboyant. Concerning Sima Qian's statements for other biographies, we cannot find another literary critic like this. While the reference to Emperor Wu's reading of Sima Xiangru's has strong meta-poetic imagery, the biography of Sima Xiangru is the most important meta-poetic statement in *Shiji*. For comparing these two Simas, see Shen (1985): 46-50.

²⁷⁶ *Shiji*, Volume 117, 3046-7; *Hanshu*, Volume 57b, 2581. For Sima Xiangru's involvement in the southwestern campaigns, see Kong (2004): 30; Du (2009): 150-3; D. Li (2017): 37-42.

²⁷⁷ As Sima Qian highlights, Han's connection with the Dian kingdom in Yunnan is to search for *Daxiadao* (the road to Bactria), *Shiji*, Volume 123, 3166.

²⁷⁸ In the text of *Yantie lun* (Debates on Salt and Iron) recording a court debate on economic centralization or relaxing control in 80 CE, Sima Xiangru's southwestern campaign is criticized by the loose control side, *Yantielun jiaozhu*, Volume 4, 208.

Bactria thus represents Sima Qian's pondering of an alternative scenario when China is politically subjugated to the Xiongnu but culturally and economically conquers them. The emphasis on Bactria as a land of political fragmentation and economic vibrancy registers Sima Qian's nostalgia for the imagined Warring States past where great merchants are supposed to patronize literary production, as in Sima Qian's account of Lü Buwei.²⁷⁹

Parthia: China's Self-Image in the Age of Nomadic Domination

The discussion above demonstrates Bactria's role in Sima Qian's political-economic critique by revealing how the nomadic political economy illuminates the horizon of a Chinese intellectual who seeks to develop a counter-ideology during his time. This section will discuss Sima Qian's representation of Parthia. While Bactria mirrors pre-imperial China, this section shows how Parthia echoes imperial China from the Qin onward when Central Eurasian nomads brought Parthia and China together. Specifically, while Sima Qian implicitly presents an alternative model for China through Bactria, Sima Qian directly uses Parthia to undertake critics of imperial practice during Sima Qian's time concerning Emperor Wu's emulation of Parthia.

The ancient Iranian empires, from the Achaemenids to the Sasanians, influenced the imagination of despotic others in Greco-Roman and modern European thought. This discussion details Sima Qian's perception of Parthia as China's self-image when China recognized Parthia as a major power earlier than Rome did, in light of Sima Qian's *Kaiserkritik*.

²⁷⁹ The way Lü Buwei assembled *Lüshi Chunqiu* evidently inspires Sima Qian's writing. As Sima Qian recounts that *Lüshi Chunqiu* consists of eight *lan* (readers), six *lun* (treatises), and twelve *ji* (accounts), Sima Qian characterizes his *Shiji* in the preface as twelve *benji* (annals), thirty *shijia* (biographies of hereditary houses), seventy *liezhuan* (assorted biographies), four *biao* (tables), eight *shu* (books). It is well-known that Sima Qian "invents" the genre of *jizhuanti* (recounting through biographies/biography) in Chinese historiography versus the genre of *bianianti* (chronicling years/annals) attributed to *Chunqiu*. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* should be a model for Sima Qian's historical writing. In this regard, by highlighting the mercantile nature of Lü Buwei's literary patronage, Sima Qian self-consciously allies his *Shiji* with mercantile ideology instead of imperial bureaucratic ideology. *Shiji*, Volume 85, 2510. William Nienhauser discusses this resemblance, Nienhauser (2015): 471-5. Another work of a similar structure is *Huainanzi* under Liu An's patronage, see Kern (2014): 135; Du (2019): 478.

In contrast with Greco-Latin ethnography, in which Parthia is imagined as the other, Sima Qian considers Parthia as imperial China's mirror image. Nevertheless, in doing so, Sima Qian recognizes Parthia as the opposite of Bactria, the latter of which he perceived as a regime similar to idealized Warring States China.

Parthia during the second half of the 2nd century BCE is also the best-attested episode in its history, given relatively rich Greco-Latin and Babylonian accounts. Though Chinese sources are not unknown to Parthian historians,²⁸⁰ an ethnographic reading will further help gauge the impact of the Parthian empire from the 140s BCE when China recognized Parthia as a self-image given Parthia's and China's simultaneous entanglements with nomadic affairs.

As demonstrated in the previous section, Bactria represents Sima Qian's exploration of a sedentary regime under nomadic rule. Though Sima Qian does not recount Parthia's interaction with nomads,²⁸¹ the first attested Sino-Parthian diplomacy during the 110s BCE is contingent upon China's and Parthia's simultaneous dealings with Central Eurasian nomads. Before proceeding to Sima Qian's account of Parthia, I will first provide a sketch of Parthia's dealings with Central Eurasian nomads.²⁸² When Parthia expanded eastward by defeating Bactria, probably between the 150s BCE and the 140s BCE, it also inherited Bactria's existing interactions with nomads. Justin's epitome provides the best evidence concerning Parthia's hiring of "Scythian" nomads when Phraates II encountered Antiochus VII's campaign. The report goes as follows:

Post necem Mithridatis, Parthorum regis, Phraates filius rex statuitur, qui cum inferre bellum in ultionem temptati ab Antiocho Parthici regni Syriae statuisset, Scytharum

²⁸⁰ Posch (1998): 335-64.

²⁸¹ It is only mentioned in passing that Parthia is located west of Yuezhi, *Shiji*, Volume 123, 3161.

²⁸² The most important account of Parthia and Central Eurasian nomads is Olbrycht (1998). Chinese scholars have recently demonstrated increasing interest in this topic, see Wang (2020): 11-26; Wang (2022): 103-110; Yu (2022): 1-12.

motibus ad sua defendenda reuocatur. Namque Scythae in auxilium Parthorum aduersus Antiochum, Syriae regem, mercede sollicitati cum confecto bello iam superuenissent et calumnia tardius lati auxilii mercede fraudarentur, dolentes tantum itineris frustra emensum, cum uel stipendium pro uexatione uel alium hostem dari sibi poscerent, superbo responso offensi fines Parthorum uastare coeperunt.

On the death of Mithridates, king of Parthia, his son Phraates was made king. Phraates had determined to open hostilities with Syria to avenge Antiochus' attack on the kingdom of Parthia, but he was recalled to the defense of his own territory by unrest among the Scythians. These had been induced by an offer of pay to come to the aid of the Parthians against Antiochus, king of Syria; but since they arrived on the scene only when the battle was over and were cheated of their pay on the pretext that they had arrived too late with their support, they regretted having made such a long journey for nothing and demanded either compensation for their inconvenience or another enemy to fight. Receiving a disdainful response, the Scythians took offense and proceeded to lay waste Parthian territory.²⁸³

As argued by Marek Olbrycht, the passage from Justin's epitome documents the most severe crisis in Parthian history during the 2nd century BCE.²⁸⁴ According to the account, roughly around 128 BCE, Phraates II, the son of Mithradates I, hired some "Scythians" as mercenaries for his dealing with Antiochus VII's eastern anabasis. Due to their late arrival, the king decided not to pay them, which led to their rebellion and the devastation of Parthian land.²⁸⁵ After Phraates II's death at the hands of Greek captives, his uncle Artabanus II took the throne but inherited the troubled relationship with the nomads. The new king reigned briefly and died during a fight with the Tocharians in 123 BCE.²⁸⁶ Parthia's trouble with nomads was only alleviated after Mithradates II's several battles with the Scythians.²⁸⁷ This Parthian crisis in tackling the "Scythians" took place shortly after the fall of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom during the 140s BCE.

²⁸³ Just. Epit. 42.1, trans. Yardley

²⁸⁴ Olbrycht (1996): 85-91; also see Lerouge (2005): 217-52.

²⁸⁵ There can be some literary elements in this report that Parthia found an excuse for this crisis later. Yu Taishan pointed out that this incident had been linked to Yuezhi's migration to Bactria, Yu (1996): 170.

²⁸⁶ Just. Epit. 42.2

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 42.3

Two factors linked the Parthian crisis and the end of Hellenistic rule in Central Asia together. First, Phraates II's practice of hiring Central Eurasian nomads can be traced back to the practice in the Greco-Bactrian kingdom.²⁸⁸ Second, the "Scythians" who ravaged the Parthian land must be the same group of people who ended the Greco-Bactrian kingdom.²⁸⁹ Although Justin's epitome uses the generic term "Scythian" to address these nomads, the text also mentions the Tocharians, whom Artabanus II dealt with. In Strabo's report, as discussed, the ethnic group had been one of the four groups migrating to Bactria. Thus, it can be surmised that after the sack of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, some of these nomads came to Parthia to seek a new employer and did the same thing they had done in Bactria. Justin's relatively detailed report suggests the extent to which this trouble had persisted. In other words, the nomadic sack of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom did not involve Central Asia alone but had far-reaching repercussions.

Moreover, in the chapter about the Scythians, Justin even mentioned that the Scythians "founded the Parthian and Bactrian powers" (*Parthicum et Bactrianum imperium ipsi condiderunt*).²⁹⁰ This statement is an exaggerated one, but it must reflect the degree to which hiring nomadic mercenaries had an imprint on state structure in Bactria and Parthia alike. From an ethnographic point of view, this comment represents Trogus' perception of the nomadic political economic system in Bactria and Parthia.²⁹¹ While Sima Qian mentions the Yuezhi prince's addiction to the fertile land of Bactria, the report on Central Asian Scythians' economic

²⁸⁸ For the problem of Parthian mercenary, see Wolski (1965): 103-115. A document dated to the early 2nd century BCE from Yosufudhara near Bactra dating to Antimachus' time shows the process of hiring nomads, Clarysse and Thompson (2007): 276.

²⁸⁹ Wolski suggests this possibility, Wolski (1980): 242.

²⁹⁰ Just. Epit. 2.3

²⁹¹ As has been noted, Trogus Pompeius is pro-Scythian (Alonson-Nunez (1987): 67). This admiration can be related to Pompeius' Roman Gaul background when Gaul was still regarded as a barbarian province in late republican Rome, see Johnston (2017): 137-9. Also see Eggermont (1960): 97-102.

reliance on the Parthian mercenary system is a similar perception of nomadic economic dependence on a sedentary regime from a sedentary point of view.

Therefore, Parthia's active response to China's diplomatic request when Zhang Qian sent envoys to various regimes to combat the Xiongnu arose from Parthia's recognition of China as a potential ally in the fight against the nomads.²⁹² In this light, Sima Qian's representation of Parthia entails the Chinese perception of Parthia as a model for the art of being a Eurasian empire when China was expanding globally. Moreover, though Sima Qian's appreciation of Bactria may represent his own reflections on China's political economic problems, his report on Parthia, which registers China's global desire, may reflect the emperor's own view as well.

Before proceeding to Sima Qian's representation of Parthia itself, I first illustrate Sima Qian's criticism of Emperor Wu's imitation of Parthian entertainment culture. As Sima Qian recounts Sino-Parthian diplomacy during the 110s BCE:

After the Han envoys had returned, [the Parthian King] sent envoys to follow the Han envoys to come and observe the great breadth of the Han, and they presented to Han the eggs of huge birds (ostriches) and illusion-makers (or magicians) from Lixuan (Alexandria).²⁹³

This Sino-Parthian diplomatic relationship occurred in the 110s BCE during the reign of Mithridates II in Parthia.²⁹⁴ China took the initiative to send envoys to various states in the Near East and Central Asia to seek potential allies against the Xiongnu.²⁹⁵ According to Sima Qian's writing, only Parthia responded actively to this Chinese request, hosting Chinese envoys and

²⁹² Shiji, Volume 123, 3168. Though Parthia had trouble with the Yuezhi and the Sacae while the Xiongnu's domination did not extend to Central Asia, as discussed, Sima Qian emphasizes that the Xiongnu enjoyed prestige among various Central Asian states given its defeat of the Yuezhi.

²⁹³ Shiji, Volume 51, 1685, trans. William Nienhauser, slightly modified.

²⁹⁴ Posch (1998): 355-64.

²⁹⁵ "Qian took advantage [of the divisions among the Xiongnu] to divide up the assistant envoys and send them to the Great Yuan, Kangqu, the Great Yuezhi, the Great Xia (Bactria), the Anxi (Parthia), Yuandu (India), Wumi, Yutian (Khotan), and the other neighboring states." Shiji, Volume 123, 3169.

sending their envoys to China in return. Accompanying the Parthian envoys were Mediterranean performers who arrived in China. Parthia made an effort to impress Chinese envoys by showcasing their state power and landscape.²⁹⁶ Mediterranean performers' appearance among Parthian envoys indicates a similar agenda to demonstrate Parthian power in China: to show the affective power that the Parthian state could control and deploy. The designation Lixuan (Lijian) likely refers to Alexandria,²⁹⁷ and the Chinese word *shanxuan* (good at illusion) registers Chinese officials' visual experience with Mediterranean performance.

However, this Sino-Mediterranean cultural encounter is embedded within Sino-Parthian diplomacy, implying Parthian interest in Mediterranean performance culture. The Seleucids' use of entertainment to lure eastern kings who defected from Parthia may have stimulated Parthian interest in Mediterranean performance.²⁹⁸ Sima Qian's account further highlights this aspect:

Afterward, small states west of Yuan (Ferghana)---Huanqian, Dayi---and (small states) east of Yuan---Gushi, Wushen, Suxie, all visited the Son of Heaven with the Parthian envoys. The Son of Heaven was very glad about (their coming).....At this time his majesty was just taking several tours of inspection on the (eastern) sea and had foreign visitors accompany him every time. If there were great cities with numerous people, he would pass through, distributing money to reward (the visitors) and ample wine and food to richly supply them, in order to allow (the visitors) to perceive the material wealth of the Han. At these times there were great wrestling events (*da jue di*), performers of wonders and exotic goods were brought out, numerous people assembled to watch, rewards were bestowed, and there were pools of wine and forests of meat,

²⁹⁶ “Earlier, when Han envoys had reached Anxi (the Arsacids/Parthia), the King of Anxi ordered that a party of twenty thousand horsemen should be led to welcome them at the eastern border. The eastern border was several thousand li from the royal capital. As they traveled and neared arrival, they passed several dozen walled cities and the people all along were extremely numerous.” Shiji, Volume 63, 3172-3, trans. William Nienhauser, slightly modified.

²⁹⁷ Yu (2013): 21. Though they were other cities named Alexandria in the East, for Alexandria in Arachosia (today's southern Afghanistan), the Chinese rendering is Wuyishanli. Also, as to be shown, in the Chinese account of Rome, one of the Chinese names for Rome is Lijian, which is equivalent to Lixuan. Nevertheless, D.D. Leslie and K.H.J. Gardiner think it refers to the Seleucids (Leslie and Gardiner (1996): 253-4). Though this suggestion would further strengthen my argument about the Seleucid impact on Parthian performance culture, this suggestion lacks relevant phonological support.

²⁹⁸ Though Parthia could access Greek performance cultures in Bactria (Rapin (1987): 249-59; Bernard (1987): 103–115), we should avoid an essentialized understanding of Hellenism in Central Asia but Hellenism subscribes to Parthian political purpose.

allowing the foreign visitors to go around and observe the stock accumulated in each of the granaries and storehouses, causing them to see the grandeur of the Han and leave them awestruck. It was from this time that the skill of the illusion-makers was added and those in wrestling events and performances of wonders changed annually, their magnificence continuing to flourish.²⁹⁹

This passage follows Sima Qian's account of the arrival of the Mediterranean performers with Parthian envoys. Sima Qian reveals that several states near Dayuan (Ferghana or Sogdiana) also came to China with Parthian envoys. The Chinese emperor made efforts to create an affective experience for these travelers by demonstrating Chinese wealth, developing a performance culture, and arranging banquets. These measures are consistent with the way Parthian envoys impressed Chinese travelers before. Specific to China's development of entertainment culture, Sima Qian emphasizes how China enriched the existing performance represented by *juedi* (wrestling) and *qixi* (wonder-performance) by adding foreign performance *xuanzhe zhigong* (the work of illusion-makers).³⁰⁰ Although there is no direct evidence of the Chinese reaction to Mediterranean performance who came with Parthian envoys, Sima Qian's mention of the Chinese incorporation of illusion-making indicates that Chinese officials were impressed by their performance. China equally developed a foreign-oriented amusement culture to structure Central Asian travelers' experience of China, echoing Parthia's use of performance culture to display its state power.

Sima Qian undertakes a *Kaiserkritik* in writing this episode.³⁰¹ The phrase *jiuchi roulin* (wine pool and meat forest) used to describe Emperor Wu's banquet with foreign travelers particularly echoes the way Sima Qian describes King Zhòu of Shang in the late 2nd millennium

²⁹⁹ Shiji, Volume 123, 3173, trans. William Nienhauser, modified.

³⁰⁰ Shiji, 123.3173.

³⁰¹ As will be discussed, this was due to Sima Qian's castration by the emperor (Durrant et al. (2016): 23). For Sima Qian as a political dissident, see Van Ess (2016): 51-70

BCE, the archetype of an evil king in Confucian political thinking.³⁰² Yet, similar to Diodorus' and Polybius' failure to appreciate Antiochus IV's elevation of mime performers to display royal power,³⁰³ Sima Qian is also indifferent to the Chinese emperor's effort to develop China's global impact when China was unprecedentedly linked to the outside world. In particular, it was during Emperor Wu's time that imperial-sponsored public spectacles emerged.³⁰⁴ By recounting the Chinese development of entertainment culture after the Sino-Parthian diplomacy, Sima Qian indicates the motive of his Parthian writing to undertake critiques of imperial China in the time of Emperor Wu.

Sima Qian's account of Parthia goes as follows:

Anxi (Parthia) is located some several thousand *li* west of Great Yuezhi. As regards its customs, [the people] are fixed to the land and till their fields, growing rice and wheat and making grape wine. Their cities and towns are like Great Yuan. They control several hundred cities, large and small, and their territory is several thousand *li* [on a side], by far the largest of the states. They live overlooking the Gui River (Oxus), have markets, and the merchants among its people travel by carriage or ship, traveling to neighboring countries for some several thousand *li*. They use silver for their coins, and the coins have faces in the images of their kings. As soon as a king dies, they change the coins, imitating the [new] king's face on it. By means of drawing on skins in horizontal lines, they make their documents and records. To their west are the Tiaozhi (Antioch or the Seleucids), to their north there are the Yancai and the Lixuan (Alexandria or the Ptolemies?).³⁰⁵

China recognized Parthia as a major power in the Near East and Central Asia much earlier than did Rome. The phrase *zuiwei daguo* (by far the largest of the states) reflects China's appreciation of Parthia as a major power outside China; China's recognition of Parthia as a major sedentary

³⁰² "(Zhou) hugely gathers music and drama in Shaqiu, created a pool of alcohol, hang the meat as forest, asked males and females to be naked, and they played together." Shiji, Volume 3, 105; for the evil king in Greek political thought, see Luraghi (2018): 11-26.

³⁰³ After Antiochus IV's Daphne festival in 167 BCE, the king performed mime. Plb. 30.25; Diod. Sic. 16.1; Livy. 41.

³⁰⁴ According to the imperial annals in *Hanshu*, Emperor Wu staged two public spectacles, one in 107 BCE and the other in 105 BCE, *Hanshu*, Volume 6, 194 and 198

³⁰⁵ Shiji, 123.3162, trans. William Nienhauser, modified.

regime also demonstrates China's desire to become a great power on the Eurasian stage.³⁰⁶

Unlike Sima Qian's indifference to agriculture in Bactria, the passage emphasizes Parthia's practice of agriculture and viniculture. Sima Qian shows a keen sense of the political-economic foundation of the Parthian state, concerning peasants' tilling of land, which had been recognized as the basis of the regime by the Warring States political thinkers.³⁰⁷ Although rice can be found in both Parthia and China, viniculture was a new thing absent from China. Emperor Wu's fondness for grapes exemplifies Parthia's role as a Eurasian empire.

In the imperial Chinese political economy, China faced a major dilemma from the Warring States period onward: while the growing vibrant commerce in the economic realm was praised by Sima Qian, the official ideology still prioritized agriculture. This friction between ideology and economic practice led to the *benmo* (root and branch) debate in Western Han: how to balance agriculture (*ben*, root) and commerce (*mo*, branch)?³⁰⁸ Regarding Sima Qian's representation of Parthia, we can observe a balance between agriculture and commerce. Whereas agriculture is the political economic foundation of the Parthian empire, Parthia manages to control several hundred cities, which must include Hellenistic foundations from Mesopotamia to Central Asia that Parthia inherited.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ It is interesting to compare this emphasis with Greco-Latin accounts highlighting Parthia's Scythian origin, Strab. 11.9.3. The account that Arsaces is a Scythian may derive from Parthia's experience in dealing with the Scythians in the late 2nd century BCE and Trogus Pompeius accepted this version given his pro-Scythian attitude, for the reflections on whether the Parthians were nomads, see Boyce (1994): 241-51; Hauser (2005): 163-208; Lerouge (2010): 161-168.

³⁰⁷ For the Parthian economy, see Fabian (2022): 63-4; for Warring States Chinese economic thoughts on agriculture, see Von Glahn (2022): 181-3.

³⁰⁸ Chin (2014): 55-8. Also see Wang Daqing's unique research comparing economic thoughts about the priority between agriculture and commerce in ancient Greece and China, Wang (2006).

³⁰⁹ Pilipko (2012): 109-25; Bruno (2020): 66; Olbrycht (2021): 257-74. In particular, compared with the neighboring Etek region, the Hellenistic influence was lacking in the Akhal region where Nisa is located. For urbanization in Mesopotamia and western Iran under the Parthian rule as a comparison, see Pigulevskaya (1963): 17-32.

When the phrase *zuiwei daguo* alludes to Parthia's global power deserving China's emulation, the hundreds of cities within a wide territory under Parthia's governance define Parthia's greatness. The phrase naming the Greco-Bactrian king as the king of one thousand cities in both Justin's and Strabo's writings shows the Greco-Bactrian kingdom's inheritance of Seleucid spatial politics, relying on cities to exert Hellenistic governance.³¹⁰ Parthia inherited this dynamic. In turn, this Seleucid-defined Parthian spatial politics corresponds to China's self-understanding when Qin-Han China inherited major cities during the Warring States period.

While the mention of Parthian cities only implicitly speaks of commerce in Parthia, this aspect is more evident in the following presentation of the Oxus River-centered commerce and travels. Although there is no direct evidence on the role of the Oxus River in Parthian commerce, the emphasis on the Oxus is related to three factors. The first factor is Oxus' ideological potency in the governance and perception of the eastern environment by the Seleucids and Bactria. As Seleucus I's *philos*, Patrocles' circumnavigation of the Caspian Sea aimed to connect Aral, Caspian, Black, and Mediterranean seas. This project entails the Seleucid ambition to manipulate the space that the Seleucids claimed during the Diadochi Wars by using water bodies to connect the vast space.³¹¹ Bactria inherited this ideology, as evidenced by Polybius' and Strabo's mentions of the way the Oxus makes it possible to travel to the Caspian and Black Seas.³¹² Although there is no corroborating evidence from non-Chinese sources to show Parthia's partaking of this ideology, Sima Qian's observation of the dynamic economic connection which the Oxus provided to the Parthian state is the most important evidence.

³¹⁰ For Diodotus, Just. Epit. 41.4.5; for Eucratides, Strab. 15.3.

³¹¹ Kosmin (2014): 67-76; Visscher (2020): 29-44.

³¹² Plb. 10.48; Strab. 11.4.2. For discussions, see Rapin (2009): 98-121; Olbrycht (2010): 302-309; Schneider (2016). Moreover, a Delian inscription list about a Bactrian merchant named Hysipasinous details his dedication of a Hyrcanian dog in Delos in 153/2 BCE (ID 1432, 22-27). This Hyrcanian connection indicates that Hysipasinous traveled to the Mediterranean via the Oxus River and Hyrcania. Bactrian merchants thus depended on the nomadic network to undertake their travels for commercial purposes.

In addition to empirical value, the emphasis on the relationship between empire and environment teaches the Chinese state how to be an empire. When Zhang Qian informed Emperor Wu about the late Hellenistic landscape, the emperor displayed an unusual interest in searching for the origin of the Yellow River outside the political confines of the Han state.³¹³ Unlike the Oxus River, which connected Parthia with other states, the Yellow River was only governed by the Chinese state and flowed only through the land of China.³¹⁴ Compared with the First Emperor's interest in the eastern Chinese sea given his frequent travels there,³¹⁵ Emperor Wu's zeal to search for the origin of the Yellow River was a way to strengthen China's outside connections and echo the First Emperor's search for the eastern isles in the eastern China sea. In this light, Parthia's manipulation of the Oxus River was a model for how a future Chinese empire of the Eurasian horizon would deal with the natural environment by employing it for commercial purposes when Chinese imperial authorities believed that the search for the origin of the Yellow River would link China to the outside world.

Sima Qian's report suggests that the Parthian state also harnessed a commercial network similar to Bactria, but with one crucial difference: Parthia manipulated the economy under royal control. The Chinese knowledge of Parthian coins bearing kings' images is the earliest testimony to Chinese knowledge of Hellenistic-type coins. The emphasis on kings' coins indicates royal intervention in the economy.³¹⁶ From a Hellenistic perspective, by focusing on royal images on Parthian coins, the Chinese report captures an important ideological function of

³¹³ Shiji, Volume 123, 3173.

³¹⁴ See Ruth Mostern's recent environmental historical account of the role of the Yellow River, Mostern (2016): 121-47.

³¹⁵ Wang (2021): 416-31.

³¹⁶ For coinage and Hellenistic royal economy, see Aperghis (2004): 213-46. Tamara Chin notices this aspect but attributes the Chinese comment that foreigners between Parthia and Dayuan have no knowledge of striking coins to the Parthians, Chin (2014): 259-60.

Hellenistic-type coins in disseminating royal images, to make the empire legible to local people.³¹⁷

This Hellenistic political culture speaks to Emperor Wu's monetary centralization of issuing the *wuzhu* money while forbidding other forms of currency.³¹⁸ While China did not strike royal images on coins until Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), whose coins were mocked as *yuandatou* (Yuan's fat heads), its awareness of Hellenistic coins, which bear royal images, aligns with the Han dynasty's ongoing monetary centralization. Above all, unlike Bactria in Sima Qian's portrait, Parthia displayed commerce under royal control, economically signaling the art of being an empire for Han China.

Returning to Sima Qian's contrasting depictions of Bactria and Sichuan, these two regions displayed two economic modes under nomadic and centralized rule, despite maintaining economic connections. Similarly, Parthia and Bactria had similar differences. Bactrian merchants enjoyed their agency in trading with India. They were real heroes in Bactria. In contrast, Sima Qian equally mentions vibrant commerce in Parthia but emphasizes royal images on coins, indicating royal control of Parthian commerce. Ironically, Sima Qian's attention to Hellenistic type coins focused not on Greco-Bactrian coins but Parthian coins, while Parthian coins certainly imitated Greco-Bactrian coins.³¹⁹

Although we can attribute Sima Qian's silence on Bactrian coins to Zhang Qian's incomplete knowledge, this fragmentary information of the Hellenistic world subscribes to Sima

³¹⁷ Current research focus on Hellenistic numismatic details, while research on Alexander's image best demonstrates this cultural historical potential: for Alexander's images on coins, see Arnold-Biucchi (2006); for general research involving coins, see Stewart (1994).

³¹⁸ Chin (2014): 230-42; Von Glahn (2022): 116-7. Cf. Alain Bresson's comparative research on western-type coins deriving from Lydia and Chinese style coins, see Bresson (2021): 289-303.

³¹⁹ Bernard (1984): 107-114. Moreover, the Seleucid satrap in Media Timarchus also consciously borrowed the existing cultural resources from the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to construct his kingship. Scholars have demonstrated the similarity between Timarchus' and Eucratides' coins (Chrusbasik (2016): 221-223). Like Eucratides, the image of Timarchus is helmeted and on his coin, and he styled himself as the Great king.

Qian's agenda: Bactria follows the logic of commerce, while Parthian commerce serves royal interests.³²⁰ In deliberately presenting this difference, Sima Qian further constructs Parthia as China's self-image and Bactria as its opposite. However, from an empirical perspective, we can be certain that Bactria, Parthia, and China had dynamic interactions with Central Eurasian nomads during this period. Through the lens of nomadic political economy, Sima Qian discovered Bactria as an echo of Warring States China but Parthia as an image of imperial China. Moreover, considering Sima Qian's overall framework on the nomadic-sedentary interactions, the phrase *zuiwei daguo* implies a perception that Parthia was a state free of nomadic trouble. Therefore, Bactria and Parthia presented two models for China as two major sedentary regimes on the west of the Pamir mountains.

Dayuan and China's Imperial Desire

The Chinese perception of Parthia as its own mirror took form during Sino-Parthian diplomacy when China and Parthia were facing similar nomadic challenges. Emperor Wu's Dayuan campaign between 104 and 101 BCE served the emperor's Xiongnu affairs. As I will presently show, Sima Qian's report on the way Dayuan manipulated its nomadic alliance to counter Chinese invasion shows a dynamic image of a sedentary regime subjugated to nomads, whereas his presentation of Bactria under nomadic rule is static.

In 101/100 BCE, to celebrate China's victory over Dayuan, Emperor Wu issued an edict, which Sima Qian recounts in the Xiongnu chapter:

As Han had defeated Great Yuan and created awe among the foreign states, the Son of Heaven thus intended to further block the Hu (i.e. the Xiongnu) and he issued an edict: 'Emperor Gao's humiliation in Pingcheng (under the Xiongnu) was transmitted to me.

³²⁰ In this light, we can interpret it based on two scenarios 1.) Zhang Qian brought back more knowledge of Bactria but Sima Qian selectively reports it; 2.) Zhang Qian brought back limited knowledge of Bactria and Sima Qian interpreted it based on his agenda. In general, Sima Qian's emphasis on lacking overarching political authority demonstrates the greater agency of merchants when capturing the end of Hellenistic rule in Central Asia.

During the time of Dowager Gao, the letter of Chanyu (to her) contains improper words. In the past, Duke Xiang of Qi revenged what had happened before nine generations (in his family); it is the great meaning in the Spring and Autumn Annals.³²¹

Here, Emperor Wu uses the revenge motif in *Chunqiu* to express the way this victory serves the Han royal house in revenge for the humiliation that Han's founding emperor Gaozu suffered under the Xiongnu in 204 BCE.³²² This edict provides the best evidence for imperial ideology regarding the Dayuan campaign.³²³ Moreover, this campaign is part of Han's imperial strategy of countering the Xiongnu which Han imperial authorities used the body politic metaphor "cutting off its right leg" to express.³²⁴ Under this strategy, Chinese imperial authorities considered Central Asia as Xiongnu's "right leg." Invading and conquering these regions amounted to reducing Xiongnu's economic strength.³²⁵

As will be discussed soon, in the Dayuan chapter, Sima Qian attributes the motive of the Dayuan campaign to the emperor's desire for horses. Sima Qian's report on the way Dayuan aristocrats deftly manipulate the nomadic political economic system reveals that in his

³²¹ Hanshu, Volume 94a, 3776. An interesting comparison is that Mithridates II's successful dealing with nomads is considered as a revenge for previous Parthian kings as Justin reports (*Sed et cum Scythis prospere aliquotiens dimicavit ultorqne iniuriae parentum fuit*, 42.2.5). If we trust this report as a reflection of Parthian political culture, we can identify common intellectual responses to dealing with Central Eurasian nomads between China and Parthia.

³²² Liu Bang was humiliated by the Xiongnu in Baideng in today's northern Shanxi, a usual gateway between China proper and Inner Asia, in 199 BCE. According to Sima Qian's report, Liu Bang led a campaign personally to encounter Xiongnu's invasion that year. But he fell into Xiongnu's trick and was besieged by Xiongnu's cavalry, *Shiji*, Volume 8, 422.

³²³ As discussed in the first section, the young Yuezhi king has no intention to revenge for his father's death. The revenge motif may also have contemporary relevance in relation to nomadic political culture in a Confucian veneer.

³²⁴ As a milestone in this regard, in 121 BCE, one year after Zhang Qian's return, Emperor Wu dispatched Huo Qubing to lead more than ten thousand soldiers to march the northwestern ward. The result is not only the surrender of King Hunye, the Right Sage King in charge of the Xiongnu west, but also the capture of the Hesi corridor in today's Gansu. Huo's military accomplishment brought this corridor into the Chinese imperial structure for the first time. Emperor Wu then established four counties, Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, and Dunhuang, in it (*Shiji*, Volume 50, 2909; *Hanshu*, Volume 94a, 3769; *Hanshu*, Volume 55, 2482). The *Dizhi li* (Treatise on Geography) in *Hanshu* further specifies that the corridor was the dominion of King Hunye/King Xiutu and Emperor Wu's occupation of it linked Han to Central Asia, *Hanshu*, Volume 28b, 1644-5.

³²⁵ After capturing King Hunye, the emperor tried his best to cater to King Hunye. The emperor commanded putting together twenty thousand chariots as ceremonial guards to welcome Hunye. However, the governor of Chang'an was unable to marshal so many horses so that the emperor intended to execute the governor. This incident demonstrates the extent to which Emperor Wu took Hunye seriously. The motive must lie in Hunye's trade network, *Shiji*, Volume 120, 3109.

representation of the late Hellenistic world, Dayuan is an aristocratic state compared to a centralized empire such as Parthia and a decentralized state such as Bactria. While Sima Qian shows how Bactrian commerce operates under the nomadic political economy, he pays attention to Dayuan's manipulation of its participation in the nomadic political economy under the rubric of Dayuan's aristocratic politics.

A notable feature of Sima Qian's representation of Dayuan's encounter with China's increasing aggressiveness is the collective decision-making process in the political arena. Although scholars have noticed the value of these accounts as records of an aristocratic regime in Central Asia,³²⁶ I consider them as Sima Qian's deliberative emphasis on the way in which an aristocratic regime functions.

Sima Qian presents the Dayuan king as instrumental in arranging guidance to help Zhang Qian navigate Central Asia.³²⁷ In contrast, when the emperor requests horses from Dayuan later, Sima Qian uses the phrase *xiangyumouyue* (gathering and deliberating together) to display the way Dayuan aristocrats undertake decision-making.³²⁸ Although Sima Qian considers Dayuan as a state avid for Chinese wealth, he shows Dayuan nobles' more cautious attitude when they carefully weigh various factors on whether or not it is worth taking the request from China seriously.

When Dayuan does not take this request seriously and even assassinates a Chinese envoy, China begins the Dayuan campaign. For my analysis here, by setting the Xiongnu campaign as the background, Sima Qian similarly shows Chinese officials' different attitudes

³²⁶ Wu (1984): 90-5; Wang and Ma (2022): 1-8.

³²⁷ Shiji, Volume 123, 3158.

³²⁸ Ibid, 3174. In particular, Sima Qian emphasizes their consideration of Han's trouble with Xiongnu. If this report is true, it is a valuable glimpse into how Central Asia perceived contemporary Han-Xiongnu warfare.

from the emperor when some of them consider that it would be more advisable to be focused on the Xiongnu campaign.³²⁹ Nevertheless, they could not convince the emperor but the campaign continued. As a result, since the Chinese siege in Dayuan continued for more than forty days, the Dayuan nobles had another collective meeting in which the possibility of regicide was proposed, which Sima Qian vividly presents as follows:

“ ‘The reason Han attacked Dayuan is that the king Wugua has hidden the fine horses and killed the Han envoys. If we kill king Wugua at once and bring forth the fine horses. The Han troops should disengage; if they do not disengage, then it will not be too late to fight to the death with all our might.’ The noblemen of Dayuan all considered this to be so and together they killed king Wugua and sent an envoy of the noblemen carrying his head to the Ershi general (i.e. Li Guangli) and to make an agreement that said, ‘The Han must not attack us. We will bring forth all the fine horses, let you take whichever you please, and supply the Han army with food. If you do not accept, we will kill our fine horses, moreover help from Kangqu will arrive. When they arrive, with us situated within (the city walls) and Kangqu outside them, we will give the Han army battle. The Han army should consider this carefully.’”³³⁰

The warning that *wo jinsha shanma, er Kangqu zhijiu qiezh* (once we will kill our fine horses, more help from Kangqu will arrive) is an important piece of evidence that highlights Dayuan’s role as a horse supplier to the nomadic regime Kangqu (likely in Sogdiana).³³¹ This passage reveals how Dayuan aristocrats were deft in manipulating Dayuan’s nomadic alliance to counter Chinese imperialism, similar to Alexander’s difficulty in dealing with Sogdian nobles who enjoyed nomadic connections two centuries earlier.³³²

According to Sima Qian’s report, Li Guangli discussed with Zhao Shicheng and Li Duo about the Han army’s inability to counter the Kangqu army, and they agreed to Dayuan aristocrats’ proposal that the latter would behead their king Wugua and surrender some horses to

³²⁹ Shiji, Volume 123, 3176.

³³⁰ Ibid, 3177, trans. Nienhauser, modified.

³³¹ For pasture in Ferghana, see De la Vaissière (2016): 29-30.

³³² See discussions in chapter 1.

China.³³³ This Chinese fear of Kangqu is reminiscent of Euthydemus I's warning about the nomadic threat as discussed in chapter 1. Li Guangli also concludes a similar treaty with Dayuan as Antiochus III did with Euthydemus I.³³⁴

Despite appointing one of the Dayuan aristocrats named Meicai as the new king, which symbolizes Han's domination of Dayuan, the nobles later decided collectively to depose Meicai and appointed the younger brother of the previous king to be the successor.³³⁵ By recording this incident, Sima Qian displays that Emperor Wu's Dayuan campaign was not only totally a failure, but also highlights the resilience of the aristocratic regime in Dayuan to encounter an empire from the farther east by manipulating the former's nomadic connections. In this regard, Sima Qian further shows the benefit of a sedentary regime being subjugated to a nomadic regime: they do not need to exhaust their resources to establish a strong army as Emperor Wu does, but they simply enjoy the nomadic protection.

Comparing Antiochus III's Bactrian campaign and Emperor Wu's campaign reveals the similar way in which Central Asian sedentary regimes reacted to sedentary imperial regimes by manipulating their nomadic connections. For my analysis, while Polybius considers Bactria as a mirror of Greece given Antiochus III's and Euthydemus I's successful dealing with nomads, Dayuan aristocrats' manipulation of Dayuan's nomadic alliance is a major factor in Sima Qian's presentation of how the aristocratic regime in Dayuan was more capable in navigating between different powers.

³³³ Shiji, Volume 123, 3177.

³³⁴ Ibid. The dynamic of Dayuan's supplies to Han is very similar to Euthydemus I to Antiochus III: logistic support and animals (horses or elephants)

³³⁵ Shiji, Volume 123, 3179.

Furthermore, the report on aristocrats' regicide recalls an important theme in *Chunqiu*: regicide (*shijun*). In *Chunqiu*, there are two notable regicides: the assassination of Duke Ling of Jin by Zhao Dun (607 BCE) and the assassination of Duke Zhuang of Qi by Cui Zhu (548 BCE).³³⁶ Common to both incidents is the fact that the official historians immediately recount these two incidents.³³⁷ In this light, whereas Bactria resembles China's Warring States past in Sima Qian's representation, Dayuan mirrors China's earlier *Chunqiu* past as an aristocratic regime.

Compared with Bactria and Parthia, Dayuan carries greater ethnographic potency in Sima Qian's writing. After achieving the Dayuan victory, Li Guangli was ordered to make an expedition to Mt. Tianshan from the Hesi corridor in 103 BCE to further reduce the Xiongnu influence in the west.³³⁸ This arrangement further demonstrates the way Han's dealing with Central Asia is part of Han's scheme against the Xiongnu. Meanwhile, Li Ling was also ordered to join Li Guangli's campaign but he was captured and surrendered to the Xiongnu.³³⁹ This incident mattered a lot to Sima Qian, who was ordered to be castrated by the emperor for justifying Li Ling's surrender as an ad hoc strategy, an incident that Sima Qian details in *Bao Ren An shu* (The Letter to Ren An).³⁴⁰

Sima Qian is not only a witness of Han's foreign affairs during Emperor Wu's time: Han's dealing with the Xiongnu/Central Asia directly affected his personal trajectory. In

³³⁶ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan hu*, Volume 10, 398-9; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan hu*, Volume 13, 573-4.

³³⁷ Sima Qian has a dramatic presentation of the aftermath of Cui Zhu's assassination: "The Grand Historian of Qi writes: 'Cui Zhu commits regicide of Duke Zhuang.' Cui Zhu executes him. His younger brother writes again and Cui Zhu executes him again. His much younger brother writes again and Cui Zhu eventually excuses him." (Shiji, Volume 32, 1502).

³³⁸ *Hanshu*, Volume 94a, 3777.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Volume 62, 2725-36.

the Letter to Ren An, Sima Qian regards castration as the highest humiliation.³⁴¹ He also implicitly addresses his motive for writing history by listing several pre-imperial “authors” whose writings only came about after their personal sufferings. In the first section, we discussed Lü Buwei. Regarding Confucius, Sima Qian notes that “Confucius was in distress and produced the *Annals*” (*Zhongni e er zuo Chunqiu*).³⁴² By writing about these victimized authors, especially Confucius, Sima Qian self-consciously positions himself in this long list of pre-imperial “authors”.

This aspect is crucial to understanding Sima Qian’s agenda in the *Dayuan liezhuan*. Although contemporary historians see it as naïve to attribute Han’s Central Asian campaign to the emperor’s desire for Dayuan horses, from a historiographic perspective, this emphasis resembles the ending episode in the Spring and Autumn Annals: the Duke Ai of Lu obtained a unicorn during his hunting near the capital of Lu in east China in 481 BCE.³⁴³ Sima Qian recounts this episode in the biography of Confucius:

In the fourteenth year of the Duke Ai of Lu’s reign, (when the Duke) hunted in Daye, Juzi from the Shusun family and Jushang obtained a beast and they did not regard it as a good portent. Confucius looked at the beast and said: “It is a unicorn” (the appearance of which was taken to indicate that a sage king had arisen; but the person on the throne was no sage). They kept it (nonetheless). (Confucius) said: “No longer does a map come from (The Yellow) River; no book comes from the Luo (River) (as had happened in the times of the ancient sage-kings). My time has ended.” After the death of Yan Yuan (i.e. Confucius’ favorite student), (Confucius) said: “Heaven is destroying me.” When a unicorn appeared during the western hunting, (Confucius) said: “my way has ended.” (He) sorrowfully signed: “Nobody understands me.”.....Confucius said: “Alas! Alas! Gentlemen worry that their names will be lost after their deaths. If my way cannot be put into practice, how will my name appear to future generations?” (Confucius) thus composed the (Spring and Autumn) *Annals* based on the historical records (*shiji*).....(Confucius) thus (used his historical writing) to constrain his contemporaries (politicians). The future kings would illuminate the (hidden) meaning of the critiques in

³⁴¹ Ibid, 2732.

³⁴² Hanshu, Volume 62, 28.

³⁴³ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan hu*, Volume 20, 874.

(the Annals). As long as the meaning of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* prevails, evil officials and thieving nobles will fear.³⁴⁴

This passage clearly shows that Sima Qian belongs to the “New Character classics” (*jinwen jingxue*) school.³⁴⁵ In contrast with the “Old Characters classics” (*guwen jingxue*) school’s view that Confucius was only a scholar who edited ancient documents, the “New Character classics” school not only recognizes Confucius as an original author but elevates him as an “uncrowned king” (*suwang*) who has the virtue to be a king but has no throne or name (*youde wuwei*).³⁴⁶

Regarding Sima Qian’s motive for composing the *Dayuan liezhuan*, he recounts an episode: when Emperor Wu read the Book of Changes (*Yijing*), there was a saying that “divine horses should come from the northwest,” and the emperor thus named the Dayuan horse as *tianma* (heavenly horse).³⁴⁷ From a narratological point of view, this episode is a foil for the subsequent report on the Central Asian campaign. In other words, the emperor’s reading of the Classics prompted his desire for the foreign horse. The Central Asian campaign can thus be interpreted as Emperor Wu’s “western hunting” that brought foreign horses to China. In Sima Qian’s writing, the Central Asian campaign echoes the unicorn episode in the *Annals* and especially the Gongyan commentary thereto.³⁴⁸ Furthermore, in Sima Qian’s representation of Confucius, Sima Qian mentions Confucius’s disappointment that no map or book comes from the Yellow and Luo rivers. In contrast, Sima Qian recounts in the *Dayuan liezhuan* that the emperor commissioned officials to explore the origin of the Yellow River and named the mountain in the Tarim basin which had been regarded as the origin of the River as Mt.

³⁴⁴ Shiji, Volume 47, 1942-3.

³⁴⁵ See Chen Tongsheng’s discussion of this issue from the perspective of the edition of the *Book of Odes* on which Sima Qian was taught belongs to the new characters’ school, Chen (2000).

³⁴⁶ See Anne Cheng’s concise introduction on this division, Cheng (1997): 306-10.

³⁴⁷ Shiji, Volume 123, 3170.

³⁴⁸ Also, in the Gongyang commentary on the Annals, which belongs to the “new characters classics” school, it is highlighted that the unicorn is not a Chinese beast.

Kunlun.³⁴⁹ In particular, Sima Qian emphasizes that the emperor names the mountain based on *gu tushu* (antique books and maps).

For both episodes, Sima Qian deliberately recalls the scene of Confucius' reaction to obtaining the unicorn. According to Sima Qian's interpretation, this incident directly prompts Confucius to compose the Annals. Similarly, Sima Qian's historical writing originates from his castration due to his involvement in Han's Xiongnu campaign after Li Guangli's victory over Dayuan. While Confucius is not fortunate to witness the discovery of books and maps, Sima Qian does. We can regard Zhang Qian's ethnographic report on the late Hellenistic world as such a map. Sima Qian thus consciously styles himself as the successor of Confucius.

Although the Li Ling incident after the Dayuan campaign resulted in Sima Qian's castration, which has often been taken as the personal motivation for Sima Qian's writing of *Shiji*, the Dayuan campaign, undertaken by Emperor Wu on the suggestion of Zhang Qian's report and the reading of the Classics, is a main reason grounded in a public motivation. Indeed, the campaign reveals a resemblance between Sima Qian's writing and Confucius' composition of *Chunqiu*. Moreover, Xiongnu affairs ultimately dictated the emperor's Dayuan campaign, and Sima Qian's deep intellectual engagement with this campaign, with abundant *Kaiserkritik*, further demonstrates how nomadic imperialism and Chinese response to it enriched the horizon of an intellectual who not only witnessed this dynamic but also suffered from it given his justification for Li Ling's subjugation to the Xiongnu after Li Guangli's victory in Dayuan.

³⁴⁹ *Shiji*, Volume 123, 3173.

Conclusion

For ancient historians, there is no doubt that Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire and the subsequent Greco-Macedonian rule in the former Achaemenid landscape vastly widened the horizon of Greek intellectuals. Chapter 1 uses Greek knowledge of Bactria during the Roman period based on Hellenistic imperialism as a case to explore this dynamic. In a similar vein, this chapter shows how Chinese ethnography of late Hellenistic Asia, especially Bactria, derives from Chinese engagement with the nomadic political economic system. Nomadic imperialism is less well-known to ancient historians than Hellenistic imperialism, mainly because of the scarcity of sources on nomadic imperialism from today's northeast China to Central Asia.

However, based on a re-reading of Sima Qian's *Dayuan liezhuan* as an index of Chinese knowledge of the outside world taking shape in the course of China's reaction to nomadic imperialism, this chapter demonstrates how the nomadic political economy is the basis on which Chinese knowledge of the outside world took shape, serving as an angle through which Sima Qian spoke to intellectual debates during his time. Bactria is a major lens through which Sima Qian reflects upon the relationship between nomads and sedentary regimes, especially concerning the economic connections between Bactria and Sichuan. While Sima Qian's understanding of nomadic political economy derives from a simplified view equating it with the pastoral economy, he emphasizes the value of the nomadic political economy by presenting different trajectories between merchants in nomadic Bactria and Han Sichuan. Sima Qian's account of Bactria illustrates the diverse strategies in which nomadic elites interacted with sedentary regimes. Still, Sima Qian perceived this dynamic

through the prism of the nomad-sedentary dichotomy. He uses Bactria to explore an alternative means by which China may interact with the Xiongnu, not through military campaigns but through China's advantages as a sedentary regime.

Although Sima Qian's critique of Chinese political economy during the time of Emperor Wu is only implicitly manifested in the report on Bactria, the account of Parthia more explicitly demonstrates Sima Qian's criticism of Emperor Wu's economic centralization. The way Sima Qian makes an analogy between Emperor Wu's support for foreign-oriented entertainment culture under the Parthian influence and Confucian legend about King Zhòu of Shang's indulgence in amusement reveals Sima Qian's motive of using Parthia as a regime similar to imperial China while being the opposite of Bactria. While the report on Parthia entails the way Chinese imperial elites considered Parthia as China's self-image, Sima Qian's representation of Parthian coins indirectly comments on Emperor Wu's economic centralization, a theme which Sima Qian equally illustrates in his writings on Sichuan merchants. Even though Sima Qian is silent on Parthia's relationship with nomads, our historical reconstruction allows us to paint the picture that China developed diplomacy with Parthia given the common concern with Central Eurasian nomads.

As a comparison, Sima Qian depicts Bactria as static, while another Central Asian sedentary regime, Dayuan, demonstrates a more dynamic interaction with nomads. Sima Qian provides a detailed report on Dayuan's reaction to the Chinese invasion by manipulating its role as a horse supplier to Kangqu, revealing how sedentary regimes can benefit from nomadic protection. While Sima Qian portrays China's desire for expansion through Parthia's subjugation of Syria, the actual Chinese expansion into Dayuan ends up

being a failure. Sima Qian's depiction of the failure of the Chinese campaign against Dayuan contrasts China as a sedentary regime with Central Eurasian nomads, who maintained a more dynamic interaction with Central Asian sedentary regimes.

Chapter 3 Imagining Former Hellenistic Asia through Roman Pantomime

Introduction

Plutarch famously praises Alexander's eastern conquest as a civilizing project, in part by noting that as a result of his actions, Greek tragedies are now performed in Iran and Central Asia.³⁵⁰ This approach of using performance to understand the eastern landscape can be traced back to Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Dionysus brings Dionysiac dance to the regions from western Asia Minor to Bactria.³⁵¹ In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Plutarch's perception of the Far East not only repeats a traditional *topos* from classical Greek ethnography but also demonstrates the way Rome imagined former Hellenistic Asia as an entity in the post-Hellenistic period. Moreover, I will argue that the Roman theater is an institutional mechanism through which Greek ethnography of former Hellenistic Asia developed during the Roman period. As I will demonstrate, the ethnographic imagination of the east, anchored in theater performance, is an implicit means of expressing Greek ethnicity under Roman rule.

While chapter 1 demonstrated how Hellenistic imperialism in Bactria from Antiochus III's campaign to the Indo-Greek kingdoms shaped Greek ethnographic imagination of Bactria from the mid-republic to the Augustan period, this chapter shows the way Roman theaters became an institutional mechanism through which Greek residents in the Roman empire perceived the former Hellenistic landscape in the post-Hellenistic period. This discussion comprises three case studies: the performance of the story of Cleopatra at the Alexandrian theater during the second half of the 1st century CE, knowledge of the Parthian empire through the Aphrodisian theater as impacted by popular narrative from Parthian Seleucia during the

³⁵⁰ Plut. *De fort. Alex.* 328C–329D

³⁵¹ Eur. *Bac.* 12-23. For choreographic imagery of both two passages, see Curtis (2017): 6 and 64.

second half of the 1st century CE, and a representation of Parthia and India through Apollonius' eastern journey based on the existing dynamic of wandering performers from the Mediterranean to the East during the 3rd century CE.

Although these three case studies are not exhaustive, they provide snapshots of the way in which theater performances served as a vehicle for perpetuating and spreading Greek imagination of post-Hellenistic Asia in conjunction with imperial Rome's engagement with the East, whether the trans-continental network mediated by Parthia or the maritime experience as represented by the Indian Ocean trade. While the issue of how classical Greece's interactions with the outside world, including the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Black Sea, influenced ethnographic imaginations in classical Greek theater performances has been extensively discussed,³⁵² similar problems in imperial Roman theater have been largely overlooked, despite Rome's deeper engagement with the East compared with classical Athens.³⁵³ The only exception is research on the Charition mime, which recounts the story of a Greek girl named Charition's trafficking from Egypt to India and reveals how the Indian Ocean trade structured the ethnographic imagination of India at a local theater in Roman Egypt.³⁵⁴

Overall, much less scholarly attention has been paid to the imperial Roman theatrical imagination of the East due to fewer surviving sources on Roman pantomime than classical Greek tragedy and comedy plays. Nonetheless, pantomime was the most important performance genre in the Roman empire and gained much wide popularity as an empire-wide sensation.³⁵⁵ As

³⁵² Long (1986); E. Hall (1989); Griffith (1998): 22-86; Vasunia (2001): 33-74; Miller (2004): 248-57; Derbew (2022): 66-97.

³⁵³ Nevertheless, similar research exists in republican Roman comedy, Richlin (2005): 9-29; (2017): 351-86; (2018): 51-73; Deepti (2020).

³⁵⁴ E. Hall (2010): 224-50; E. Hall (2013): 69-91; Tsitsirdis (2010): 184-232.

³⁵⁵ Ismene Lada-Richards' work highlights this aspect, Lada-Richards (2007); Lada-Richards (2009): 285-314. For pantomime as a vehicle of transmitting Greek culture, see Garelli (2007). For pantomime in late antiquity, see Webb (2008).

I will demonstrate, it is still possible to research how Rome's eastern engagements were staged and imagined in pantomime-dominated Roman theaters. Part I shows how Roman and Chinese convergent views on Bactria arose from imperial encounters across Eurasia from the 2nd century BCE onward, while Part II explores how pantomime-dominated Roman theater was an institutional mechanism of Greco-Chinese ethnographic imaginations of the trans-Eurasian network from the Mediterranean to China.

Foreshadowing the next chapter on how wandering Mediterranean performers contributed to the Chinese utopian view of the Mediterranean, this chapter explores how Roman pantomime performance played a crucial role in Greek imagination of the former Hellenistic landscape as a unified entity in the imperial Roman context. While literary scholars raised an important point that pantomime is an overlooked phenomenon in Roman culture that deserves more serious research, Part II aims to write Roman pantomime into cultural history by highlighting its role in mediating both Rome's and China's ethnographic imagination in the context of both regimes' trans-Eurasian communication.

Scholars usually rely on the 2nd century-treatise *De Saltatione* (On Dance) by Lucian as the benchmark to understand pantomime, as it is the most systematic writing on Roman pantomime. However, it is inconceivable for pantomime to have remained unchanged from its debut in Augustan Rome to Lucian's time during the second half of the 2nd century CE.³⁵⁶ Moreover, while scholars have demonstrated a keen sense of Lucian's discursive construction of pantomime by examining how he explores the social status of sophists from the lens of

³⁵⁶ Amy Koenig has a reflection on this problem in using Lucian to examine earlier development of pantomime: "This is particularly when one's aim (as here) is not to reconstruct a performance itself, but to examine the potentially pantomimic qualities of a literary text. It should be noted, as with Lucian above, that the authors in question hail from a great variety of times and places within the Empire; the evidence we are dealing with unfortunately represents an all-too-small sampling of views spanning a broad chronological period." (Koenig (2020): 323).

pantomime dancers,³⁵⁷ a more historical understanding of Lucian's treatise on pantomime dance remains to be done.

In conjunction with the agenda in this chapter, it is argued that the background of Lucian's writing of *De Saltatione* is the increasing importance of dance in pantomime performance during the 2nd century CE, which was related to the social status of Greek sophists in imperial Rome. A fundamental aspect that escapes from the attention of pantomime scholars is that *De Saltatione* is not a text justifying pantomime as a whole but a text arguing that dance is the defining feature of pantomime performance by downplaying the role of music and performers' visuality.

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully examine how dance became more important in pantomime performance, this historical understanding of Lucian helps appreciate more nuanced aspects of Roman theaters in 3rd-century Greek ethnographical imaginations. As demonstrated, it is only in the 3rd century CE that we can observe how dance becomes the major vehicle for imagining eastern developments. The major case presented is the 3rd-century portrayal of the 1st-century Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius based on the existing image of a wandering pantomime performer.

While the discussion of Philostratus will occupy section 3, sections 1 and 2 will examine earlier ethnographic imaginations anchored in Roman pantomime imagery. In the first section, it is shown how pantomime music is the major means for the ethnographic imagination of the East by reading the first century CE orator Dio Chrysostom's speech to Alexandrians and Plutarch's account of Cleopatra together. As I will show, music not only dictated the multilingual audiences' (from Syria to Bactria) experience at the Alexandrian theater but also constituted a

³⁵⁷ Lada-Richards (2005): 335-57; Schlapbach (2009): 314-37; Schlapbach (2018): 169-200.

major means for them to conceive of Alexandria's eastern connections. Similarly, as I will demonstrate in the second section, the 1st-century Greek novelist Chariton uses the infrastructure of theater, which is a place of sexual encounters, in Aphrodisias to conceive Roman state power in Asia Minor by imagining Rome as Bactria through the character Mithridates, a Bactrian who governs Caria, where Aphrodisias is located. As I will argue, through this implicit negotiation with the Roman state power, former Hellenistic Asia was reimagined in theater-mediated literary representation in Aphrodisias.

Furthermore, despite variations in the theatrical aspects of Greco-Roman knowledge of the East across two centuries, what connects the three sections is Hellenic residents' engagement with Roman imperialism through ethnographic imaginations of the East conveyed through theater. Ruth Webb notes that pantomime performance originated from Hellenic diasporic experience in Italy.³⁵⁸ According to the traditional understanding, the arrival of two pantomime dancers, Pylades from Cilicia and Bathyllus from Alexandria, in Rome in 22/21 BCE marked the beginning of imperial pantomime. While we must be cautious of its aetiological nature,³⁵⁹ attributing the origin of imperial pantomime to two Hellenic artists from the Roman East sheds light on how pantomime was associated with Hellenic culture under the Roman empire.

In this light, when demonstrating Greek imagination of the former Hellenistic lands in the Roman period, I also attend on the issue of how relevant ethnographic imaginations under examination represent a negotiation of Hellenic identity under Roman rule. This aligns

³⁵⁸ Webb (2007): 244.

³⁵⁹ While acknowledging the general reliability, Ismene Lada-Richards mentions in passing that the account of Pylades' and Bathyllus' arrivals in Rome has mythic features (Lada-Richards (2007): 19). As a comparison, these pantomime performers' arrival in Rome sounds very similar to the so-called Athenian philosopher-ambassadors' arrival in Rome in 155 BCE, marking Rome's first exposure to Greek philosophy (Cic. *De or.* 2.155). For doubts, see Powell (2013): 219-47.

with Simon Goldhill's classic inquiry of "being Greek under Rome."³⁶⁰ My focus emphasizes that living as "Greeks" under the Roman empire was a dynamic process of "becoming" rather than a static and essentialized "being." As research on ancient Greek ethnicity has shown that Greek ethnicity is a relative minority identity,³⁶¹ my discussions will further contribute to an understanding of how Hellenic identity is dynamically negotiated through the institutions of Roman theater by imagining the east.

Staging Cleopatra in Alexandria and the Indian Ocean Context

One clear example of how pantomime performance reflected Rome's participation in the trans-Eurasian network during the second half of the 1st century CE is staging Cleopatra in Alexandria. Plutarch's writing on Cleopatra, with emphasis on Alexandria's eastern connections, is thought to derive from a real pantomime libretto.³⁶² Additionally, the speech to Alexandrians by Plutarch's contemporary Greek orator Dio Chrysostom provides insights into the Alexandrian theater as a means of shaping various eastern audiences' experience with Alexandria through the city's Indian Ocean connection. Examining Plutarch's writing on Cleopatra in light of Dio's speech demonstrates how staging Cleopatra at the Alexandrian theater represents the way the former Hellenistic landscape was imagined in the Roman period. This imagination also shows how the Alexandrians positioned themselves within the Roman imperial system by revisiting the founding moment of the Roman empire.

³⁶⁰ Goldhill (2001): 1-26.

³⁶¹ Vlassopoulos (2015): 1-13; Borg (2016): 213-34; Mazurek (2022): 13-5. In particular, post-colonial theories, especially the notion of mimicry by Homi Bhaba, have joined debates on Greek ethnicity under Roman rule to highlight the marginalized status of the Greeks under Roman governance, see Jolowicz and Elsner (2022): 1-26. In making this argument, recent scholars implicitly revise the classical scholarship by Jonathan Hall which lacks a dimension that Greek ethnicity is a marginalized identity, even though Hall strongly argues that Greek identity originally occurred at the peripheries (Hall (2005): 90-124). Meanwhile, Hyun Jin Kim helpfully mentions that Greek identity originated from Asian Greeks under Persian rule (Kim (2013): 25-48).

³⁶² Swain (1992): 76-82.

Dio Chrysostom's speech to Alexandrians is an important testimony to the way Alexandrian theater mediated global audiences' experience with the Mediterranean world. As regards global audiences at the theater, the passage from the speech goes as follows:

ἀλλ' ἐν ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις. ὁρῶ γὰρ ἔγωγε οὐ μόνον Ἑλληνας παρ' ὑμῶν οὐδ' Ἴταλοὺς οὐδὲ ἀπὸ τῶν πλησίων Συρίας, Λιβύης, Κιλικίας, οὐδὲ τοὺς ὑπὲρ ἐκείνους Αἰθίοπας οὐδὲ Ἄραβας ἀλλὰ καὶ Βακτρίους καὶ Σκύθας καὶ Πέρσας καὶ Ἰνδῶν τινάς, οἱ συνθεῶνται καὶ πάρεισιν ἐκάστοτε ὑμῶν.

....but in the presence of all human beings. Among you, I see not merely Greeks and Italians and people from neighboring Syria, Libya, Cilicia, nor yet Ethiopians and Arabs from more distant regions, but even Bactrians and Scythians and Persians and some Indians, and all these help to make up the audience in your theatre and sit beside you on each occasion.³⁶³

The governing concept of this speech is the Alexandrians' unusual penchant for popular performance. Dio argues that citizens of such a metropolis ought to pay more attention to intellectual pursuits. This speech reveals Dio's anxiety about the cultural elite's status when facing the spectacular success of pantomime performers in his time.³⁶⁴ In this passage, Dio reminds the Alexandrians that they ought to care about their image due to the global connections of the city. Dio mentions a number of ethnic groups, dividing them into three levels: the Mediterranean people, the neighboring people, and the people from farther east, including the Bactrians and the Indians. Dio also mentions Alexandria's active engagement with the Indian Ocean in an earlier part of this speech.³⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Dio describes how these people may experience popular culture in

³⁶³ Dio Chrys.*Or.* 32.40, trans. Lamar Crosby, slightly modified.

³⁶⁴ Although Dio's engagement with popular culture has been noticed, this speech is an untapped document for pantomime during the imperial period (Lada-Richards (2007): 136-41; Lada-Richards (2009): 295). In my view, this speech ought to be considered as important as Lucian's *De Saltatione* and Libanius' Oration 64 as sources for pantomime performance. Dio's early experience in his hometown of Prusa may account for his bias toward the masses; see Barry (1993): 82-103. For a general historical account of Dio, see Jones (1978).

³⁶⁵ Dio Chrys.*Or.* 32.36; in the later part of the speech, Dio also alludes to the practice of checking travelers' background on the port, Dio Chrys.*Or.* 32.96.

Alexandria:

ὥστε ὑμεῖς μὲν ἀκούετε ἑνός, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, κιθαρῳδοῦ, καὶ τούτου συνήθους, ἀκούεσθε δὲ ὑπὸ μυρίων ἐθνῶν οὐκ ἐπισταμένων ὑμᾶς, καὶ ὄρατε μὲν τρεῖς ἢ τέτταρας ἠνιόχους, ὀρᾶσθε δὲ ὑπὸ τοσούτων μὲν Ἑλλήνων, τοσούτων δὲ βαρβάρων.

Therefore, by chance, while listening to a harpist, you are listened to by a multitude of ethnic groups who do not know you; while watching three or four chariots, you are watched by so many Greeks and so many barbarians.³⁶⁶

In this passage, Dio presents a vivid picture: when the Alexandrians watch the performance of a harpist, they are observed by all kinds of people from all over the world. Since Dio purports to warn the Alexandrians about their global image, he deliberately differentiates the Alexandrians from the other people by contrasting ἀκούετε and ἀκούεσθε. What these references imply, however, is that in reality, all of these people listen to the performance in the theater at the same time. The phrase ἐνός...κιθαρῳδοῦ is a particularly striking suggestion that people from different parts of the world share the same soundscape.³⁶⁷ Although people speak different languages, they enjoy the same Mediterranean music together. A global soundscape is thus created at an Alexandrian theater. In this way, Dio also indicates how a pantomime-defined Alexandrian theater was experienced by its audiences on the phenomenological level.³⁶⁸

To further emphasize Alexandria's global image, Dio mentions that the foreign people may transmit their perception of Alexandria to their homelands:

τί οὖν οἴεσθε τούτους ἐπὶ γῆς πέρατα ἐλθόντας λέγειν; οὐχ ὡς πόλιν εἶδομεν τὰ μὲν ἄλλα θαυμαστὴν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεαμάτων πάντων κρεῖττον θέαμα...μαιομένην δὲ ὑπὸ ᾠδῆς καὶ δρόμων ἵππικῶν καὶ μηδὲν ἄξιον πράττουσαν ἐν τούτοις ἑαυτῆς; οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι θύοντες μὲν εἰσι μέτριοι καὶ βαδίζοντες καθ' αὐτοὺς καὶ τᾶλλα πράττοντες ὅταν δὲ εἰς τὸ θέατρον εἰσέλθωσιν ἢ τὸ στάδιον, ὥσπερ φαρμάκων αὐτοῖς ἐκεῖ

³⁶⁶ Dio Chrys.*Or.* 32.40.

³⁶⁷ For the idea of soundscape, see Butler and Nooter (2019): 1-12.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Naomi Weiss' discussion of the phenomenology of classical Greek theaters, Weiss (2020): 330-67.

κατορωρυγμένων, οὐδὲν οἶδασι τῶν προτέρων οὐδὲ αἰσχύνονται λέγειν ἢ ποιεῖν ὅ τι ἂν αὐτοῖς ἐπέλθῃ.

Do you consider what these people say after going beyond the end of the earth? Not as “we know this city is marvelous in other aspects and the view is better than all other human scenes”...but “(the people) are mad about music and chariot race. They do nothing worthy in these things. Therefore, only a moderate number of people go to sacrifice by themselves and do other things. Whenever they enter the theater or the stadium, they forget about the previous time, just like they are spoiled by drugs there, and they feel no shame to say or do whichever thing occurs to them.”³⁶⁹

When Dio mentions γῆς πέρατα, he highlights the fame of Alexandria in faraway lands. The focus thus implicitly falls upon people from Bactria and India by highlighting the edge of the earth. Dio’s mention of the visitors’ reaction indicates an assumption among the Alexandrians that these visitors will tell of their experiences in Alexandria after returning home. However, Dio evidently regards these visitors as allies who share his resentment of popular performances.³⁷⁰ In contrast, the underlying social reality must be that these visitors enjoyed watching popular performances in Alexandria. Just as they were impressed by the grandeur of Alexandria, they must have been impressed by the city’s vibrant popular culture.³⁷¹ Alexandria was a “pop city” in antiquity, an image that was disseminated along the Indian Ocean.³⁷²

Dio’s speech provides valuable insights into the functioning of the theater as a mechanism that brought together people from vast geographical regions in the city of Alexandria during the second half of the 1st century CE. This global connection of the Alexandrian theater, as revealed by Dio’s speech, influenced the performance of Cleopatra in Alexandria, as hinted at in Plutarch’s account of this Greco-Macedonian queen. In current historiography, Plutarch’s writing on Cleopatra, particularly the episode of Antony’s donation to Alexandria, has been

³⁶⁹ Dio Chrys.*Or.* 32.41, trans. Lamar Crosby, slightly modified.

³⁷⁰ For the image of Alexandria in Greek literature during this period, see Trapp (2004): 113-32.

³⁷¹ This is similar to the ways China tried to impress foreign audiences during the 110s BCE, as we discussed in chapter 2.

³⁷² For an interpretation of popular culture and image-making in antiquity, see Gilhuly (2017).

approached as empirical evidence of late Hellenistic history.³⁷³ However, as I will demonstrate, Plutarch's story of Cleopatra can also serve as evidence for how Alexandria imagined its position *vis-à-vis* the East in the Indian Ocean network, particularly in terms of performance imagery.

As far as the Indian Ocean context is concerned, the episode of Cleopatra's attempt to flee to the East via the Indian Ocean after losing the Battle of Actium and sending her son Caesarion to India via Ethiopia reveals this aspect.³⁷⁴ Although we cannot discount the possibility that Plutarch writes this as a matter of fact, given that Egypt was well-linked to the Indian Ocean world during her time, the following description of Cleopatra's multilingual talents contains a strong musical, particularly pantomime, imagery:

ἡδονὴ δὲ καὶ φθεγγομένης ἐπῆν τῷ ἤχῳ· καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν, ὥσπερ ὄργανόν τι πολύχορδον, εὐπετῶς τρέπουσα καθ' ἣν βούλοιτο διάλεκτον ὀλίγοις παντάπασι δι' ἔρμηνέως ἐνετύγγανε βαρβάρους, τοῖς δὲ πλείστοις αὐτὴ δι' αὐτῆς ἀπεδίδου τὰς ἀποκρίσεις, οἷον Αἰθίοψι, Τρωγλοδύταις, Ἑβραίοις, Ἄραψι, Σύροις, Μήδοις, Παρθυαίοις.

There was sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased, so that in her interviews with Barbarians she very seldom had need of an interpreter, but made her replies to most of them herself and unassisted, whether they were Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes or Parthians.³⁷⁵

Plutarch's vivid portrayal of Cleopatra's multilingual talents has drawn scholarly attention to interpreting how she could master these linguistic competencies.³⁷⁶ However, the strong musical imagery in this portrait has gone unnoticed. As discussed, Dio vividly demonstrates how pantomime music created a global soundscape at the theater of Alexandria. Similarly, the presentation of Cleopatra's multilingual talent reflects the multilingual audiences' experience

³⁷³ Roller (2011): 99-101; Van Wijlick (2021): 136-9. Christopher Pelling's systematic reflection is still the best guide for the historical approach to Plutarch, with eyes on literary nuances, Pelling (2002).

³⁷⁴ Plut. Ant. 69.2; 81.2

³⁷⁵ Plut. Ant. 27.3-4, trans. Bernadotte Perrin

³⁷⁶ Pelling (1988): 191; Kleiner (2005): 27; Roller (2011): 46-7

with watching the episode of Cleopatra at the Alexandrian theater. By likening Cleopatra's tongue to a stringed instrument,³⁷⁷ the passage above reveals how pantomime performance transcends linguistic boundaries.

As Plutarch's near contemporary writer, the grammarian Quintilian praised pantomime performance as representing a truly universal language.³⁷⁸ The sentence εὐπετῶς τρέπουσα καθ' ἣν βούλοιτο διάλεκτον ὀλίγοις παντάπασι δι' ἑρμηνέως ἐνετύγχανε βαρβάροις in Plutarch's presentation of Cleopatra similarly illustrates the universal nature of pantomime performance when the dancer acted as Cleopatra, accompanied by pantomime music.³⁷⁹ This performance made the story of Cleopatra comprehensible to multiethnic audiences sitting at the Alexandrian theater, without the need for interpretation. Although the list of ethnic groups related to Cleopatra's multilingual talents does not include Bactria and India, they are roughly correspondent to the list of people in Dio's speech.³⁸⁰ In this light, even though the emphasis on Cleopatra's fleeing to the Indian Ocean does not have performance imagery, it still demonstrates the way Alexandria imagined its position vis-à-vis the East in the Indian Ocean network. This imaginary is consistent with Dio's stress on Alexandria as an Indian Ocean metropolis. Additionally, Cleopatra's multilingual talents, which range from Ethiopian to Parthian, highlight her embodiment of the former Hellenistic landscape.

A similar dynamic where ethnographic imagination and performer interact can also be found in the episode of the donation in Alexandria as follows:

³⁷⁷ Dio highlighted the role of harp, which is a stringed instrument, in creating a soundscape for global audiences at the Alexandrian theater, which should be a major stringed instrument in pantomime performance (cf. Molloy (1996): 76). As an echo, Lucian describes pantomime music polyphonous with stringed instruments (De. Salt. 2 and 72).

³⁷⁸ *ut in tanta per omnis gentes nationesque linguae diversitate hic mihi omnium hominum communis sermo videatur*, Quint. Inst. 11.3.87. The same linguistic metaphor goes to a pantomime dancer from the Codex Salmasianus, *tot linguae quot membra viro* (Paris 10318).

³⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the focus dwells on music instead of dance. As will be shown in the third section, only until the 2nd century CE that when the dancing body has drawn sufficient intellectual attention.

³⁸⁰ The overlapping groups are Syrians, Ethiopians, Arabians, and Iranians (Persians or Medians/Parthians).

He was hated, too, for the distribution which he made to his children in Alexandria; it was seen to be theatrical and arrogant, and to evince hatred of Rome (τραγικὴν καὶ ὑπερήφανον καὶ μισορρώμαιον φανεῖσαν). For after filling the gymnasium with a throng and placing on a tribunal of silver two thrones of gold, one for himself and the other for Cleopatra, and other lower thrones for his sons (ἐμπλήσας γὰρ ὄχλου τὸ γυμνάσιον καὶ θέμενος ἐπὶ βήματος ἀργυροῦ δύο θρόνους χρυσοῦς, τὸν μὲν ἑαυτῷ, τὸν δὲ Κλεοπάτρα, καὶ τοῖς παισὶν ἑτέρους ταπεινοτέρους), in the first place he declared Cleopatra Queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya, and Coele Syria, and she was to share her throne with Caesarion. Caesarion was believed to be a son of the former Caesar, by whom Cleopatra was left pregnant. In the second place, he proclaimed his own sons by Cleopatra Kings of Kings, and to Alexander he allotted Armenia, Media and Parthia (when he should have subdued it), to Ptolemy Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia. At the same time he also produced his sons, Alexander arrayed in Median garb, which included a tiara and upright head-dress, Ptolemy in boots, short cloak, and broad-brimmed hat surmounted by a diadem. For the latter was the dress of the kings who followed Alexander, the former that of Medes and Armenians (ἅμα δὲ καὶ προήγαγε τῶν παίδων Ἀλέξανδρον μὲν ἐσθῆτι Μηδικῇ τιάραν καὶ κίταριν ὀρθὴν ἐχούση, Πτολεμαῖον δὲ κρηπίσι καὶ χλανίδι καὶ καυσία διαδηματοφόρῳ κεκοσμημένον). And when the boys had embraced their parents, one was given a bodyguard of Armenians, the other of Macedonians. Cleopatra, indeed, both then and at other times when she appeared in public, assumed a robe sacred to Isis, and was addressed as the New Isis.³⁸¹

This passage reads similarly to the episode of the judgment of Paris in Apuleius’

Metamorphoses, identified as a classical pantomime scene in imperial novels.³⁸² I contend that

this passage reveals how the former Hellenistic landscape was staged at the Alexandrian theater.

For my analysis here, the passage above indicates the visuality of pantomime performance.

While an emphasis on Cleopatra’s linguistic talents captures the aural effect of pantomime performance, this passage displays another major feature of pantomime performance: visuality

³⁸¹ Plut. Ant. 54.3-6

³⁸² For a detailed pantomime reading of the judgment of Paris episode, see May (2009): 338-62. Another similar scene in Plutarch’s writing on Cleopatra is Cleopatra’s playing of Venus and Antony’s playing of Dionysus, Plut. Ant. 26.2-3.

constructed by props.³⁸³ In particular, the phrase τραγικὴν καὶ ὑπερήφανον καὶ μισορρώμιον φανεῖσαν defines the performance as tragic.³⁸⁴

As I will demonstrate, it would be inconceivable for Plutarch to have such a detailed understanding of the unfolding of the donation, without reading this description as a guide for stage arrangement. As a performance genre based on Roman theaters, the arrangement of the stage was essential for the visual impact of a pantomime program. The passage focuses on the materiality of the successful creation of a visual impression where the gymnasium, the major space where the performance takes place, is filled with people who should be the chorus (ἐμπλήσας γὰρ ὄχλου τὸ γυμνάσιον).³⁸⁵ Two golden thrones are placed upon the silver tribune, which structure the space for the forthcoming donation (θέμενος ἐπὶ βήματος ἀργυροῦ δύο θρόνους χρυσοῦς). One throne is for Antony, the other for Cleopatra, and other thrones below the tribune are for the sons to receive the gift (τὸν μὲν ἑαυτῷ, τὸν δὲ Κλεοπάτρα, καὶ τοῖς παισὶν ἑτέρους ταπεινότερους). A throng of people, a tribune with two thrones, and other thrones below the tribune execute such an arrangement, creating a special space by materially conditioning the subsequent performance routine.³⁸⁶

Another essential element of the visuality of the performance was the performers' props. Alexander wears Median clothes and a straight tiara, while Ptolemy has a half-boot, woolen upper garment, cloak, and diadem (ἐσθῆτι Μηδικῇ τιάραν καὶ κίταριν ὀρθὴν ἐχούσῃ).³⁸⁷ Plutarch highlights that Ptolemy's dress follows that of Hellenistic kings, while Alexander's

³⁸³ When Lucian denies the significance of visuality created by pantomime performers' clothes (Luc. Salt. 64), it indicates the earlier importance of visuality in pantomime performance.

³⁸⁴ For tragic imagery in his writing on Antony, see Duff (2004): 271-91; for general, see Papadi (2007).

³⁸⁵ For chorus as revealed from the Barcelona Alcestis, which is very likely a pantomime libretto, see Hall (2009): 270-1.

³⁸⁶ Cf. Plutarch's interest in the entwinement between stagecraft and statecraft, see Harrison (2005): 53-9.

³⁸⁷ For the phenomenology of pantomime involving props, see Wyles (2009): 84-5. Also see recent discussions of the agency of props and costumes in Greek tragedy, Mueller (2016); Wyles (2020).

resembles that worn by Median and Armenian kings (αὕτη γὰρ ἦν σκευὴ τῶν ἀπ' Ἀλεξάνδρου βασιλέων, ἐκείνη δὲ Μήδων καὶ Ἀρμενίω).³⁸⁸

Plutarch attributes ethnic and cultural labels to these props when describing the process of assigning Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia to Ptolemy, and donating Armenia, Media, and Parthia to Alexander. This allocation of territories to Antony's two sons, Ptolemy and Alexander, reflects the actual political division in the first century CE. All these regions were former Achaemenid and Hellenistic territories; the eastern Mediterranean coast from Phoenicia to Cilicia was under Roman domination but Armenia, Media, and Parthia were outside Roman rule. The different ways of presenting the bodies of Ptolemy and Alexander were consistent with the political division between Rome and Parthia in Plutarch's time.³⁸⁹ Telling the story of Antony's donation during the first century CE thus served as an aetiology explaining existing political divisions of the former Hellenistic landscape by supposing an original unified space from the Mediterranean to Iran.

Although we should not dismiss the possibility that Antony's donation in Alexandria as only a later fiction, the strong theatrical imagery in Plutarch's passage demonstrates how this historical episode was reimagined when Alexandria was a global connecting point between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. It can also be inferred that staging this episode in front of multiethnic audiences from the East in Alexandria theatrically positioned Alexandria at the center of the world, a dynamic recalling the Ptolemaic procession during the time of Ptolemy II

³⁸⁸ This distinction has to do with a Roman keen sense of Iranian clothes as revealed by Plutarch's notice of the difference between Scythian and Median fashion in the *Life of Crassus*, *Plut. Cras.* 24.2-3

³⁸⁹ Plutarch's interest in Parthia must be related to the struggle in Armenia between Rome and Parthia during the time of Nero, especially evident in the writing on Armenia's betrayal of Rome by Parthia during the Battle of Carrhae. For Rome's renewed interest in Parthia during the time of Nero, most attention has been paid to Lucan's *Bello Civil*, Nabel (2019): 604-25; Serena (2020): 111-30.

in the 270s BCE.³⁹⁰ Above all, when staging a Hellenistic queen with multilingual audiences through the Hellenistic past, this performance recenters the role of Alexandria by imagining the former Hellenistic space.

Staging the story of Cleopatra and Antony, which concerns the ideological foundation of the Augustan principate, has strong political implications. As mentioned, the phrase τραγικὴν καὶ ὑπερήφανον καὶ μισορρώμιον φανεῖσαν reveals the strong theatrical element in the passage. In turn, the word μισορρώμιον suggests that Roman officials experienced this performance and understood it as anti-Roman.³⁹¹ Regarding the anecdote of how Cleopatra educates Antony, Plutarch has another similar theatrical note as follows:

οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ προσέχαιρον αὐτοῦ τῇ βωμολοχίᾳ καὶ συνέπαιζον οὐκ ἀρρῦθμως οὐδὲ ἀμούσως οἱ Ἀλεξανδρεῖς, ἀγαπῶντες καὶ λέγοντες ὡς τῷ τραγικῷ πρὸς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους χρῆται προσώπῳ, τῷ δὲ κωμικῷ πρὸς αὐτούς.

However, the Alexandrians took delight in his coarse wit, and joined in his amusements in their graceful and cultivated way; they liked him, and said that he used the tragic mask with the Romans, but the comic mask with them.³⁹²

Before this comment, Plutarch vividly portrays Cleopatra's subjugation of Antony, so that the latter wears a maiden's clothes serving the queen.³⁹³ This passage tells how Alexandrians find amusement in this enslavement. I consider this episode as the Alexandrians' reworking of Rome's stereotyped view against Cleopatra.³⁹⁴ Whereas Roman elites interpreted the story as a demonstration of Cleopatra's corruption of Roman morale, the Alexandrians perceived it as a

³⁹⁰ FGrH 627 F2=Athen. Deipno. 200 d-e. For a general discussion of this procession, see Rice (1983). For Ptolemy II's global ambition, see Marquaille (2008): 39-64. For how this procession may impact later Roman practice of amphitheater, see Coleman (1996): 49-68.

³⁹¹ As Christopher Pelling suggests, τραγικὴν is better to be translated as "theatrical" or "spectacular" instead of "tragic"; meanwhile, Pelling believes the word μισορρώμιον is Plutarch's own coinage (Pelling (1988): 250).

³⁹² Plut. Ant. 29.2, trans. Perrin

³⁹³ Plut. Ant. 26. A comparison between Plutarch's account of reverse gender relationship between Antony and Cleopatra and his writing on women/tyrannical women in *Mulierum Virtutes* would be an interesting line of inquiry, cf. Monaco-Caterine (2019): 194-208.

³⁹⁴ See chapter 1.

representation of Egypt's conquest of Rome. With regards to the changing masks of Antony, in addition to its allusion to the usual practice of changing masks in a pantomime performance,³⁹⁵ this mention suggests the targeted audiences in the different casts of staging Cleopatra in the pantomime performance. When Plutarch defines the Alexandrian donation as an anti-Roman performance, the statement shows the way this performance speaks to Roman audiences by centering Alexandria in the East. In contrast, the performance of Antony's service for the queen amused the Alexandrians.

In this regard, we can better understand Dio's concerns about the subversive power of the Alexandrian theater as follows:

καὶ νῦν οὕτως ἐπιεικεῖς ἔχοντες ἡγεμόνας εἰς ὑποψίαν αὐτοὺς καθ' ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἡγάγετε, ὥστε ἐπιμελεστέρας χρῆναι φυλακῆς ᾤθησαν ἢ πρότερον· καὶ τοῦτο εἴργασθε δι' ἀγερωχίαν, οὐκ ἐπιβουλεύοντες. ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἂν ἀποσταίητέ τινος; πολεμήσατε δ' ἂν ὑμεῖς μίαν ἡμέραν; οὐκ ἐν τῇ γενομένη ταραχῇ μέχρι σκωμμάτων ἔθρασύνοντο οἱ πολλοί, τινὲς δὲ ὀλίγοι βάλλοντες ὅ τι ἔτυχον ἅπαξ ἢ δίς, ὥσπερ οἱ καταχέοντες τῶν παριόντων, κατέκειντο εὐθὺς ἄδοντες, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ τοὺς ὄρμους ἤεσαν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἐορτῇ πιούμενοι;

And though you now have such reasonable men as governors, you have brought them to a feeling of suspicion toward yourselves, and so they have come to believe that there is need of more careful watchfulness than formerly; and this you have brought about through arrogance and not through plotting. For would you revolt from anybody? Would you wage war a single day? Is it not true that in the disturbance which took place the majority went only as far as jeering in their show of courage, while only a few, after one or two shots with anything at hand, like people drenching passers-by with slops, quickly lay down and began to sing, and some went to fetch garlands, as if on their way to a drinking party at some festival?³⁹⁶

In the previous line, Dio reflects on Alexandria's Hellenistic past, where the king and the people had a complicated relationship, and entertainment played a significant role.³⁹⁷ He then shifts his

³⁹⁵ For five masks during pantomime performance, see Luc. Salt. 66; for pantomime masks from visual evidence, see Huskinson (2009): 89.

³⁹⁶ Dio. Or. 32.71, trans. Crosby

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 32.70; for entertainment as a structuring factor between the king and the people during the Ptolemies, see the discussion of recent papyrus about the festival of the Theadelphia during the time of Ptolemy III, Chepel (2022): 159-78.

focus to Roman governance, which he characterizes as ἐπιεικεῖς. However, Dio highlights a contrast between the Roman emperors and the Alexandrians, with the former becoming more “rational” while the latter maintained their uneasy relationship with their ruler.³⁹⁸ Dio emphasizes the Alexandrians’ arrogance and how it led to the governor’s increased vigilance. Dio’s description of the people’s disturbance provides insights into the staging of Cleopatra at the Alexandrian theater. As a public event, watching pantomimic Cleopatra at a grand theater provided the Alexandrians with an opportunity to challenge Roman imperial authority.³⁹⁹

Despite the performance’s apparent portrayal of Rome’s eventual triumph over Cleopatra, it had a hidden meaning of the Alexandrians subverting Roman imperial ideology.⁴⁰⁰ The Alexandria’s dynamic economic connection with the Indian Ocean influenced its residents’ historical understanding of its Hellenistic past, specifically Antony/Cleopatra’s interactions with the East, notably Parthia, through theater. Alexandria’s participation in the Indian Ocean trade and the residents’ negotiations with Roman imperial governance were two significant factors that shaped the ethnographic imagination of the former Hellenistic landscape in the 1st century CE.

Aphrodisias: Imagining Roman Imperialism via Parthia

In a similar vein, the former Hellenistic landscape was also imagined in Aphrodisias, in Asia Minor, during the same period. However, the performance of a pantomime about Cleopatra and Antony in Alexandria, as a hidden transcript, to borrow Scott’s term, allowed Alexandrians to negotiate with Roman imperialism, whereas a more nuanced interpretation of Roman imperialism took place in Aphrodisias, located in Caria, in the

³⁹⁸ For Roman governance in Egypt, see the discussion of the Chinese perception of Rome via Roman Egypt in chapter 4.

³⁹⁹ This dynamic fits the notion of “hidden transcripts” in the guise of an official narrative by James Scott, Scott (1992): 1-16.

⁴⁰⁰ When Plutarch makes this hidden transcript become a more public transcript, it should reflect Plutarch’s own negotiation with Roman imperialism. Cf. Almagor (2022): 89-111.

southwestern part of Roman Asia Minor.⁴⁰¹ Unlike Alexandria, which was a former Hellenistic metropolis, Roman Aphrodisias was a Roman urban foundation in Asia Minor. In other words, it was a Roman city created on former Hellenistic landscape. Although the theater in Aphrodisias was a Roman creation, it did not inherit the former Hellenistic foundation. Nevertheless, as one of the best-attested theaters in the Roman East, with rich epigraphic and graffiti evidence, the theater in Aphrodisias was a microcosm of Roman imperialism in Asia Minor, with numerous masks from the theater indicating that pantomime was an important program in the theater.⁴⁰²

From an ethnographic perspective, I argue that Chariton's novel *Callirhoe* is an important document for understanding how the theater in Roman Aphrodisias mediated ethnographic imaginations of the East, during the same period when the Alexandrians subverted the Roman imperial ideology at the theater. The novel, set in the late 5th century BCE, tells the story of the Sicilian princess Callirhoe's trafficking to Persia and her husband Chaereas' travels to Persia to find her.

There are several reasons why this novel deserves attention for analysis. First, the author, Chariton, identifies himself as a judicial clerk in Caria, where Aphrodisias is located. While this self-statement is complex in terms of literary authorship, it is widely accepted that the novel's comparison between Callirhoe and Aphrodite speaks to the urban foundation of Aphrodisias when Aphrodite was its major deity.⁴⁰³ Second, among five major Greek novels, this novel contains the richest references to the East, making it relevant to the imperial Greek

⁴⁰¹ For an attempt to apply the notion of "hidden transcripts" to read the novel *Callirhoe* in relation to Aphrodisias, see Jolowicz (2022): 116-134.

⁴⁰² For a chronological account of Aphrodisias from the late Hellenistic to the early imperial period, see Ratté (2002): 5-32. For Greek cities under Roman rule involving Aphrodisias, see Millar (2006): 113.

⁴⁰³ Tilg (2010): 27-30. For implicitly claimed kinship with Aeneas via Aphrodite, see Jones (2004): 34; Whitmarsh (2013): 11-8; for local past, see Whitmarsh (2011): 27; for challenging Roman imperialism, see Jolowicz (2022): 131-2.

imagination of the former Hellenistic landscape.⁴⁰⁴ Third, the novel contains rich theatrical imagery that underpins its literary imagination.⁴⁰⁵

As I will demonstrate, Mithridates, a Bactrian who governs Caria and is one of the major protagonists in the novel, is a key figure in the intersection between the Roman ethnographical imagination of former Hellenistic Asia, Greek negotiation with Roman imperialism, and the role of theater. Two episodes in the novel are particularly noteworthy for analysis. The first episode involves Chaereas and his companions' work as slave laborers in the quarry of Mithridates' estate and Mithridates' subsequent discovery of their identities. This episode concerns the material foundation of Roman theater in Aphrodisias, as votive tablets from Aphrodisias contain information about building the theater. One inscription from the second half of the 1st century CE is particularly revealing for this purpose, which reads as follows:

“To Aphrodite and deified Augusti, the buttresses and stairways, the paving (?panelling), the blocks of seats, the vaults and all other seats (were given by Aristokles Molossos Kaikos (?), son of Artemidoros and Kaikos Papias, son of Artemidoros; Hermas supervised the work in accordance with the will of Molossos, his foster-father, and promised also the third bank of seats (?) in the theater auditorium from the income of Molossos' estate.”⁴⁰⁶

The inscription shares the basic formula with other similar inscriptions. Molossos is likely a local Carian who contributed to the construction of the city.⁴⁰⁷ The supervisor Hermas's name also appears in two other similar construction inscriptions.⁴⁰⁸ However, what is unique to this inscription is the mention of Molossos' contribution to the construction of the theater using his

⁴⁰⁴ The Parthian dimension in interpreting this novel is still lacking. For existing historical readings of this novel: with Thucydides, Luginbill (2000): 1-11; with Xenophon, Trzaskoma (2011): 1-35; classical Syracuse, De Temmerman (2002): 165-87; classical Athens, Smith (2007).

⁴⁰⁵ David Elmer's formalist reading of this novel represents the most recent scholarship in this direction, Elmer (2022): 148-80.

⁴⁰⁶ Reynolds (1991): 23-4, n.2

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 24-5.

estate's wealth. In other words, this inscription demonstrates how landed wealth in rural Caria was used to build cultural institutions such as theaters in Aphrodisias.

This economic dynamic underpins the literary representation of Chaereas' working at the quarry in Mithridates' estate. After Chaereas and his friend Polycharmus are sold as slaves to Mithridates' estate and put to work in the quarry,⁴⁰⁹ Chariton vividly describes their harsh labor, including the overseer's beating of Chaereas for his inability to work (Χαιρέαν ἐργάζεσθαι μὴ δυνάμενον, ἀλλὰ πληγὰς λαμβάνοντα καὶ προπηλακιζόμενον αἰσχροῶς).⁴¹⁰ Under these conditions, the companion Polycharmus begs the overseer to allow him to do double work for Chaereas.⁴¹¹

What happens later helps us understand the theatrical allusion in this episode. After noticing Chaereas' true identity, Mithridates manipulates him into struggling for Callirhoe with Dionysus, the Ionian tyrant who purchased Callirhoe, by asking Chaereas to write her a letter.⁴¹² However, Dionysus obtains this letter and files a lawsuit against Mithridates by bringing the case to Artaxerxes II. The narrative then shifts to the Babylonian hearing between the Persian king of kings and Mithridates/Dionysus, which will be the focus of the following discussion.⁴¹³

Given the author Chariton's self-stated background as a clerk from Aphrodisias, Chaereas' work as a slave in Mithridate's stone quarry speaks to the building of Roman theaters in Aphrodisias during the second half of the first century CE, when this novel was written.⁴¹⁴ In

⁴⁰⁹ καὶ ὁ λαβὼν αὐτοὺς ἐπώλησεν εἰς Καρίαν. ἐκεῖ δὲ πέδας σύροντες παχείας εἰργάζοντο τὰ Μιθριδάτου, Charit. 3.7.3

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 4.2.2

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 4.2.2-3

⁴¹² Ibid, 4.4.7-10

⁴¹³ Ibid, 4.5.8-10

⁴¹⁴ For theater building in general, see Reynolds (1982): xv; Roueché (1993): 1-2; for theater dedication inscription in Aphrodisias, Reynolds (1982): 161 doc. 36.

other words, Mithridates' role as a slave master refers to his narratological function as a stage director in the novel.⁴¹⁵ The vivid description of Chaereas and Polycharmus' harsh labor at Mithridates' estates is a literarily conscious demonstration of the construction of Roman theater in Aphrodisias as a manifestation of Roman imperialism in the Greek world.⁴¹⁶ By borrowing the actual economic dynamic of constructing the theater under an overseer, the description alludes to the Roman domination of Greeks.⁴¹⁷

In particular, Mithridates' background as a Bactrian implies Roman imperialism through the existing Roman imagination of Parthia. The other major instance in which the name Bactria is mentioned is Callirhoe's lamentation about her future home in Susa and Bactra when she is about to cross the river Euphrates (Βάκτρα μοι καὶ Σοῦσα λοιπὸν οἶκος καὶ τάφος. ἄπαξ, Εὐφραῖτα, μέλλω σε διαβαίνειν· φοβοῦμαι γὰρ οὐχ οὕτως τὸ μῆκος τῆς ἀποδημίας ὡς μὴ δόξω κάκεῖ καλὴ τι).⁴¹⁸ By emphasizing the Euphrates River as the dividing line between the known world of Callirhoe and the foreign east, Chariton employs Roman spatial ideology to depict

⁴¹⁵ For the meta-poetic significance of Chaereas' letter-writing under Mithridates' order, see Létoublon (2003): 271-88; Robiano (2007): 201-22; cf. Elmer (2022): 194.

⁴¹⁶ In other words, Chaereas' slave labor in quarry, which is related to theater construction, is a metaliterary device showing the way Roman theater underpins literary production of this novel.

⁴¹⁷ From a classical perspective, this episode reworks Athenian captives in the Sicilian quarry after the Sicilian campaign (Plut. Nic. 29) when the novel sets the background in the aftermath of the Sicilian victory over Athens. Nevertheless, when Plutarch puts the lives of Nicias and Crassus together, he implicitly uses the classical Athenian past to speak to the Roman republican past (Roman captives from the Battle of Carrhae) during the second half of the 1st century CE.

⁴¹⁸ Charit. 5.2.7.

Callirhoe's diasporic experience.⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, the inclusion of lands from Asia Minor to Bactria serves to envision the former Hellenistic world as a unified entity.⁴²⁰

The mention of Bactria likely reflects Rome's limited knowledge of Parthia's dealing with nomads in the region from the late 2nd century BCE onward. In the mid-1st century CE, Gotarzes II sent an envoy to boast about the Parthian domination in front of Izates, the king of Adiaeben, claiming that the Parthian territory extended from the Euphrates to Bactria (ὄς τὴν Πάρθων δύναμιν ὅση τίς ἐστιν ἤγγελλεν ἀπὸ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ μέχρι Βάκτρων τοὺς ὄρους αὐτῆς τιθέμενος καὶ τοὺς ὑπηκόους αὐτῆς βασιλέας καταλέγων).⁴²¹ Accordingly, the Parthian presence in Central Asia is archaeologically most visible from the late 1st century BCE to 1st century CE, extending from Khalchayan in northern Bactria to Gandhara.⁴²² Although Parthia's actual rule in Central Asia may have been more limited than its influence, this wide sphere of influence across the Hindu Kush indicates how Parthia impacted aristocratic aesthetics of Central Asia during this period.

Nevertheless, though Rome's engagement with Parthia shapes Chariton's presentation of Persia in this historical novel, Parthia/Persia stands for Rome in the novel. It is the usual rhetorical device for Roman Greek authors to use classical Greece's engagement with Persia to refer to Roman domination in the Greek world.⁴²³ Thus, we can identify that Chariton's

⁴¹⁹ For the Euphrates as a transition between Rome and Parthia in Roman spatial ideology, see Jenkyns (1993): 115-21; for archaeological discussion of crossing Zeugma, see Comfort (2000): 99-126. The emphasis on displacement is also consistent with Greek epigrams from the 1st century BCE onward, revealing diasporic identity in an enlarged horizon, see Schmitz (2022): 80-1.

⁴²⁰ Before that, Callirhoe laments that she could still hear the Greek language being spoken in Cilicia and Syria (Καλλιρρόη μὲν γὰρ μέχρι Συρίας καὶ Κιλικίας κούφως ἔφερε τὴν ἀποδημίαν· καὶ γὰρ Ἑλλάδος ἤκουε φωνῆς καὶ θάλασσαν ἔβλεπε τὴν ἄγουσαν εἰς Συρακούσας), Charit. 5.1.3.

⁴²¹ J. AJ. 20.87; For the Parthians in Josephus, see Rajak (2000): 273-300; Gregoratti (2012): 183-92; Gruen (2017): 223-40. For Parthia and Bactria, see Olbrycht (2013): 101-7.

⁴²² Goldman (1978): 189-202; Rtveldadze (1995): 181-91. The site of Tillya-tepe is a particular case, see Peterson (2012).

⁴²³ Eran Almagor highlights this aspect in imperial Greek literature through the case study of Plutarch, Almagor (2018).

imagination of Bactria as the edge of the earth engages with some vague knowledge of Parthian eastern frontier.⁴²⁴ Mithridates' unique background as a Bactrian from the eastern end of the Persian empire, who governs Caria at the western end of the Persian empire, alludes to Chariton's reflection of Aphrodisias in the Roman rule: the city of Rome is far away from Aphrodisias, but Roman imperialism is present in this Hellenic city in Asia Minor.⁴²⁵ In this regard, through imagining the former Hellenistic world, Chariton situates Aphrodisias into the Roman imperial system.

In turn, the portrayal of two Sicilian Greeks working at the quarry of a Bactrian's estate speaks of theater in Aphrodisias as an institution of Roman cultural imperialism in Asia Minor.⁴²⁶ While the quarry episode only speaks of the material foundation of building the theater, the Babylonian lawsuit, which is the result of Mithridates' stagecraft commissioning Chaereas to write the letter to Callirhoe, demonstrates the outcome of Mithridates' effort.

As I will show, the city Babylon in this novel refers to Rome.⁴²⁷ In particular, through the image of Babylonian theater, Chariton further explores Roman theater as a Roman imperial institution. The first time the Babylonian populace encounters Callirhoe is at the Babylonian theater, where there is a beauty contest between her and the Persian lady Rhodogune. In staging this contest, Persian authorities aim to demonstrate the superiority of Persians over Greeks (οἶον τῆς Ἰωνίας Καλλιρόη, τοιοῦτο τῆς Ἀσίας ἢ Ῥοδογούνη... πάντες δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν

⁴²⁴ Cioffi (2013): 17. No.60

⁴²⁵ Daniel Jolowicz relates this character to Mithridates VI (Jolowicz (2022): 131). However, by taking into account the emphasis on his Bactrian background, my reading still can make sense, even though Jolowicz's has its own reason.

⁴²⁶ Cf. theaters in Roman Arcadia and Roman imperialism in Pausanias' writings, Di Napoli (2005): 509-20.

⁴²⁷ The classical trope of Babylon as an allusion to Rome is in the *Apocalypse of John*, which was produced in Asia Minor roughly during the same period as the novel *Callirhoe*. For an effort to find parallels between this novel and the New Testament, Van Der Horst (1983): 348-55.

ἀπέβλεπον καὶ διελάλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους ‘νενικήκαμεν’ ἢ Περσὶς ἀποσβέσει τὴν ξένην. εἰ δύναται, συγκριθῆτω· μαθέτωσαν Ἕλληνας ὅτι εἰσὶν ἀλαζόνες).⁴²⁸

However, it turns out that Callirhoe beats Rhodogune, which Chariton depicts as follows:

ἅμα δὲ πάντες οὐ μόνον τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐξέτειναν καὶ μικροῦ δεῖν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλους κατέπεσον, ἄλλος πρὸ ἄλλου θέλων ἰδεῖν καὶ ὡς δυνατὸν ἐγγυτάτω γενέσθαι. ἐξέλαμψε δὲ τὸ Καλλιρόης πρόσωπον, καὶ μαρμαρυγὴ κατέσχε τὰς ἀπάντων ὄψεις, ὥσπερ ἐν νυκτὶ βαθεῖα πολλοῦ φωτὸς αἰφνίδιον φανέντος· ἐκπλαγέντες δὲ οἱ βάρβαροι προσεκύνησαν καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδόκει Ῥοδογούνην παρεῖναι.

At that moment everyone strained not only their eyes but their very souls, and nearly fell over each other in their eagerness to be first to see and get as near as possible. Callirhoe’s face shone with a radiance that dazzled the eyes of all, just as when on a dark night a blinding flash is seen. Struck with amazement, the Persians knelt in homage, and no one noticed the presence of Rhodogune.⁴²⁹

It has been observed that Chariton’s writing on the Babylonian theater contrasts the Roman theater with the Greek theater. In contrast to the Sicilian theater, which served as a place of public political debates and deliberation, the Roman theater was primarily a place for public entertainment.⁴³⁰ By using Babylon as an allusion to Rome, Chariton inherits the classical Greek ethnographic trope that Babylon is an anti-city based on the Greek polis ideal.⁴³¹ However, what has gone unnoticed is Chariton’s engagement with the public aesthetic brought about by Roman pantomime performance.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* has been used as a document to reconstruct the aesthetics of watching Roman pantomime performance, given the pantomime impact on Ovid’s poetic

⁴²⁸ Charit. 5.3.4-7.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 5.3.8-9, trans. G.P. Goold

⁴³⁰ “Classical Greeks liked to see freeborn citizens compete against each other in the theatre, the stadium, the chariot racecourse, and, on a more intimate scale, in the athletic matches of the gymnasium or the wrestling school. The practice of spectacle was quite different at Rome. Rather than fellow citizens, Romans preferred to see foreign professionals, slaves, prisoners of war, or condemned criminals in their theatres, racetracks, arenas and amphitheatres.” Connors (2002): 163.

⁴³¹ Kurke (1999): 232-7; Clarke (2018): 172-3.

imagination.⁴³² In particular, Narcissus' self-indulgence with his beauty has been considered to be a demonstration of audiences' watching of pantomime performers while reflecting on themselves.⁴³³ As Daniel Jolowicz displayed, Chariton is a reader of Ovid's love poetry when composing his novel.⁴³⁴ Given Chariton's interest in Roman theater in Aphrodisias, I argue that he also had a unique appreciation of pantomime imagery in Ovid's poetry concerning the public visual experience with pantomime performance.

The above passage focuses on the visual aspect of Roman theater, as indicated by the words τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς, ἰδεῖν, ὄψεις.⁴³⁵ Ovid has a similar metatheatrical reflection on the function of Roman theater as a place of sexual encounter for females looking for males in *Ars Amatoria*: *sic ruit ad celebres cultissima femina ludos/copia iudicium saepe Morata meum est/spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsae*.⁴³⁶ In particular, Ovid relates this sexual experience with Roman theater to Roman sexual history about the prostitute of Sabine women in Rome's mythic past.⁴³⁷ From a social perspective, Ovid's emphasis on the Roman theater as a public space for alien people to meet each other speaks of the way monumental stone theaters reconstructed the public relationship in the city of Rome since theater's appearance in Rome in the 50s BCE.⁴³⁸ In turn, Ovid's interest in this social function reveals sexual encounter as a major

⁴³² For two pioneering research, see Richlin (1993): 158-79; Galinsky (1999): 103-11. Ismene Lada-Richards' sustained focus on this issue is the most recent discussions, Lada-Richards (2013): 105-52; *Ibid* (2016): 131-69; *Ibid* (2018): 371-404.

⁴³³ Galinsky (1996): 265-6; Koenig (2021): 320-40

⁴³⁴ Jolowicz (2021): 35-90.

⁴³⁵ Ocular perception of bodies are the center of portraits in the Daphne and Narcissus episodes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Ov. Met.* 1.499-502; 3.420-32, which are two classical pantomime scenes in Ovid. Though not concerned with pantomime, Shadi Bartsch has an in-depth philosophical discussion of the intellectual implication of Narcissus in Roman thought, Bartsch (2006): 84-102.

⁴³⁶ *Ov. Ars.* 1.99-101.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, 1.102-134

⁴³⁸ Nandini Pandey notices in passing about this significance as regards Augustan poets' engagement with Roman visual culture, Pandey (2018): 172. For how Roman theater reconstructs Roman visual imagery and sense of life, see Beacham and Denard (2022).

theme not only of Roman pantomime but also *Metamorphoses*.⁴³⁹ Chariton engages with this pantomime-inflected Ovidian theme in two respects: 1.) the theater as a place of public gathering for indulging in public sexuality; 2.) the theater as a vehicle for watching pantomime performance.

While pantomime is the framework in which Chariton understands the function of the Roman theater,⁴⁴⁰ the popular narrative from Parthian Seleucia also influences his portrayal of Babylon. After the competition between Callirhoe and Rhodogune, another competition takes place between Dionysus and Mithridates in front of the king of kings concerning the question of who is legal to own the body of Callirhoe. Chariton uses theatrical language to describe the dynamic as follows:

ποιῶς ποιητῆς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς παράδοξον μῦθον οὕτως εἰσήγαγεν; ἔδοξας ἂν ἐν θεάτρῳ παρεῖναι μυρίων παθῶν πλήρει· πάντα ἦν ὁμοῦ, δάκρυα, χαρά, θάμβος, ἔλεος, ἀπιστία, εὐχαί. Χαιρέαν ἑμακάριζον, Μιθριδάτη συνέχαιρον, συνελυποῦντο Διονυσίῳ, περὶ Καλλιρῶς ἠπόρουν.

What dramatist ever staged such an extraordinary situation? An observer would have thought of himself in a theater filled with every conceivable emotion. All were there at once—tears, joy, astonishment, pity, disbelief, prayer. They blessed Chaereas and rejoiced with Mithridates; they grieved with Dionysius; about Callirhoe they were baffled.⁴⁴¹

Though not taking place at a theater, Chariton uses theatrical imagery to describe its dynamic.

The legal case between Mithridates and Dionysus similarly involves the public pathos of the Babylonian populace. Chariton previously mentions that opinions among the residents in

⁴³⁹ See Ovid's comment in *Remedia Armoris: Illic adsidue ficti saltantur amantes* (Ov. Rem. 755).

⁴⁴⁰ In comparison, references to Roman military institutions especially triumph in the novel, Jolowicz (2018a): 113-38.

⁴⁴¹ Charit. 5.8.2-3, trans. G.P. Goold

Babylon are split: the nobles support Mithridates but the commoners stand on the side of Dionysus.⁴⁴²

This representation builds upon Roman knowledge of politics in Parthian Seleucia. Tacitus, when commenting on the struggle between Artabanus II and Tiridates in 36 CE, mentions the way a struggle for the Parthian throne manifests in the divide between the masses and the elites in Seleucia: “when they differed (*ubi dissensere*), since each invited support against rivals, the Parthian summoned against part prevailed overall.”⁴⁴³ Similarly, in Plutarch’s biography of Crassus, to display Parthian victory in the Battle of Carrhae, the Parthian Surena stages two triumphs separately in front of the senators and the commoners in Seleucia.⁴⁴⁴ In this light, though Babylon alludes to Rome, Chariton also incorporates actual Roman knowledge of Parthian Seleucia during the first century CE into crafting the image of Babylon. Like Mithridates’ Bactrian background, the use of Parthian Seleucia to refer to Rome speaks of Greek sentiment toward Rome as an oppressive regime like Achaemenid Persia.⁴⁴⁵

While Chaereas’ and Polycharmus’ working at Mithridates’ quarry concerns building a theater in Aphrodisias, the Babylonian episode is a stage play under the direction of Mithridates after Callirhoe became a Milesian slave.⁴⁴⁶ Echoing Ovid’s earlier engagement with Roman theater, Chariton explores Greek literary production under Roman rule when the Roman theater

⁴⁴² Παρασκευὴ οὖν ἐντεῦθεν ἐγένετο ἐπὶ τὴν δίκην παρ’ ἑκατέρων ὥσπερ ἐπὶ πόλεμον τὸν μέγιστον. ἐσχίσθη δὲ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν βαρβάρων καὶ ὅσον μὲν ἦν σατραπικὸν Μιθριδάτη προσέθετο... Διονύσιος δὲ τὸ δημοτικὸν εἶχεν εὖνουν· ἐδόκει γὰρ ἀδικεῖσθαι παρὰ τοὺς νόμους εἰς γυναῖκα ἐπιβουλευθεῖς, καὶ ὁ μείζων ἐστὶ, τοιαύτην. οὐ μὴν οὐδ’ ἡ γυναικωνίτις ἢ Περσῶν ἀμέριμνος ἦν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνταῦθα διηρέθησαν αἱ σπουδαί. Charit. 5.4.1-2

⁴⁴³ Tac. Ann. 6.42.2, trans. Cynthia Damon

⁴⁴⁴ Plut. Crass. 32.3-5. The background is that Seleucia stood on the side of Mithridates III during his power struggle with his brother Orodes II but Surena helped Orodes II regain Seleucia. Plut. Crass. 21.7

⁴⁴⁵ Daniel Jolowicz argues that this novel has an allusion to late republican politics concerning Sicily in the novel (Jolowicz (2018b); 127-49). In light of Jolowicz’s research, I contend that the representation of the Achaemenids in this novel revisits Rome’s dealing with Parthia during the late republic, especially regards the Battle of Carrhae.

⁴⁴⁶ The king of kings regards Callirhoe as a “Milesian girl” (ἡ Μιλήσια), Charit. 5.2.7.

was a major means affecting public passion and cultural experience. Overall, Chariton taps into an established topos in using classical Greece's dealing with Persia to speak of Rome's contemporary domination over Greece. In turn, Rome's imagination of the former Hellenistic landscape dominated by Parthia frames Chariton's understanding of Achaemenid Persia.

In Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid also recounts Rome's display of the naumachy of Athens and Persia to strengthen people's pathos for victory over Parthia.⁴⁴⁷ Chariton speaks to this Roman political culture. Meanwhile, Chariton highlights at the end of the novel that the Sicilian theater is the space where Callirhoe and Chaereas receive public blessings when the people in Syracuse hold the public assembly.⁴⁴⁸ This ending episode brings the male and female protagonists back from pantomime-dominated Roman theater, under which both of them have become slaves under Persian/Roman domination,⁴⁴⁹ to the Greek theater as a civic institution.⁴⁵⁰ In this regard, the novel *Callirhoe* is Chariton's exploration of Aphrodisias' ambiguous status as a quintessentially Roman urban foundation with a Hellenic veneer through the institution of theater when Roman-Parthian engagement dictates the way Rome's trans-continental Eurasian network unfolded.

Antioch: from Wandering Performers to Wandering Sophists

Antioch in Syria is another city known for its vibrant pantomime traditions, in addition to Alexandria and Aphrodisias. As the former capital of the Seleucid empire, the Seleucid imperial authorities reoriented Seleucid political culture by developing entertainment

⁴⁴⁷ Ov. *Ars.* 1.171-229. For Rome's use of this classical past to refer to the Roman-Parthian relationship, see A.J.S. Spawforth's discussion of Plataea, Spawforth (2011): 130-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Charit. 8.7.3

⁴⁴⁹ Chaereas' participation in theater construction while Callirhoe functions like a pantomime performer subject to public sexuality under the intense gaze.

⁴⁵⁰ As has been suggested, this novel demonstrates how Chaereas learns to be a good citizen (Smith (2008)). I further suggest that the author explores the way to be a "Greek citizen" under Roman rule based on my discussion.

culture during the early 2nd century BCE. A significant incident is the Daphne festival by Antiochus IV in 169 BCE.⁴⁵¹ In particular, after the festival, the king danced to mime with other dancers.⁴⁵² The Seleucid authorities' support for entertainment culture helped convert Antioch into a city known for entertainment and luxurious culture in the Roman period.⁴⁵³

Antioch had been a center of pantomime performance since the 2nd century CE,⁴⁵⁴ as evidenced by Lucius Verus' addiction to pantomime dance in Antioch during his campaign in the 160s BCE.⁴⁵⁵ This personal interest may serve as a background for Lucian's *De Saltatione*, which justifies pantomime dance as a serious cultural pursuit. For my analysis, as I will presently show, Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* is an important testimony for gauging pantomime-mediated ethnographic representation of the former Hellenistic landscape from Syria to the Indus Valley.

Similar to Chariton's *Callirhoe*, the 3rd-century text *Vita Apollonii* is another work with extensive geographical imagination, including former Hellenistic Asia. The text is a novelistic account of the 1st-century sophist Apollonius' journeys in both the East and the Mediterranean. In particular, its first four books describe the sophist's journey to India via Parthia. For my analysis, this text demonstrates a geographical representation of Parthia based on the body-centered understanding of pantomime.

As discussed, when Dio Chrysostom criticizes Alexandrians' devotion to watching pantomime, the attention dwells upon music, with dance not featuring prominently.⁴⁵⁶ However,

⁴⁵¹ Plb. 30.25; Diod. Sic. 16.1; Livy. 41. For recent discussions, see Heller (2013): 197-277; Brisson (2018): 415-49; Strootman (2019a): 173-215.

⁴⁵² μετὰ ταῦτα τῆς συμφωνίας προκαλουμένης ἀνεπήδα γυμνὸς καὶ τοῖς μίμοις προσπαίζων ὠρχεῖτο τῶν ὀρχήσεων τὰς γέλωτα καὶ χλευασμὸν εἰωθυίας ἐπισπᾶσθαι, ὡς πάντας αἰσχυνθέντας ἐπὶ τοῖς πραττομένοις φεύγειν ἐκ τοῦ πότου, Diod. Sic. 31.16.3

⁴⁵³ Mosaics from Roman Antioch are most vivid testimonies to this dynamic, Becker (2005). Despite an old scholarship, George Haddad lays unusual emphasis on entertainment culture in Antioch, Haddad (1949). For a most recent survey of ancient Antioch, see De Giorgi and Agers (2021).

⁴⁵⁴ Webb (2012): 247.

⁴⁵⁵ Jones (1986): 68.

⁴⁵⁶ Dio only mentions dance four times in passing, Dio. Chr. Or. 32.45, 54, 69, 92.

this changed during the 2nd century CE. While we can reasonably assume that dance became more important in the course of some internal artistic development of pantomime performance during the 2nd century CE, the incorporation of pantomime dance into the official Hellenic festival is a major milestone in pantomime development.⁴⁵⁷ As epigraphic evidence attests, a wandering pantomime dancer such as Iulis Apolaustus could earn proxenia from numerous Hellenic cities across the Aegean from mainland Greece to western Asia Minor.⁴⁵⁸

Lucian's *De Saltatione* was written during this dynamic moment. It not only justifies pantomime performance as a whole but elevates pantomime dance to be the most important feature of pantomime. In particular, Lucian presents an anecdote about a quasi-Hellenized diplomat from the Pontus region who appreciated Nero's pantomime dancer, but not the music accompanying dance.⁴⁵⁹ The diplomat requests a dancer from Nero to be a diplomatic tool, presenting him around various ethnic groups in the Pontus region. In this portrait, pantomime truly becomes a universal language by embodying Hellenic culture.⁴⁶⁰ Through this anecdote, Lucian reveals his agenda in praising pantomime when pantomime becomes a means for him to consider issues of inclusion and exclusion in Hellenism with regard to his Syrian background.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, Lucian makes a clear reference to pantomime performance in Antioch.⁴⁶² Although his *De Saltatione* is not focused on foreign regions, by presenting the way a pantomime dancer

⁴⁵⁷ Skotheim (2016): 230-1; for the larger context, see Graf (2016): 11-60.

⁴⁵⁸ FdD III.1 551; Slater (1995): 263-92; Webb (2012): 250-2.

⁴⁵⁹ Lucian. Salt. 64; Nicolò D'Alconzo notices the significance of this passage for understanding Lucian's motive in writing *De Saltatione* in passing, D'Alconzo (2022): 143, no.11.

⁴⁶⁰ The major evidence for pantomime in the Black Sea area is the tombstone of Krispos, a pantomime dancer from Alexandria who died in Heraclea around the turn of the 3rd century CE, Jonnes and Ameling (1994), no.9; cf. Hall (2019): 57. For performance culture in Roman Paphlagonia as part of the Pontic region, see Wu (2018): 166-224.

⁴⁶¹ "In fact, of all second-century AD declaiming intellectuals, Lucian was the most likely to have experienced some kind of psychological congruity with pantomime, an empathy, that is, with its precarious cultural positioning and its largely irrational marginalisation at the hands of overbearing cultural snobs." (Lada-Richards (2007): 156). For Lucian's representation of his homeland Samosata, see Kidd (2022): 447-73; for Lycian's writing on the Syrian goddess, see Elsner (2001): 123-56.

⁴⁶² Luc De. Salt. 76

served as a diplomatic tool in the Pontic region, Lucian reinforces his idea of the centrality of dance in pantomime performance.

Philostratus' understanding of pantomime is inflected through this dance-centered view.⁴⁶³ In the eastern context, reworking Lucian's equation of pantomime as a form of *paideia*, Philostratus understands Apollonius' journey as an embodiment of Hellenism in the East.⁴⁶⁴ This text has a clear Syrian setting, and at the beginning, Philostratus presents the Syrian intellectual milieu in which his literary endeavor is situated, recounting how he rewrote this text based on the Syrian Damis' notebooks with support from the salon of the Severan queen Julia Domna.⁴⁶⁵

Furthermore, Antioch is where Apollonius makes the decision to travel to India,⁴⁶⁶ making it the departure point of his journey. During the 2nd century BCE, Syria, particularly Antioch, was at the forefront of Rome's Parthian campaigns. This dynamic continued into the Severan dynasty when Parthian/Persian campaigns were undertaken by Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Alexander Severus.⁴⁶⁷ By setting Antioch as the departure point of Apollonius' wisdom journey, Philostratus implicitly speaks of Antioch's transregional network with the east, especially in terms of crafting the image of Apollonius based on the image of pantomime performer.

Additionally, Zeugma is another key station from which Apollonius sets foot in the Parthian landscape:

⁴⁶³ In Apollonius' first speech to the Ephesians in book 5, his focus is on people's addiction to pantomime (*ὄρχηστῶν γὰρ ἠττημένοι*, Phlostr. VA, 4.2).

⁴⁶⁴ For *paideia* in Philostratus' VA, see Flinterman (1995).

⁴⁶⁵ Phlostr. VA 1.13.1; for relevant authorship issue in this statement, see Kemezis (2016): 159. For Julia Damna, see Lewick (2007).

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 1.16.1

⁴⁶⁷ For Septimius Severus, see Gradoni (2013): 3-24; for Caracalla, see Hekster and Kaizer (2012): 89-107, Langford (2017): 47-63; for Alexander Severus, see Potter (1987): 147-58. For *imitatio Alexandri* in 3rd century writings, see Baharal (1994): 524-67; Mallan (2017): 132-44; Pownall (2022): 253-78.

Παριόντας δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐς τὴν μέσσην τῶν ποταμῶν ὁ τελώνης ὁ ἐπιβεβλημένος τῷ Ζεύγματι πρὸς τὸ πινάκιον ἦγε καὶ ἠρώτα, ὅ τι ἀπάγειεν, ὁ δὲ Ἀπολλώνιος “ἀπάγω” ἔφη “σωφροσύνην, δικαιοσύνην, ἀρετὴν, ἐγκράτειαν, ἀνδρείαν, ἄσκησιν,” πολλὰ οὕτω καὶ θήλαα εἴρας ὀνόματα. ὁ δ’ ἤδη βλέπων τὸ ἑαυτοῦ κέρδος “ἀπόγραψαι οὖν” ἔφη “τὰς δούλας.” ὁ δὲ “οὐκ ἔξεστιν,” εἶπεν “οὐ γὰρ δούλας ἀπάγω ταύτας, ἀλλὰ δεσποίνας.”

When they were about to cross to Mesopotamia, the tax collector in charge of Zeugma took them to the notice board and asked them what they were exporting. “Prudence,” replied Apollonius, “Justice, Virtue, Temperance, Courage, Perseverance,” thus stringing out many nouns in the feminine. The official, immediately thinking of his own profit, said, “Well then, register your servants.” “I cannot,” retorted Apollonius, “since it is not my servants I am exporting, but my governesses.”⁴⁶⁸

This sophistic anecdote has been well-discussed.⁴⁶⁹ Yet, what has not been highlighted is the way this anecdote appropriates the existing dynamic of wandering performers from the Mediterranean to the East as embedded within the slave trade. In this passage, by playing the word game of the feminine nature of σωφροσύνην, δικαιοσύνην, ἀρετὴν, ἐγκράτειαν, ἀνδρείαν, ἄσκησιν as abstract nouns, Philostratus shows a tax farmer’s misunderstanding of them as five female slaves. By specifying the role of Zeugma, the anecdote from the passage above further illustrates how Roman-Parthian economic transactions impact Greek literary imagination.

Apollonius’ clarification that these five sophistic characteristics are not his slaves but his masters render Apollonius as a special slave circulated from Rome to Parthia. Based on the extant evidence, the most outstanding cultural transfer that went with the slave trade is the exportation of pantomime performers from the eastern Mediterranean to the farther east. An inscription from Dura-Europus dated to the 3rd century CE clearly shows traveling

⁴⁶⁸ Philostr. VA, 1.20.1, trans. Christopher Jones, modified.

⁴⁶⁹ Jones (2001): 191; Abraham (2009): 54; Kanavou (2018).

performers from Zeugma to Dura-Europus.⁴⁷⁰ Several mosaics from Zeugma also demonstrate vibrant performance culture with Greek motifs, especially the depiction of the star pantomime performer Theonoe.⁴⁷¹ We can argue that popular performance played a role in bringing Greek motifs to Zeugma. Apollonius styles himself as a slave subject to five sophistic characteristics whose names sound like five Greek female slaves. Behind this self-styling is not only the slave trade in general but also the exportation of pantomime performers from the Mediterranean to the East more especially.⁴⁷²

When Philostratus employs the imagery of traveling performers from Syria to Mesopotamia to write about Apollonius' eastern journey, he reworks mundane pleasure for higher intellectual pursuit. The pantomime performer serves as an undercurrent of Philostratus' portrait of Apollonius. The following statement from Apollonius regarding Vardanes' royal gifts culminates Philostratus' reworking of the dynamic of the wandering performer:

σὺ δ' ἴσως ἡγή τὸ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι ἀμαρτεῖν ἦττον εἶναι τοῦ Ἀθήνησιν ἢ Ὀλυμπίασιν ἢ Πυθοῖ, καὶ οὐκ ἐνθυμῆ ὅτι σοφῶ ἀνδρὶ Ἑλλὰς πάντα, καὶ οὐδὲν ἔρημον ἢ βάρβαρον χωρίον οὔτε ἡγήσεται ὁ σοφὸς οὔτε νομιεῖ, ζῶν γε ὑπὸ τοῖς τῆς ἀρετῆς ὀφθαλμοῖς, καὶ βλέπει μὲν ὀλίγους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, μυρία δ' ὄμμασιν αὐτὸς ὁρᾶται.

You perhaps think that doing wrong in Babylon matters less than doing so in Athens, Olympia, or Delphi. You do not take into account that to a wise man Greece is everywhere, and he will not consider or believe any place to be deserted or uncivilized. He lives in the sight of virtue, and though he sees few people he himself is observed with a thousand eyes.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Rostovtzeff et al. (1944): 212; the correlation between this inscription and the reference of Zeugma in VA has been noted in passing, Rostovtzeff et al. (1944): 170. For the military demand of these performers, see Pollard (2001): 188.

⁴⁷¹ Dunbabin (2010): 413-26; Görkay (2012): 275-300.

⁴⁷² Stories from Menander are particularly strong based on visual remains, see Nervegna (2013): 120-200; N.W. Slater (2014): 366-76.

⁴⁷³ Philostr. VA. 1.35.2, trans. Jones

When Damis tries to induce Apollonius to accept royal gifts from Vardanes, Apollonius insists on avoiding temptation from mundane pleasures (εἰ μὴ γαστρὸς ἥττητο καὶ ἀμπεχόνης, καὶ οἴνου, καὶ τοῦ ἐξ ἐταίρας φέρεσθαι).⁴⁷⁴ While recognizing the significance of the Parthian infrastructure in Apollonius' Indian journey when Vardanes provides necessary provisions, camels, and guides for the saint,⁴⁷⁵ Philostratus deconstructs the Parthian luxury economy by showing how Apollonius rejects royal gifts, which is a means by which Parthian imperial authorities dealt with empire-wide elites.⁴⁷⁶

In this light, the saying that Hellas is everywhere in the passage above demonstrates an inclusive vision of Hellenism in VA.⁴⁷⁷ What has not been noted, however, is the vision of a wandering sophist rooted in performative culture. This passage contains performance imagery that depicts a sophist under the scrutiny of countless eyes.⁴⁷⁸ The saying is thus a sophist's reworking of how pantomime performers present Greek myths through their embodied performance. In Philostratus' literary construction, sophists would replace pantomime performers as the embodiment of Hellenic culture in the East.

Philostratus' denial of banquet culture of which performance is part further manifests in the writing on India in VA. Although Apollonius travels to India, there are two

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Philostr. VA. 2.1. While the first three elements are directly provided by Vardanes, villages' support along the way is contingent upon their recognition of royal support of Apollonius' journey based on the gold chain on the brow of the leading camel. Philostratus thus displays the Parthian king's instrumental role in Apollonius' journey based on the infrastructural apparatus of the Parthian state. For Parthian state authorities' interaction with cities, see Pigulevskaya (1963): 79-89 (cf. Payne (2021): 353-64). For the infrastructural significance of camels from a *longue durée* perspective, see Bulliet (1990).

⁴⁷⁶ As discussed in the last chapter about Parthian Nisa, The Parthian empire can be understood as an affective structure that regulated people's sensory experience: banquet was an effective means to do so, as can be inferred from material remains from Nisa, the Parthian ritual capital from the mid-2nd century BCE to the early 1st century CE, where a banquet hall with dozens of rhytons depicting musical scenes are found. Bernard (1991): 31-8. For Parthian Nisa, see Invernizzi (2004): 133-43.

⁴⁷⁷ It also deconstructs the center and periphery in the Atheno-centric Greek worldview, Kemezis (2014): 170; Kanavou (2018): 179-205.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Schouler (1986): 273-94; Gleason (1995); Connolly (2001): 339-72; Eshleman (2012): 125-6; Kemezis (2014): 164-5.

“Indias” in *VA*: one is the Indus Valley and the other is India beyond the Indus Valley. Philostratus’ understanding of India beyond the Indus as a lost Hellas represents a pure utopian image, while the account of the Indus Valley is based on Philostratus’ awareness of it as a part of the former Hellenistic landscape and the Parthian transactional order.

King Phraortes, who governs the Indus Valley, has a Parthian royal name, which, although unattested among existing Indo-Parthian kings, suggests Philostratus’ knowledge of Parthian political culture in the Indus Valley.⁴⁷⁹ According to Philostratus’ account, Vardanes’ letter is equally important for Apollonius to access Phraortes, in addition to providing necessary provisions and camel.⁴⁸⁰ Philostratus emphasizes that the Indus valley is a satrapy in Parthia, even though Phraortes is subject to Vardanes (πρὸς γὰρ τὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰνδοῦ σατράπην ἔπεμψε τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ταύτην, καίτοι μὴ ὑποκείμενον τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἀρχῇ).⁴⁸¹ Nevertheless, with the help of Vardanes’ letter, Apollonius manages to cross the Hydraotes River to reach the king Phraortes.⁴⁸² By demonstrating how a Parthian royal letter operates from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley, Philostratus further illustrates how the Parthian royal system underlies Apollonius’ journey when Apollonius himself embodies Hellenism.⁴⁸³

When Phraortes hosts a banquet for Apollonius, Philostratus emphasizes that the banquet is for diplomats from Babylon.⁴⁸⁴ In this regard, Philostratus understands the

⁴⁷⁹ The best proxy is Parthian musical instruments on Gandharan art, Goldman (1978): 189-202; Lo Muzio (1989): 257-84. Marco Galli is insightful in noting that Gandharan art represents Hellenistic royal imagery but we should note that this Hellenistic political culture is not unmediated by directly inheriting from the Hellenistic period but was mediated from Parthia, Galli (2011): 279-329.

⁴⁸⁰ It is an imagined representation of a royal letter in Parthian political culture. Artabanus II’s letters to Susa are the most salient examples, SEG VII.1; IEOG, 218.

⁴⁸¹ Philostr. *VA*. 2.17.2

⁴⁸² *Ibid*, 2.17.3

⁴⁸³ In scholarship on *VA*, some quotations of Apollonius’ own letters are of interest for scholars to reconstruct Apollonius’ own views, Penella (1979).

⁴⁸⁴ Philostr. *VA*. 2.27.1

banquet as the extension of Parthian political culture in the farther East. During the banquet, Philostratus makes a clear reference to pantomime performance as follows:

μεταξὺ δὲ πίνοντες ἐπεσάγονται ἀγερωχίας ἐπικινδύνους καὶ οὐκ ἔξω τοῦ σπουδάσειν· παῖς γάρ τις, ὥσπερ ὁ τῶν ὀρχηστρίδων, ἀνερριπτεῖτο κούφως συναφιμένου αὐτῷ βέλους ἐς τὸ ἄνω, καὶ ἐπειδὴ πολὺ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς γένοιτο, ἐκυβίστα ὁ παῖς ὑπεραίρων ἑαυτὸν τοῦ βέλους, καὶ ἀμαρτάνει τοῦ κυβιστᾶν ἔτοιμα ἦν βεβληῖσθαι. . . . Οἱ μὲν δὴ περὶ τὸν Δάμιν ἐξεπλήττοντο αὐτὰ ὡς εὐσκοπα καὶ τὴν ζυμμετρίαν τῆς τοξείας ἐθαύμαζον, ὁ δὲ Ἀπολλώνιος, ζυνεσίει γὰρ τῷ βασιλεῖ ὁμοδιαίτῳ ὄντι, τούτοις μὲν ἤττον προσεῖχε

As they drink, they exhibit shows of skill that are dangerous and quite are worthy of attention. A boy, like the ones that accompany dancing girls, was tossed high while an arrow was shot at the same time into the air, and when the boy was high above the ground he twisted himself, lifting himself over the arrow, sure of being hit if he twisted wrongly. . . . Damis and the others were amazed by this sharpness of eye, and admired the accuracy of the shooting, but Apollonius, who was eating with the king at the same table, was not so interested in such things.⁴⁸⁵

In the first three books of VA, this is a major direct reference to a pantomime performer by likening that Indian performer to a female pantomime dancer.⁴⁸⁶ The vivid depiction of the boy dancer's complicated bodily gestures is consistent with the visual effect that a pantomime performance brings about.

From a literary point of view, this depiction is a rewriting of Xenophon's *Symposium*, in which performers prompt Socrates' philosophical meditation. Xenophon's *Symposium* is the first major complete testimony to popular performance in Greco-Latin literature. In this dialogue, when Socrates has dinner at Callias' house, a group of wandering performers from Syracuse came to perform. In contrast with the aloof attitude of denying flute girls in Plato's *Symposium*,⁴⁸⁷ Socrates is not only amazed at the boy and girl dancers

⁴⁸⁵ Philostr. VA. 2.28.2-29.1, trans. Jones

⁴⁸⁶ In the rest of VA about Apollonius' return to the Mediterranean, in addition to the Ephesian episode mentioned, major engagement with popular performance is Apollonius' condemnation of the Alexandrians' penchant for spectacle (Philostr. VA. 5.26) echoing Dio's speech discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁸⁷ Plat. Sym. 176e5

but also praises the virtue of dance so much so that he wants to learn to dance.⁴⁸⁸ This dialogue is unique in the 4th century BCE Greek literature concerning performance culture in two regards: 1.) this dialogue praises rather than condemns popular performance; 2.) in contrast with a focus on music like in Plato's *Nomoi*, Xenophon's attention more dwells on dance.⁴⁸⁹

When Lucian and Libanius try to justify pantomime, they both evoke Xenophon's Socrates as an archetype of an intellectual "aca-fan" of popular performance.⁴⁹⁰ In this light, Philostratus' writing implicitly engages with Xenophon's *Symposium* by speaking to his contemporaries or near contemporaries who would like to evoke Xenophon's Socrates to legitimize pantomime as Lucian did. While dancers provoke Socrates' thinking on if virtue is teachable in Xenophon's writing,⁴⁹¹ Philostratus' account of Apollonius' indifference to dance deliberately shows that popular performance has nothing to do with philosophy.⁴⁹²

However, Philostratus' presentation of the order of events is consistent with Xenophon's *Symposium*: while Xenophon displays how dance stimulates Socrates' meditation on philosophy, Apollonius would like to turn the king's attention from the dance to how India trains philosophers. The irony is that the training of pantomime dancers heavily imprints on Phraortes' introduction of how India trains philosophers in Philostratus' writing.

⁴⁸⁸ Xen. Sym. 2.16-17. For how a more down-to-earth image of Socrates in Xenophon's writing represents coming to terms with the Athenian demos, see Gilhuly (2008): 98-139. It is interesting to note that after Socrates shows awkward movements by imitating the dance of the girl and the boy, he returns to his "comfortable zone" by asking everyone to list their own virtues, in which Callias mentions his ability to recite the entire Homeric epics given his education (Xen. Sym. 3.6). It is interesting to note how two "cultural capitals" (popular dance and elite habitus) negotiate throughout this dialogue when these dancers embody Athenian demos.

⁴⁸⁹ For Plato's critic of "new music," see Wallace (2009): 201-13.

⁴⁹⁰ Luc. De Salt. 25; Lib. Or.64.18. For Socrates in Severan writings in general, see C. Taylor (2007): 500-11.

⁴⁹¹ Xen. Sym. 2.11-4; see Wohl (2004): 337-64.

⁴⁹² Aelius Aristides is Lucian's major opponent regarding pantomime, as far as Libanius' speech attests, see Boulanger (1923): 144-51.

Phraortes' answer consists of three aspects: 1.) the legal system; 2.) the selection and training; 3.) his personal experience. In relation to the focus on performance imagery, the second aspect is discussed first.

While Phraortes implicitly criticizes that Greece is a place where everyone can become a philosopher, the bar of becoming a philosopher is much higher in India:

τὰ δὲ τῶν ἐφήβων ἐς αὐτοὺς ὀρῶντες ἀναμανθάνουσι· πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ὀφθαλμοὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπείων ἠθῶν ἐρμηνεύουσι, πολλὰ δ' ἐν ὄφρῦσι καὶ παρειαῖς κεῖται γνωματεύειν τε καὶ θεωρεῖν, ἀφ' ὧν σοφοὶ τε καὶ φυσικοὶ ἄνδρες, ὥσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ εἶδωλα, τοὺς νοῦς τῶν ἀνθρώπων διαθεῶνται. μεγάλων γὰρ δὴ ἀξιουμένης φιλοσοφίας ἐνταῦθα, καὶ τιμὴν τούτου παρ' Ἰνδοῖς ἔχοντος, ἀνάγκη πᾶσα ἐκβασανίζεσθαι τε τοὺς ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἰόντας ἐλέγχους τε ὑποβεβλήσθαι μυρίοις. ὡς μὲν δὴ ἐπὶ διδασκάλους αὐτὸ ποιούμεθα καὶ ἐς δοκιμασίαν ἡμῖν τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν ἦκε

Information about the young men they gather by looking at them directly. Many human characteristics are conveyed by the eyes and many await interpretation and observation in the brows and the cheeks, and by means of them skilled students of nature inspect human minds, like images in a mirror. Philosophy is highly valued here, and the pursuit enjoys honor among the Indians, so that it is absolutely essential for candidates in philosophy to undergo scrutiny and face countless tests. Well, the fact that we study it with teachers, and that it involves examination.⁴⁹³

This passage should be read in conjunction with Libanius' presentation of pantomime training. While Phraortes acknowledges that becoming a philosopher is a challenging profession that only a few pursue, Libanius emphasizes that pantomime is only for capable individuals.⁴⁹⁴ Both Philostratus and Libanius emphasize the importance of examination and selection, but pantomime examiners focus on the physical skill while Indian philosophers prioritize mental prowess.

⁴⁹³ Philostr. VA, 2.30.2, trans. Jones

⁴⁹⁴ "It is not within the capability of everyone's body to take up the profession (οὐ παντός σώματος ἐστὶ ὑποδέξασθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα), but just as in the case of puppies and foals and those who intend to become athletes, the men who are skilled in examining each of these apply a test, and select all who, through their physical type, show promise of excellence in the actions involved (οἱ τούτων ἕκαστου δεινοὶ γε ἰδεῖν δοκιμασίαν προσάγουτες τὰ μὴ ἐγκρίνουσιν ὅσα τῷ τύπῳ τῶν σωμάτων μηνύει τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν πράξεων ἀρετήν), but reject others who will not be appealing enough for the work, so it is necessary also for a boy to show that he will attain a moderate height and will not become plump." Lib. Ora. 64.103, trans. Molloy.

Returning to Philostratus' rejection of Xenophon's version of Socrates, despite his explicit rejection of pantomime performance, Philostratus implicitly admires the success of pantomime performers and believes that elite intellectuals should emulate them. He proposes a new method of philosopher training based on the training of pantomime dancers but transferred to the context of Indian philosophy.⁴⁹⁵ As previously discussed, Lucian's portrayal of pantomime dancers reflects an idealized version of Hellenic intellectuals' self-reflection. Pantomime dancers are both Hellenic intellectuals' selves and others. Similarly, Philostratus presents the Indus Valley as a Hellenic "self."⁴⁹⁶

Understanding Phraortes' first point on lacking legal protection of Greek philosophy is easier in this context.⁴⁹⁷ The use of legal metaphor to understand Greek philosophy can be traced back to Cicero's *De Oratore* during the late republic. At the beginning of *De Oratore*, Crassus initiates the discussion, stressing the significance of eloquence, and Scaevola responds by imagining a legal suit in which different philosophical schools accuse Crassus.⁴⁹⁸ This imaginary legal affair shows how late republican Roman elites attempted to appropriate Greek philosophy, which was still foreign to them, based on Roman legal traditions from which traditional Roman elites derived their pride.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁵ The comparison between Indian and Greek philosophers also recalls Diodorus' comparison between Greek and Babylonian philosophers, Diod. Sic. 2.29

⁴⁹⁶ While Philostratus' mention of Seleucus and Antiochus quickly touches upon the Hellenistic past in Mesopotamia (Philostr. VA. 1.38.2), Philostratus' writing on Taxila including Porus' elephants which still live (Philostr. VA, 2.12.2) culminates Philostratus' interest in the Indus Valley as a Hellenistic landscape. For Porus' elephants (1972): 473-502. Given that imperial Greek authors tends to use Persia/Parthia as a synonym for Rome (cf. Almagor (2018)), it is tentative to suggest that Philostratus' representation of the way the Indus valley is subjugated to Parthia recalls Roman domination in Greece.

⁴⁹⁷ Philostr. VA, 2.29.2

⁴⁹⁸ Cic. *De Orat.* 1.41-44

⁴⁹⁹ For a recent discussion of Roman law and Greek philosophy in this dialogue, see Zetzel (2022).

When Crassus mentions that he may bring a number of Greek philosophers to amuse his audience by watching their debate,⁵⁰⁰ it is reminiscent of Lucius Anicius Gallus' introduction of Greek performers for entertainment in 167 BCE after the Third Macedonian War.⁵⁰¹ In other words, Greek philosophers were not fundamentally different from buffoons from whom Roman elites derived pleasure. This resemblance was only possible due to Rome's massive enslavement of the Greek people, including performers and intellectuals, who were legally considered slaves in Rome.⁵⁰²

Although the situation changed significantly during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, when elite Greek intellectuals were no longer slaves, Greek sophists remained eager to gain recognition from Roman political authorities. In Lucian's *On Salaried Posts*, a sophist's performance at a Roman elite banquet, alongside other popular performers, vividly depicts this anxiety among elite Hellenic intellectuals.⁵⁰³ Philostratus' mention of the legal protection of philosophy speaks to the relationship between Greek philosophy and Roman political authorities, which he explores in an Indian context based on a certain level of familiarity with the Parthian political culture in the Indus Valley.⁵⁰⁴

Philostratus wrote during a time when pantomime dancers enjoyed an unusual level of status. In Herodian's account, the competing visions of how to educate Alexander Severus between Elagabalus and Severus' mother Julia Mamaea, whether based on dance or Greco-Latin instruction, exemplify the elevating challenge that pantomime dancers posed to

⁵⁰⁰ *Quod si te, Cotta, arbitrarer aut te, Sulpici, de eis rebus audire velle, adduxissem huc Graecum aliquem, qui nos istius modi disputationibus delectaret; quod ne nunc quidem difficile factu est*, Cic. de. Orat. 1.104-105

⁵⁰¹ μεταπεμψαμενος γὰρ τοὺς ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐπιφανεστάτους τεχνίτας καὶ σκηνὴν κατασκευάσας μεγίστην ἐν τῷ κίρκῳ πρῶτους εἰσηῆγεν αὐλητὰς ἅμα πάντα, Polyb. 30.22.2=Athen. Deipno. 14.615.2. Cf. Morgan (2022): 42-9.

⁵⁰² Volk (2021): 41-6.

⁵⁰³ Wang (2021): 159-61.

⁵⁰⁴ My view differs from Jake Nabel's intertextual approach on how Philostratus engages with classical *topoi* on the Persians, Nabel (forthcoming).

sophists.⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, in *Vita Sophistarum*, Philostratus' vivid description of pantomime audiences defecting from a dancer's performance to the sophist Hadrian of Tyre illustrates sophists' desire to effectively compete with dancers by appropriating their visual style.⁵⁰⁶

In this context, Philostratus presents India as a philosophical utopia where state politics are guided by philosophers. The way in which India trains philosophers, as Philostratus envisions, derives from actual pantomime training. The first four books of *Vita Apollonii* not only depict the former Hellenistic landscape but also have pantomime dance as an underlying theme. Although the text does not directly reference theater performance, the growing significance of pantomime dancers from the late 2nd century CE onward is a major cultural background in which the ethnographic imagination of former Hellenistic Asia took place in the text. Contrasting with Lucian's idea of a pantomime dancer's instrumental role in navigating ethnic boundaries in the Pontus area while setting Antioch as a center of pantomime performance, Philostratus highlights the role of a Hellenic sophist in transregional exchange by traveling from Antioch to India based on the existing image of a pantomime dancer.

Conclusion

This chapter uses three case studies to demonstrate how former Hellenistic Asia was imagined through Roman performance, with three regional settings: Alexandria, Aphrodisias, and Antioch. From an eastern perspective, the increasing tension between Rome and Parthia around the issue of Armenia during the second half of the 1st century CE

⁵⁰⁵ Hdn, 5.7.4-5. Rowan Clare mentions "foreign paideia" with respect to this passage, Clare (2012): 172. Also see Roberto (2022): 133-53.

⁵⁰⁶ Philostr, VS, 589. Lada-Richards helpfully attributes it to sophists' appropriation of pantomime visual style, Lada-Richards (2009): 304-5.

must be the general background for renewed interest in the east, as evident in Plutarch's account of Antony's public donation of territories to his sons in the theater at Alexandria, and Chariton's novelistic story on Persia. The rise of Sasanian Iran and its confrontation with Rome must also be responsible for Philostratus' interest in eastern lands.⁵⁰⁷ However, what is common to all texts is the way they reimagine the former Hellenistic landscape as an entity. Moreover, all portraits have a pantomime performance setting. Plutarch's story of Cleopatra is directly derived from a pantomime libretto. The actual economic practice of constructing a Roman theater in Aphrodisias dictated the way Chariton perceived the east in theatrical terms. Furthermore, the growth of pantomime dance as a defining feature of pantomime performance is reflected in Philostratus's portrait of Apollonius as a wandering sophist whose traveling body is a vehicle for communicating Hellenism in the East.

⁵⁰⁷ As a comparison, Sasanian Iran and the portrayal of Phoenicians in Philostratus' *Heroikos*, Shayegan (2005): 285-316.

Chapter 4 Popular Performers and the Making of a Chinese Rome

Introduction

Chapter 2 explored how Western Han China develop its initial knowledge of the outside world through participation in trans-continental commercial networks facilitated by nomadic political regimes, and how Sima Qian utilized this knowledge to engage with contemporary political economic debates. This chapter investigates how Chinese knowledge of the Mediterranean was derived from the popular narrative of Rome on the Indian Ocean. While both the Central Eurasian steppe and the Indian Ocean were major conduits for transregional communications across pre-modern Eurasia, nomadic imperialism facilitated transregional exchanges through the domination of the steppe world, but no overarching political authority existed in the Indian Ocean world. This difference raises questions about the usefulness of the Indian Ocean as an analytical tool for researching pre-modern transregional exchanges.

The traditional historiography of the Indian Ocean during the early 20th century emphasized a modernizing understanding of long-distance trade across the Indian Ocean as a modern international economy and a Rome-centered point of view, while downplaying the different political entities involved in trade.⁵⁰⁸ More recent scholarship have explicitly or implicitly challenged these views from two major angles: 1.) a more Near Eastern and South Asian point of view highlighting the agency of non-Mediterranean people in the Indian Ocean trade;⁵⁰⁹ 2.) more focuses on the individual social life of each trafficked item (spice, pepper, frankincense, myrrh, silk, coin, etc.).⁵¹⁰ Current research emphasizes the piecemeal and

⁵⁰⁸ For a survey of early scholarship before the 1950s, see Cobb (2018): 9-13.

⁵⁰⁹ For Nabataeans, Durand (2009): 405-11; Durand (2012): 85-90; Terpstra (2015): 73-94. For Palmyra, Seland (2016). For India and Sri Lanka, see De Saxcé (2016): 53-74; Sidebotham (2016): 75-82; Asher (2019): 157-68. For the Red Sea, Sidebotham (2011). For Parthia, Gregoratti (2019): 52-72.

⁵¹⁰ Hull (2008): 275-88; Van der Veen and Morales (2015): 54-63; De Romanis (2020).

accidental nature of the ancient Indian Ocean trade: there was no unified, systematic trade across the Indian Ocean resembling modern and contemporary international trade under 19th-century British colonialism or post-WWII American neoliberal imperialism. Instead, if there existed an ancient Indian Ocean trade, it was an aggregation of these piecemeal and accidental long-distance trades involving various items and ethnic groups.⁵¹¹

Nevertheless, the thesis that there was a unified Roman network across the Indian Ocean is still evident among scholars who work on the cultural aspect of the Indian Ocean exchange, especially focusing on the fact that Greek was the *lingua franca* for trans-regional exchange.⁵¹² Moreover, the recent conversation between global studies and ancient Indian Ocean studies encourages a global horizon to Indian Ocean studies.⁵¹³

While engaging with recent scholarship and the major agenda of this dissertation, this chapter highlights the agency of an overlooked “commodity” trafficked on the Indian Ocean from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE: performers. Since the sinologist Paul Pelliot’s short essay, which accounts for the appearance of Mediterranean performers in China,⁵¹⁴ the phenomenon of wandering performers on the Indian Ocean has not received specific attention.⁵¹⁵ While the previous chapter emphasizes pantomime-dominated Roman theater as an institutional mechanism through which imperial Roman ethnography of the East developed, this chapter demonstrates the role of wandering performers in bringing the knowledge of Rome to China. On the one hand, I highlight this dynamic as a Sino-Mediterranean cultural exchange. On the other

⁵¹¹ For a recent synthetic account, Cobb (2018)

⁵¹² Seland (2013): 373-90; Andrade (2018): 42-66. Though this kind of research pays keen attention to the sheer ethnic and cultural diversity in the Indian Ocean exchange, they still highlight the Greek language as a unified factor to conceive the Indian Ocean world as a space.

⁵¹³ Autiero and Cobb (2021).

⁵¹⁴ Pelliot (1915): 690-1; for an overview of Pelliot’s contribution, see Sinor (2001): xxv-xxxv.

⁵¹⁵ Most recently, in the form of a substantial note, Harry Morgan discusses this problem, Morgan (2022): 35, no.146.

hand, I also pay attention to the way the uneasy relationship between the Chinese imperial center and its southwestern frontier during the early 2nd century CE conditioned the travels of Mediterranean performers to the Chinese court via southwest China, so as to avoid a simple romanization of this exchange. In doing so, my discussion is consistent with the concern about the piecemeal nature of the ancient Indian Ocean in current historiography.

The Sophytos inscription from Kandahar, Afghanistan is a lynchpin for my discussion. The inscription was acquired from the antiquities market in Kandahar, Afghanistan.⁵¹⁶ Paul Bernard, Jean-Georges Pinault, and Georges Rougemont have undertaken systematic research on this inscription. According to their research, this inscription should not be deemed a forgery, and Sophytos is the Greek form of the Indic name Subhūti.⁵¹⁷ Meanwhile, this inscription has been dated to the 2nd century BCE by relating it to the Greco-Bactrian kingdom's conquest of northwestern India.⁵¹⁸ This inscription has drawn scholarly attention from different angles.⁵¹⁹ In particular, Rachel Mairs provided a theory-informed systematic interpretation from the perspective of ethnicity and display of identity, opening the door for further historical interpretation.⁵²⁰ More recently, a new dating of this inscription proposes that it should be dated no earlier than the late 1st century BCE.⁵²¹ In a passing comment, Angelos Chaniotis endorses this view and relates this inscription to the vibrant Indian Ocean trade during the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE.⁵²²

In conjunction with relevant Indic sources, I read this inscription as a performer's voice using the Homeric motif to document his successful mercantile career based on

⁵¹⁶ Mairs (2014): 107-9.

⁵¹⁷ Bernard, Pinault, and Rougemont (2004): 250.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 235-6.

⁵¹⁹ Bresson (2012): 233; Garulli (2012): 279-87; Hunter (2018): 22-24.

⁵²⁰ Mairs (2014): 102-146.

⁵²¹ Santin (2009): 276-82; Del Corso (2010): 3-5; Lougouvaya (2016): 185-202.

⁵²² Chaniotis (2018): 390-391.

performance between the 2nd century BCE and the early 1st century CE. Based on Chinese materials on Kandahar, as I argue, Kandahar, from which the Sophytos inscription is found, is a well-attested case showing the way in which China acquired its initial knowledge of the Mediterranean through Central Asia. In particular, by reading together Pliny's account of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Chinese account of Rome (Daqin), I show that these two accounts share surprising similarities. As I suggest, both accounts derive from the popular narrative of the Roman state power on the Indian Ocean, based on the Homeric motif of the Phaeacian island. While Rome mapped out the external perception of its power onto a South Asian island as its mirror, China directly construed Rome as its self-image. Based on the Sophytos inscription and Chinese materials on Mediterranean performers, I argue that wandering performers on the Indian Ocean are the most likely candidates responsible for creating Chinese knowledge of Rome.

While sections 1 and 2 explore the phenomenon of wandering performers on the Indian Ocean as an ancient global cultural exchange, the third section adopts a local perspective to examine how the tension between the Chinese imperial center and southwestern ethnic groups was the political context behind the Mediterranean performers' arrival in China. In turn, by examining the use of Rome in Chinese Buddhist and Taoist debates during the 3rd century CE, the final section explores the lasting impact of these performers in the Chinese ethnographic system.

From Kandahar to Luoyang: the World of Sophytos

The head official Ban Chao sent Gan Ying, the vice-head of the protectorate of the Western Regions, on a diplomatic mission to Rome in the 90s CE, which *Hou Hanshu* reports as follows:

“On the ninth year of Yonghe of Emperor He, the protector Ban Chao dispatched Gan Ying to be an envoy to the Great Qin (Rome). (When Gan Ying) arrived in Tiaozhi, he

faced the Great Sea (the Indian Ocean) and wanted to move across it. However, the sailor on the western frontier of Anxi (Parthia) told Ying: ‘The sea is vast. Travel can only be made possible under the condition of mild wind. (Even then), it takes three months to cross it. If one encounters the violent wind, it could take two years. So the people who made the sea voyage usually bring foodstuff for three years with them. People can easily get homesick in the middle of the sea, and deaths on the sea usually took place.’ After having been informed of it, Ying stopped (and went back to China).”⁵²³

This account is well-known in China, but its cultural significance has not been explored. Ban Chao commissioned Gan Ying to Rome at a critical moment, after his victory over the Kushans in the Tarim Basin, which propelled Kushan imperial interest toward India and the vibrant Indian Ocean trade.⁵²⁴ It then must not be a coincidence that Ban Chao commissioned Gan Ying to Rome at this critical moment. The best explanation is that Ban Chao obtained information about Rome by monitoring Kushan affairs.

Additionally, the *Hou Hanshu* details that Gan Ying arrived in Tiaozhi, which is designated to the Characene kingdom in the Persian Gulf in this context,⁵²⁵ from Wuyishanli.⁵²⁶ Wuyishanli is a Chinese phonological rendering of Alexandria in Arachosia, i.e. Kandahar.⁵²⁷ Gan Ying thus followed the route between Kandahar and the southwestern Iranian plateau that

⁵²³ *Hou hanshu* (History of Late Han), Volume 88, 2918.

⁵²⁴ Chinese rule represented by the Protectorate in the Western Regions in the Tarim Basin, which also monitored affairs further west, ended during Wang Mang’s governance between 9 and 23 CE. China only reestablished the protectorate in 78 CE. Even though we have to construe how much Parthian-Roman warfare and the Chinese civil wars between Western and Eastern Han provided a favorable environment for a Central Asia-based imperial enterprise, we are certain that the return of China to Central Asia conflicted with the Kushan power. This conflict manifests in the Sino-Kushan war in 88 CE, a decade after the re-establishment of the Protectorate in the Western Regions in the Tarim Basin, given Kushan’s existing interest in the basin. The result is a Chinese victory over the Kushans (*Hou Hanshu*, Volume 47, 1580). The Kushan king Vima Kadphises then turned to expand southward by crossing the Hindu Kush and conquering northwestern India. The Chinese reaction to it is evidenced in the Chinese account of Kushan rule in India. The account emphasizes India’s economic relationship with Rome which is called Daqin (the Great Qin). For the Kushan power in the Tarim basin, see Vorderstrasse (2020): 169-201; Morris (2020): 80. For Kushan fortification in the Wakhan corridor, see Learner (2016): 107-30.

⁵²⁵ For this kingdom, see Schuol (2000); Gregoratti (2011): 209-229.

⁵²⁶ *Hou hanshu* (History of Late Han), Volume 88, 2918.

⁵²⁷ Pulleyblank (1999): 73.

goes back to the Achaemenid period.⁵²⁸ This aspect also disproves the long-held myth that Parthia deliberately prevented a direct connection between China and Rome as shown in this account.⁵²⁹ There was no reason for Parthian state authorities to tolerate Gan Ying's arrival to the western border of Parthia while allowing him to pass through the Iranian plateau. Instead, the sailor who advised Gan Ying was likely a middleman in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. Such middlemen provided aid for travel between Parthia and the Mediterranean.⁵³⁰

An alternative explanation of this account is Chinese exposure to the Homeric nostos motif when Gan Ying was about to embark on his Indian Ocean journey. To account for the agent that shaped Gan Ying's encounter with the Siren motif in the Persian Gulf, we need to consider wandering pantomime performers on the Indian Ocean. In the pantomime performance, Lucian clearly mentions Sirens as a program in pantomime dance,⁵³¹ which captures the aesthetic experience of watching the pantomime performance. When Crato accuses of Lycinus' addiction to pantomime performance, he uses the Siren motif,⁵³² to which Lycinus responds accordingly:

πλὴν τό γε παράδειγμα, τὴν τῶν Λωτοφάγων καὶ Σειρήνων εἰκόνα, πάνυ ἀνομοιοτάτην μοι δοκεῖς εἰρηκέναι ὧν πέπονθα, παρ' ὅσον τοῖς μὲν τοῦ λωτοῦ γευσσάμενοις καὶ τῶν Σειρήνων ἀκούσασιν ὄλεθρος ἦν τῆς τε ἐδωδῆς καὶ τῆς ἀκροάσεως τοῦπιτίμιον, ἐμοὶ δὲ πρὸς τῷ τὴν ἡδονὴν παρὰ πολὺ ἡδίω πεφυκέναι καὶ τὸ τέλος ἀγαθὸν ἀποβέβηκεν· οὐ γὰρ εἰς λήθην τῶν οἴκοι οὐδ' εἰς ἀγνωσίαν τῶν κατ' ἐμαυτὸν περιίσταμαι, ἀλλ' εἰ χρὴ μηδὲν ὀκνήσαντα εἰπεῖν, μακρῶ πινυτώτερος καὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ διορατικώτερος ἐκ τοῦ θεάτρου σοὶ ἐπανελήλυθα.

More than the warning about the Lotus-eaters and Sirens similes, what you said is completely not from my experience. As far as those who tasted lotus and heard the Sirens, death was the penalty for eating and hearing. But for me, in addition to becoming more glad about the pleasure, it finally proved to be a benefit. I neither came to be forgetful of home nor be ignorant about my affairs. Instead, if I need to say

⁵²⁸ For Arachosia and the Achaemenids, see King (2019): 185-99.

⁵²⁹ For a recent reprise of this view, see Gregoratti (2012); 109-119.

⁵³⁰ Cameron (2018): 231-80.

⁵³¹ Luc. Dalt. 50. For Sirens in Lucian, see Deriu (2018): 345-61.

⁵³² Ibid, 3

without hesitation, after returning from the theater to you, I became much more sharpened and insightful in life.⁵³³

In the previous chapter, it was shown that Lucian's vision of pantomime centers around dance and reflects the growing importance of pantomime dance during his time. Lucian constructs an ideal version of pantomime based on the agenda of the sophists. This is exemplified in a passage where Crato expresses hesitation to attend a pantomime theater due to concerns about feeling awkward among enthusiastic fans.⁵³⁴ This view likely represents the more mainstream attitude among intellectuals.⁵³⁵

In contrast, Lycinus's comment that he gains wisdom from watching pantomime represents an idealistic version. Lucian's acquisition of insights from watching pantomime is comparable to a contemporary trained performance ethnographer who attends a performance event with certain intellectual agendas that most audiences do not share.⁵³⁶ Therefore, what Lucian argues against more stands for the popular aesthetic of pantomime.⁵³⁷ The Lotus and Siren metaphors must be the established meta-theatrical motifs of general audiences' addiction to pantomime performance.

In light of this, the Siren motif that Gan Ying was exposed to in the Persian Gulf undoubtedly captures the risk of traveling on the Indian Ocean. However, it is worth exploring further who were the agents transmitting this Homeric motif to the Indian Ocean and what made sailors on the Indian Ocean use the Siren motif to express their uncertainty

⁵³³ Ibid, 4.

⁵³⁴ Luc. Salt. 5

⁵³⁵ Crato's mention about his would-be experience as a gray-haired and bearded old man sitting among maniac female audiences ("Ἐτι γὰρ τοῦτό μοι τὸ λοιπὸν ἦν, ἐν βαθεῖ τούτῳ τῷ πάγωνι καὶ πολιᾷ τῇ κόμῃ καθῆσθαι μέσον ἐν τοῖς γυναίκοις καὶ τοῖς μεμνημένοις ἐκείνοις θεαταῖς) suggest that the majority of pantomime watchers, in intellectual stereotype, are young females.

⁵³⁶ In *Nigrinus*, Lucian has a vivid portrayal of his experience in sitting at a theater: καὶ καθίσας ἑμαυτὸν ὥσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ μυριάνδρῳ σφόδρα που μετέωρος ἐπισκοπῶ τὰ γιγνόμενα, τοῦτο μὲν πολλὴν ψυχαγωγίαν καὶ γέλτα παρεχειν δυνάμενα, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ πείραν ἀνδρὸς ὡς ἀληθῶς βεβαίου λαβεῖν, Luc. Nigr. 18.

⁵³⁷ See chapter 3.

about travels. As I will be demonstrating, wandering performers on the Indian Ocean were instrumental in transmitting Homeric motives across the Indian Ocean when Siren was used as a motif to capture general audiences' aesthetic experience of watching pantomime performances.

The first recorded instance of wandering performers from the Mediterranean to the farther east is from Chinese evidence in the 110s BCE, where a group of Mediterranean performers arrived from Lixuan (Alexandria) to China with Parthian envoys.⁵³⁸ Lixuan refers to Alexandria in Egypt.⁵³⁹ From a Parthian perspective, these performers' appearance in China as Parthia's gifts to China is part of Parthian authorities' interest in Hellenic performance culture, as revealed from Greek music motifs on rhytons from Parthian Nisa in today's Turkmenistan.⁵⁴⁰ From a Mediterranean perspective, however, we can detect that Ptolemaic Egypt exported performers to the farther east.

Strabo's account of the Ptolemies' involvement in the Indian Ocean trade supports the Chinese account of Alexandrian performers. According to Strabo, after the Ptolemaic authorities discovered the direct route from Egypt to India from an Indian refugee in Egypt, Eudoxus, a Ptolemies' mercenary sailor, accompanied this refugee to India.⁵⁴¹ Due to subsequent dissatisfaction with the monopoly on the trade by the Ptolemaic royal house, Eudoxus decided to undertake private trade to India, which included slave musicians.⁵⁴² Trafficking people with skills was likely a profitable enterprise for long-distance travel

⁵³⁸ Shiji (Historical Records), Volume 123, 3172.

⁵³⁹ Yu (2013): 21. Though they were other cities named Alexandria in the East, for Alexandria in Arachosia (today's southern Afghanistan), the Chinese rendering is Wuyishanli. Also, as to be shown, in the Chinese account of Rome, one of the Chinese names for Rome is Lijian, which is equivalent to Lixuan

⁵⁴⁰ See chapter 3.

⁵⁴¹ For the historicity of Cyzicus, see Habicht (2013) 197-206; Chaniotis (2018) 388-90. For the Ptolemies' engagement with the Indian Ocean trade, see Cobb (2018): 47-58; Wilkinson (2021): 144-64.

⁵⁴² ἐμβιβάσαι τε μουσικά παιδισκάρια καὶ ἰατροὺς καὶ ἄλλους τεχνίτας, ἔπειτα πλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰνδικὴν μετέωρον ζεφύροις συνεχέσι, Strab. 2.3.4.

between Egypt and India, as they possessed expertise that would otherwise be unavailable in India. The music girl, for instance, might have specialized in an instrument that the Indians had never heard but would enjoy. Eudoxus' previous experience in traveling to India must have informed him of the potential demand for Mediterranean performers in India. His exportation of slave musicians to India further sheds light on the dynamic behind Alexandrian performers' arrival in China.

Meanwhile, when the Ptolemies gained direct access to India through the Indian Ocean, Ptolemaic authorities used a Homeric motif to record their encounter with the Indian refugee as follows:

τυχεῖν δὴ τινα Ἰνδὸν κομισθέντα ὡς τὸν βασιλέα ὑπὸ τῶν φυλάκων τοῦ Ἀραβίου μυχοῦ, λεγόντων εὐρεῖν ἡμίθανῆ καταχθέντα μόνον ἐν νηί, τίς δ' εἶη καὶ πόθεν ἀγνοεῖν μὴ συνιέντας τὴν διάλεκτον· τὸν δὲ παραδοῦναι τοῖς διδάξουσιν ἐλληνίζειν. ἐκμαθόντα δὲ διηγῆσασθαι διότι ἐκ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς πλέων περιπέσοι πλάνη καὶ σωθείη δεῦρο τοὺς σύμπλους ἀποβαλὼν λιμῶ

It chanced that a certain Indian was brought to the king by the coast guard of the Arabian Gulf. They reported that they had found him reduced to a state of half-death and being alone on a ship; not understanding his language, they did not know who he was and where he came from. They entrusted him to teachers to learn Greek. On acquiring (Greek), this Indian related that he started from the coasts of India, he lost his course, and after reaching Egypt he survived while losing his shipmates due to hunger.⁵⁴³

The scene of the discovery of an Indian refugee evokes a clear Homeric motif about the interface between traveling and the ethnographic gaze.⁵⁴⁴ However, unlike Odysseus, who evaluates each region he visits based on a Hellenocentric perspective, there exists a salient Ptolemaic point of view in which this Indian is the object of ethnographic meditation by the Ptolemies.⁵⁴⁵ The outcome of this causal encounter is the Indian's mastery of Greek language and culture, and after

⁵⁴³ Strab. 2.3.4, trans. Roller, modified. For the Ptolemies' Indian Ocean link, see Bucharin (2011): 109-23.

⁵⁴⁴ The question of τίς δ' εἶη καὶ πόθεν is a very typical one throughout Odysseus' traveling.

⁵⁴⁵ Dougherty (1993) 122-143.

overcoming the language barrier, this Indian serves as a guide who directly links the Ptolemies to India. The story of this Indian refugee clearly demonstrates Ptolemies' self-consciousness in transferring the Homeric motif to capture their engagement with the Indian Ocean trade.⁵⁴⁶ Eudoxus' knowledge of Indian demand for Mediterranean performers was an outcome of this encounter.

In this light, two dynamics can be observed during the early 1st century BCE: 1.) wandering performers on the Indian Ocean; 2.) the Ptolemies' use of Homeric motif to address its direct engagement with the Indian Ocean trade. I contend that the entwinement of these two aspects was responsible for the Siren motif that Gan Ying encountered. The Sophytos inscription from Kandahar is a crucial piece of evidence for understanding this transmission, as Kandahar was a major route through which China was linked to the farther west.

As discussed, Gan Ying arrived in the Persian Gulf from Kandahar. This choice of route was not a coincidence but arose from China's established link with Kandahar during the Western Han period. In recounting Chinese access to Tiaozi in the Persian Gulf, the author of the *Hanshu*, Ban Gu, the elder brother of Ban Chao who commissioned Gan Ying's journey, comments that Wuyishanli (Kandahar/Alexandria) is the western limit of Chinese travelers.⁵⁴⁷ This comment helps us understand the account of Kandahar in *Hanshu*, which goes as follows:

“(When it comes to) the state of Wuyishanli (Alexandria in Arachosia or Kandahar), its king's (capital?) distance from Chang'an is twelve thousand and two hundred li. It does not belong to (Han's) Protectorate (in the Western Region). Its household is big enough to support its army, being a huge state. Following the northeastern direction, it takes about sixty days to arrive in the office of the Protectorate. It neighbors Jibin (Gandhara) in the east, Putao (Bactria?) in the north, and Lixuan (Alexandria in Egypt or the

⁵⁴⁶ This aspect echoes the sculpture of Apotheosis of Homer by Archelaus of Priene in which Homer is enthroned by time (chronos) and world (cosmos), suggesting the wide-spread of Homer across space and the longevity of Homer throughout ages. This sculpture was sponsored by Ptolemy IV during the early 2nd century BCE and envisioned Ptolemaic imperialism by culting Homer. For relevant discussion, see Stewart (2014): 134-39.

⁵⁴⁷ Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2920.

Ptolemies) and Tiaozhi (Antioch in Syria or the Seleucids) in the west. It takes more than one hundred days to arrive in Tiaozhi.In the land of Wuyi, it is hot during the summer. In terms of its plantation, pastoral flocks, vegetation, palace and house, market, money and goods, weapon, god and pearl, and the like, all are similar to the ones in Jibin. But it has peach, lion, and rhinoceros. Its custom pays attention to protecting animals. For its money, a human portrait is on its obverse and a horse-rider is on its reverse. It uses gold and silver to decorate the scepter. Its location is very far and Han envoys hardly go there. Departing from the Gate of Jade and the Gate of South, following the southern route (in the Tarim basin), passing by Shanshan and turning southward, one arrives in Wuyishanli, the extreme point of the southern route.”⁵⁴⁸

The account of Kandahar is not present in Sima Qian’s report, but this information might have been accumulated at a later time.⁵⁴⁹ The most important information from the account above is Kandahar’s connection to Tiaozhi and Lixuan. While it is uncertain if Tiaozhi refers to Antioch or Characene in this context,⁵⁵⁰ Lixuan must indicate Alexandria in Egypt. Therefore, Chinese authorities were aware of Kandahar’s Mediterranean connections.

While it is unrealistic to locate Tiaozhi and Lixuan on the west of Kandahar, given the vast distance in between, this geographical identification demonstrates Chinese officials’ knowledge of Kandahar’s connection with the Mediterranean and its ideological significance for Chinese authorities. This aspect helps us understand two earlier attempts to connect with the Hellenistic world from the Far East: Aśoka’s missionary to the Hellenistic kingdoms, as mentioned in the Greek translation of the Major Edict XIII in Kandahar, and Sima Qian’s

⁵⁴⁸ Hanshu, volume 96a, 3888-9.

⁵⁴⁹ There two attested Chinese diplomacy with Kandahar from the wooden clips in Xuanyuan in today’s Gansu, Hao and Zhang (2009): 209.

⁵⁵⁰ In the Western Han period, it more likely refers to Antioch. What epitomizes this dynamic is a recognition of Tiaozhi as the westernmost region while what lies further west is the place of sun setting (Hanshu, Volume 96a, 3888) to an appreciation that the place west of Tiaozhi is a gigantic empire called Daqin. In conjunction with this change, Tiaozhi refers to somewhere in the Persian Gulf, likely the Characene kingdom, in *Hou Hanshu*. When Fan Ye introduces Tiaozhi, he particularly highlights that the previous knowledge about Tiaozhi in *Hanshu* is wrong (Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2920). This difference has to do with that the horizon in *Shiji* and *Hanshu* is defined by the late Hellenistic world but Rome-Parthia-Kushan dominates the knowledge in *Hou Hanshu*. In the *Milindapañha* (The Questions of Milinda), a Pali text that recounts the conversation between the Indo-Greek king Menander and Indian monk Nāsenā dated to the 2nd century CE. This text is the sole extant document that is specifically related to a Greek king in Hellenistic Central Asia and India. In it, Yavanaka must refer to the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (*Milindapañha*, 1.1). However, Yavana in later Indian sources addresses more to the people from the Mediterranean and the Near East instead of Hellenistic Central Asia.

passing mention of Emperor Wu's sending of diplomats to Tiaozi and Lixuan.⁵⁵¹ The Chinese knowledge of Kandahar's Mediterranean link helps us understand these attempts, as Gan Ying's travels from China to the Persian Gulf via Kandahar is not an isolated case.

The Sophytos inscription fills the missing link between China's established relationship with Kandahar and Gan Ying's encounter with the Siren motif in the Persian Gulf. As I will show, the Sophytos inscription recounts how a wandering performer used the Homeric motif to narrate his trajectory. The dating of this inscription ranges from the 2nd century BCE to the early 1st century CE. The epigram states that Sophytos originally comes from a distinguished family, but his family's decline forces him to undertake an overseas journey by borrowing money. After making enormous fortunes, he returns to his homeland, rebuilds his ancestral tomb and house, and erects this inscription.⁵⁵² While the inscription registers mercantile ideology by fleshing out merchants' voices from the *Odyssey*,⁵⁵³ it is worth wondering what kind of mercantile activity requires moving from one city to another city.⁵⁵⁴ As far as current evidence on ancient long-distance trade on the Indian Ocean suggests, long-distance traders did not need to travel from city to city to sell their products; they only need to ship goods to the major port while local traders, who were more familiar with the local markets, would distribute them to the

⁵⁵¹ Shiji, Volume 123, 3170. Only Edicts 12 and 13 are preserved in Kandahar. Yet, as inferred from inscriptions from other places, there should have been more edicts in Kandahar so that even all of the fourteen edicts could have been translated into Greek but only two of them have survived. As the major edicts were erected in the center of old Kandahar, these inscriptions made the imperial ideology legible in a region far from the imperial center in a language widespread from the Mediterranean to Central Asia. See Humbach (1971): 52-8; Fussman (1982): 621-47; Bang (2012): 60-75; Von Hinüber (2016): 191-206; Thapar (2015): 577-600; Ball (2020): 363; Maniscalco (2021): 139-66.

⁵⁵² Richard Hunter's notice of this epigram represents a recent discussion from a Homeric perspective, Hunter (2018): 22-24.

⁵⁵³ As Carol Dougherty argues, Odysseus is a proto-wandering poet who sells his poetic skill while revising aristocratic ideology (Dougherty (1993) 38-61). This epigram's engagement with the Cretan tale in the *Odyssey* is particularly evident (Od. 8.159-164). For the Cretan tale in the epic and slaves' voice, see Rankine (2011): 34-50.

⁵⁵⁴ In particular, the phrase ἐπ' ἐμπορήσιον ἰὼν εἰς ἄστρα πολλὰ (visiting many cities on mercantile sailing) fully discloses Sophytos' occupation as a wandering performer. Traveling from city to city is characteristic of a wandering performer's activity.

domestic market.⁵⁵⁵ I suggest that Sophytos was a wandering performer who traveled around selling his performance skill.

The major clue for his performance activity is in lines 5-7 of the inscription: “As I practiced the virtues of Apollo and Muses mixed with noble prudence, I was deliberating on how would I revive the ancestral hall one more time (ὡς ἀρετὴν Ἐκάτου Μουσέων τ’ ἦσ(κ)ηκα σὺν ἐσθλῆι/φυρτὴν σωφροσύνηι, (τ)ήμος ἐπεφρασάμην/ὕψώσαιμί κε πῶς μέγαρον πατρώϊον αὐθις).”⁵⁵⁶ What follows is Sophytos’ borrowing of silvered money from someone else.⁵⁵⁷ We can observe that Sophytos considered the mastery of the virtues of Apollo/Muses and silvered money as two conditions for his overseas fortune, which would potentially yield a great fortune.⁵⁵⁸ Since Apollo and Muses are mentioned together, the technique of Apollo and Muses is best interpreted as music/performance skill.

In particular, Sophytos’ account of his training recalls a relevant section in *Natyashastra*, a unique ancient Indian document about performance training composed between the 2nd century BCE and the early 1st century CE, which goes as follows:

Brahma agreed. Dismissing the petitioners he mediated in solitude and finally decided to compose a fifth Veda incorporating all the arts and sciences, and enlightening too... Then he called Indra and others and said: ‘Here is the Nātyaveda. Let the sura-s (gods) practice (*niyuj*) it. It requires persons who are smart (*kuśala*), intelligent (*vidagdha*), observant and tireless (*jitaśrama*).’ Indra pondered and then said that the sura-s were unable to practice it since they have grasped the Vedic knowledge and are also self-controlled,’ he added...Brahma commanded me. So I practiced it with my

⁵⁵⁵ As a text dating to the mid-2nd century AD, the Muziris papyrus shows that a loan made in Muziris in southern India or in Alexandria enabled someone to travel from India to Alexandria or the reverse to undertake commerce. Casson (1990): 195-206.

⁵⁵⁶ *Inscriptions grecques d’Iran et d’Asie centrale*, 174.

⁵⁵⁷ τεκνοφόρον δὲ λαβὼν ἄλλοθεν ἀργύριον/Ὁ οἴκοθεν ἐξέμολον μεμαῶς οὐ πρόσθ’ ἐπανελεθεῖν. For a discussion of this line, see Bresson (2015): 233.

⁵⁵⁸ What comes afterward is Sophytos’ deliberation (ἐπεφρασάμην) on how to rebuild his house. The cognitive verb ἐπεφρασάμην indicates Sophytos’ practical reasoning about how to save himself and his family from the current unpromising situation. While the first four lines show the crisis of Sophytos’ family, these two lines about Sophytos’ artistic training and his consideration of how to rebuild his family demonstrate crisis management. Cf. Vadan (2018): 42-66.

sons, assigning to each a fitting role, telling them where to stand and how to move, and training them in words, emotions and movements.”⁵⁵⁹

Although the Sophytos epigram has a Greek Homeric style, echoing Greek literature written by eastern people during the Hellenistic period, it must also have an indigenous substance, following the logic of seeing double.⁵⁶⁰ Sophytos’ practice of the virtues of Apollo/Muses reflects this dynamic. The phrase ἥσ(κ)ηκα σὺν ἐσθλῆι/φουρτῆν σωφοσύνηι is consistent with the practice of performance skill in *Natyashastra*. In particular, the word σωφοσύνηι is a soph-word, correspondent with the Sanskrit word *vidagdha*. In this light, the deities Apollo and Muses are standard *interpretatio Indica*, which match the Indian pantheon with the Greek pantheon.⁵⁶¹

Another context in which we can understand the Sophytos inscription is the growth of performance culture in Central Asia during the Hellenistic period. Although we lack related evidence on performance culture from Kandahar, Greek style theater from Ai Khanoum during the first half of the 2nd century BCE is a significant testament to the growth of performance culture.⁵⁶² From its origin in classical Athens, monumental theater provided a physical space container for people of different areas and background to mingle together for a performance event or political gathering.⁵⁶³ The emergence of such a theater in Ai Khanoum conceivably

⁵⁵⁹ Rangacharya (2014): 1.

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. For Egypt, Stephens (2003); for Babylon, see Kosmin (2014): 173-98.

⁵⁶¹ See Robert Parker’s discussion of this dynamic, Parker (2017): 184-90.

⁵⁶² Together with a mask excavated from the theater in Ai Khanoum, a Greek tragic fragment confirms that a real tragic performance took place at the theater in Ai Khanoum (Bernard (1978): 429-41; Rapin (1987): 249-59). For the most recent survey of Ai Khanoum, especially the theater, see Hoo (2022): 84-6.

⁵⁶³ Recent research on the spread of Greek theater has covered Sicily (Boshcer (2021)) and the Black Sea (Braund, Hall, and Wyles (2019)), demonstrating how Greek style theaters took on different meanings outside mainland Greece.

provided a new relationship structure for its residents.⁵⁶⁴ Its signifies that performance culture in Bactria grew to a certain point, requiring a monumental structure following Hellenistic pattern.⁵⁶⁵

The Atrosokes altar of aulos-player from the temple of Takht-i-sangin during the 2nd century BCE provides corroborating evidence.⁵⁶⁶ Although in a non-urban context, a statue depicting a Bactrian named Atrosokes who dedicates an aulos-player statue by using Greek languages at a Bactrian temple testifies the popularity of Greek performance culture in this period.⁵⁶⁷ In other words, this altar provides a snapshot of the spread of Hellenic performance culture in Bactria, at a time when performance in Ai Khanoum needs a permanent physical space. The Sophytos inscription is another testimony to this dynamic: a non-Greek who came to share Greek performance culture. The Indian artifacts from the palace in Ai Khanoum, with documents recording transactions of Indian coins, in this period testifies to the vibrant trans-Hindu Kush commerce while Ai Khanoum was an important node in this connection.⁵⁶⁸ Kandahar was very like part of this cultural impact.⁵⁶⁹

Economically, the epigram also reveals converting monetary/fluid wealth into landed wealth. The silvered coins provide the initial capital for Sophytos' wealth accumulation, which

⁵⁶⁴ See Hoo's discussion of trans-localism in Ai Khanoums: "The cultural, social, and architectural practices at Ai Khanoum indicate that the population engaged with networked practices and diverse ways of doing that circulated on local, regional, and transregional scales, and became re-embedded anew in local contexts, possibly altering the very texture of local cultural experience in the Baktrian city." (Hoo (2022): 251).

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. The growth of Roman performance under Greek influence from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century BCE provides a *comparandum*, Beacham (1992): 1-26. We easily forget that 2nd-century BCE Rome was another "Hellenistic" city, which even lacked monumental structure hosting performance, cf. Dench (2003): 294-310.

⁵⁶⁶ Bernard (1987): 103-115; Litvinskii and Pichikian (1994): 87.

⁵⁶⁷ Though in Greek ethnography, aulos is usually associated with Phrygia, Yulia Ustinova's recent critical examination demonstrates that aulos is indigenous to Greece but classical Greek elites attributed an instrumente creating an ecstatic effect to foreigners when many Phrygian slaves may carry on the role of playing aulos (Ustinova (2021): 54-73). Though Ustinova's denial of the possible Phrygian origin of aulos needs more research, it is more relevant that aulos represents Greek music culture since the Hellenistic period.

⁵⁶⁸ For Indian artefacts, Rapin (1992): 117-121; for economic documents, Rapin and Grenet (1983): 305-81; for archaeological context, see Rapin and Lecuyot (1992).

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. The possible link between Greek literary culture in Ai Khanoum and Kandahar, Yailenko (1990): 239-56.

he then uses to invest in his homeland.⁵⁷⁰ From a cultural point of view, an implicit aspect has to do with the transformation of Sophytos' mastered Apollo/Muses skill into writing the inscription. Line 18, "I erected the telling inscription on the road while still living (τὴν καὶ ζῶν στήλην ἐν ὁδῶι ἐπέθηκα λάλον)," is about this aspect. This line is the most literarily conscious part of the epigram, as it refers to Sophytos' erection of the inscription while defining the readers' sensory experience with it as λάλον. As part of Sophytos' house rebuilding project, he refers to his own composition of an epigram. This self-reference showcases Sophytos' transformation from a performer to a literary figure.⁵⁷¹ We can establish a parallel between Sophytos' economic capital and cultural capital as follows:

Silvered coins (mercantile, fluid)-----landed wealth (non-mercantile, permanent)

Apollo/Muses' technique (mercantile, embodied)----the inscription (non-mercantile, literary)

The Sophytos inscription signifies not only about his house rebuilding but also his access to Homeric motifs during his performance career.⁵⁷² Thus, mercantile wealth leads to landed wealth, while performance skill eventually culminates in Homeric paideia.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷⁰ See Chaniotis' discussion on people's ambiguous attitude toward landed wealth from the Hellenistic world onward. On the one hand, mercantile activity has been receiving increased recognition, but on the other hand, landed wealth still maintains its traditional prestige, Chaniotis (2018): 292. Also see Moses Finley's discussion on land investment, Finley (1999): 116-21. Even though Finley's model has received critiques on the way in which this model underestimates the complexity and sophistication of ancient economy, we should not overestimate it.

⁵⁷¹ The inscription uses three verbs to portray Sophytos' rebuilding of his house: συντέλεσα, ἔτευξα, and ἐπέθηκα. The first verb συντέλεσα is about reviving the rotten paternal house; ἔτευξα shows the erection of another tomb since the original tomb has fallen apart; and ἐπέθηκα has to do with erecting this inscription. See constructing a ship in the *Odyssey* as a meta-poetic metaphor, Dougherty (2001): 19-37.

⁵⁷² Greek graffiti in the Hoq Cave on the Socatra island off today's Yemen witnessed Greek literary practice and nostos motif, see Bucharin (2012): 494-500. Also see Strauch (2012): 343-59. An interesting comparison is material practice about nostos in the Adriatic Sea, see Morgan (2018): 213-44.

⁵⁷³ These two parallels thus lead to reconsider the most formalist aspect of the inscription: it is a twenty-line epigram employing Homeric idioms to tell a Homeric nostos story by virtually squeezing the twenty-four books of *Odyssey* into an epigram. In addition to the Cretan tale, the story in this inscription resembles Aristotle's summary of the *Odyssey* (Aristot. Poet. 17.18-23). Aristotle's agenda here is to demonstrate that drama is a more succinct genre than epic. Unlike drama, epic usually contains a large number of extra plots, although its core is not long. Thus, Aristotle briefly summarizes *Odyssey*'s core plot. In light of Andrew Ford's discussion of Aristotle's literary production as a poet, Aristotle's summary of the *Odyssey* can already be regarded as a practice to rewrite Homer, see Ford (2011).

It is thus possible to demonstrate that Sophytos was a wandering performer who accessed the Homeric motif during his travels. However, it is unclear whether Sophytos' performance career was linked to the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the 3rd-century CE Buddhist text, *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā Dṛṣṭāntapañkti* (Garland of Examples), written in the Kushan context, provides the most convincing evidence that the Indian Ocean trade underpins the Sophytos inscription. This text tells a story similar to the Sophytos inscription. It was originally written in Sanskrit but has survived only in Chinese translation:

Again, as I once heard: In the country of Takṣaśilā (Taxila) there is the town of *Vajrapura. There was a merchant called Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa who built a *saṃghārāma* (Buddhistic monastery) that still stands today. Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa was the son of a **grhapati*, and his household was at first rich, but as it declined and drifted towards poverty, his blood relatives despised it and did not recognize him [as kin]. Harboring worries, he left his family and went away with some companions to the Daqin (the Great Qin, Rome or the Greek-speaking Roman East). He won enormous wealth and returned to his native land.⁵⁷⁴

Taxila, a city in today's Pakistan, is the setting of this story. Like Kandahar, where the Sophytos inscription is from, Taxila is a city with a Hellenistic legacy.⁵⁷⁵ Resembling the Sophytos epigram, this Buddhistic story tells how someone who once enjoyed prosperity but suffered from the decline of his family rebuilds his house by engaging in long-distance trade and traveling to the Mediterranean. Although the Sophytos inscription does not specify the destination of Sophytos, its use of Greek indicates Sophytos' Mediterranean connection. However, this Buddhistic story points out that Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa traveled to Great Qin, whose Sanskrit original should be Yavana, the Indian term for the Mediterranean.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ T4.201. 347c29–348a5, translated by Diego Loukota Sanclemente; Loukota Sanclemente (2019): 311-312.

⁵⁷⁵ For Taxila in the Greco-Roman literary imaginary given its Hellenistic legacy, see Fussman (1993): 83-100; Bernard (1996): 475-530; Bäbler (2016): 69-99; Stoneman (2018): 461-78.

⁵⁷⁶ When Chinese monks translated Yavana, they generally translated it as the Great Qin; see Yu (2013): 236-7.

The story of Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa is also more elaborate. After Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa's return, his relatives who once despised him welcome him warmly, and he feels sad about his snobbish relatives.⁵⁷⁷ At the beginning of the story, the signal phrase *woxi cengwen* (as I once heard) is used. This signal phrase indicates this story's embeddedness in Buddha's teaching via a fable. In telling this story, Buddha expresses his concern that it is not his teaching but his mundane interest that attracts people to Buddhism.⁵⁷⁸ For our purposes, this story discloses the extent to which the kind of story the Sophytos inscription tells underpinned people's view of long-distance trade, so much so that this view made its way into a Buddhistic fable. In telling a fable, people would not have used an example that sounded alien to their audience. Instead, they manipulated a common motif that people took for granted by providing a new interpretation that emphasized the fable's ethics.⁵⁷⁹

When Kumāralāt introduced this story in the 3rd century CE, the Indian Ocean trade had begun to decline after its heyday during the previous two centuries. However, the Indian Ocean trade still underlies the social imaginary of the Śāṅkhabhaṭṭa story.⁵⁸⁰ Regardless of the dating of the inscription, the Sophytos epigram illustrates a similar imaginary of the Indian Ocean trade. The above demonstration shows that the Homeric motif in Kandahar was acquired from an Indian resident called Subhuti during his performance career on the Indian Ocean, even though this inscription lacks concrete historical and geographical references.

In this light, it is reasonable to conclude that the Siren episode in Gan Ying's story was a result of his access to Homeric stories in Kandahar, as he failed to reach Rome and

⁵⁷⁷ T4.201. 348a5–20; Loukota Sanclemente (2019): 313-4.

⁵⁷⁸ That this aspect thus entails early Buddhism's mixed attitude toward mercantile interests is another issue. Schopen (2004); Loukota Sanclemente (2019).

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Kurke (2014).

⁵⁸⁰ See the discussion in the third section.

only stopped at the Persian Gulf or even Kandahar.⁵⁸¹ He used the Siren episode to justify his failed diplomatic mission, illustrating the risk of traveling on the Indian Ocean.⁵⁸² The impression that Parthia deliberately tries to prevent Gan Ying's journey should ultimately be traced back to Kandahar when Parthia, the Indo-Parthian kingdom, and the Indo-Scythian kingdom had a conflict of interests in Central Asia and northwestern India.⁵⁸³ In turn, a wandering performer like Sophytos played a role in bringing Homeric stories from the Mediterranean to Central Asia.

For the Siren motif that Gan Ying encountered, as it is also a motif for pantomime aesthetics, wandering performers were not only responsible for transmitting it, but this motif may also register their diasporic experience from the Mediterranean to the East. In other words, pantomime performers used their performance repertoire to address their experience with Indian Ocean travels. This motif was then popularized and accessed by Parthian sailors.

Roman Pantomime Performers in China and Chinese Knowledge of Rome

Wandering performers also contributed to the formation of Chinese knowledge of Rome. There are three attested Sino-Mediterranean communications in *Hou Hanshu*: Gan Ying's attempted diplomacy, Mediterranean performers' arrival in China in 120 CE, and Mediterranean merchants' journey to China in 166 CE. While we cannot attribute all Chinese knowledge to a single incident, it is worth inquiring which incident was most responsible for China's initial knowledge of Rome, which Western Han lacked.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ In other words, if we adopt a more critical direction, Gan Ying may only arrive in Kandahar but did not go forward while his knowledge of the Persian Gulf is from people in Kandahar.

⁵⁸² This episode and the Sophytos inscription contain competing ideologies regarding whether it will be a rewarding experience to travel on the Indian Ocean.

⁵⁸³ This struggle is explicitly mentioned in the *Periplus*, PME 38. For discussion, see Yuan (2022): 30-48.

⁵⁸⁴ In *Hanshu*, Tiaozhi represents the limit of the geographical horizon by being closer to the place of sunset in Western Han China, see *Hanshu*, Volume 96a, 2988.

The third incident can be omitted since *Hou Hanshu* recounts that Chinese authorities were disappointed by the exotica that those merchants presented to the Chinese court. Meanwhile, *Hou Hanshu* concludes that the transmitting knowledge of Rome is exaggerated.⁵⁸⁵ This comment implies that Chinese authorities already had a utopian image of Rome. In this light, I propose that China must acquire some elaborate knowledge of Rome between the 90s CE and the 120s CE. While Gan Ying may access some knowledge in Kandahar, which performers like Sophytos may bring about, Mediterranean performers who traveled to China in 120 CE must have played their role as well.

The major clue comes from the dynamic: while Chinese knowledge of Rome came through maritime experience on the Indian Ocean, wandering Mediterranean performers actively used their oceanic experience to define themselves by calling themselves the Western Sea people. They traveled to China in 120 CE as part of the diplomatic troupe from the Shan state in today's upper Burma, which *Hou Hanshu* report as follows:

In the first year of Yongning, Yong Youdiao, the king of the State of Shan (northern Burma) sent envoys to the court again, with musicians and an illusion-maker. (The illusion-maker) could do magic and pour out the fire, dismember himself, and switch the heads between oxen and horses. They are also very good at juggling, up to a thousand times. They said themselves: "I am from the Western Sea People." The Western Sea is the Great Qin. The State of Shan is connected to the Great Qin in its southwestern direction. At the imperial new year banquet, Emperor An arranged music at the court and feoffed Yong Youdiao as the Great Protectorate, awarding him with several seals, gold, silver, and silks.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ Concerning reported Roman merchants' arrival in China in 166 CE, what has gone unnoticed is the comment on how these envoys' gifts disappointed Chinese officials. The reason is that these gifts *bingwu zhenyi/yi chuanzhe guo yan* (had nothing at all precious or rare; thus one suspects that those who have transmitted about it (the Great Qin) have erred). The description of disappointment verbally parallels to *chuan qi zhenguai* that describes Gan Ying's information. The verb *chuan* (transmit) echoes the verbal noun *chuanzhe* (the people who transmits). The verbal noun *zhenyi* (precious and marvelous) corresponds to *zhenguai* (precious and strange), see *Hou Hanshu*, Volume 88, 2910.

⁵⁸⁶ *Hou Hanshu*, Volume 76, 2851. So far, the most systematic discussion of pantomime in China is by Wang Zijin, even without an awareness of the significance of pantomime in the Mediterranean, Wang (2011): 225-38.

As discussed, the arrival of Pylades and Bathyllus to Rome in 21/20 BCE marked the beginning of imperial pantomime.⁵⁸⁷ The unique value of the passage from *Hou Hanshu* provides a snapshot of pantomime's globalization during the 2nd century CE. According to this Chinese account, in addition to Pylades and Bathyllus, we can identify another solo dancer who played an important role in the history of Roman pantomime. This dancer calls themselves *Haxiren* (from the Western Sea People). This solo dancer demonstrates the skill characteristic of a pantomime performance. The phrase *nengbianhua tuhuo* (being able to transform themselves and pour out fire) captures an audience's visual experience of a pantomime performance, especially concerning how a pantomime performance produced changed visual aesthetics.⁵⁸⁸ The word *zizhijie* (to dismember themselves) recalls many high-risk activities in a pantomime performance to produce violent episodes.⁵⁸⁹ The *yi niuma tou* (to switch the heads between oxen and horses) reveals its pantomime character most strongly: a pantomime solo dancer usually changed masks five times in performing a plot.⁵⁹⁰ Finally, while "juggling" is not specific to pantomime, pantomime demonstrates a more complex juggling called "marvel-making."⁵⁹¹

As regards their agency in forming Chinese knowledge of Rome, what is most noticeable is these performers' self-representation as the Western Sea people (*Haixi ren*). The precise translation of the term *Haixi* is "west of the sea." The trans-continental network monopolized by Parthia is called *Haibei*, which means "north of the sea," in the Chinese text.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁷ See chapter 3.

⁵⁸⁸ It is for this reason that the Egyptian god good at transforming is identified as a prototype of the pantomime performer, Webb (2009): 68-72.

⁵⁸⁹ Webb (2008): 121-3.

⁵⁹⁰ De Salt. 66

⁵⁹¹ Dio Chrys.*Or.* 34.55

⁵⁹² Concerning southwestern China's link to Rome via the Indian Ocean, it is reported: "not only is there a route to the Great Qin communicating from the north of the sea (*Haibei*) by land." (Weilue, fragment in *Sanguo Zhi*, Volume 30, 861). For Parthia's involvement in the Indian Ocean, see Gregoratti (2011): 209-229.

At the same time, the Indian Ocean is called *Haizhong*, “the middle of the sea,” as recorded in *Hou Hanshu*:

They make coins from gold and silver, ten silver coins being equal to one gold coin. [The Great Qin/Rome] trades in the middle of the sea (*Haizhong*) with Anxi (Parthia) and Tianzhu (India), the profit is tenfold. The people are honest and frank; there are no double prices in the market.⁵⁹³

In this passage, the term *Haizhong* (the middle of the sea) refers to the Indian Ocean. As a result, when the performers told Chinese officials that they were the Western Sea people, they meant that they were the people from the west of the Indian Ocean. This self-designation entails an Indian Ocean–centered view among these performers who traveled around the Indian Ocean.⁵⁹⁴ When the passage above mentions that Rome trades with Parthia and India on the Indian Ocean makes a tenfold profit on this trade, this economic dynamic coincides with the special transactional order in which these performers participated by selling their performance skills.

Moreover, the Chinese description of Roman people’s uprightness in economic practices echoes Pliny the Elder’s account of a Roman freedman’s journey to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) during Claudius’ time after encountering a shipwreck on the Indian Ocean.⁵⁹⁵ This freedman:

“In a period of six months acquired a thorough knowledge of the language and afterwards in reply to the king’s enquiries [...] gave him an account of the Romans and their emperor (*sex mensum tempore inbutus adloquio percontanti postea narravit Romanos et Caesarem*). The king among all that he heard was remarkably struck with admiration for Roman honesty, on the ground that among the money found on the captive the denarii were all equal in weight, although the various figures on them showed that they had been coined by several emperors (*mirum in modum in auditis iustitiam ille suspexit, quod paris pondere denarii essent in captiva pecunia, cum*

⁵⁹³ *Hou hanshu*, Volume 88, 2919, translated by Yu Taishan, edited by Victor Mair, modified.

⁵⁹⁴ It also decenters the center and periphery that were ideologically constructed during the Hellenistic period; cf. Alcock (1994): 162-75.

⁵⁹⁵ For Ceylon and the Indian Ocean at this time, see De Saxcé (2015): 53-73.

diversae imagines indicarent a pluribus factos). This strongly attracted his friendship, and he sent four envoys, the chief of whom was Rachias.”⁵⁹⁶

For our purposes, the central information in this passage is that the reputation of Rome spread around the Indian Ocean.⁵⁹⁷ In particular, Roman coins are material registers of the characters of the Roman people.⁵⁹⁸ When this passage describes the same price in the Romans’ trade, it echoes the term *zhizhi* (honest and frank) that describes the Roman people in the Chinese account above. Common to both reports is that the virtue of the Romans is defined through their economic practices. Whether it is using coins of equal weight or charging customers the same prices, both practices have to do with the market. The market on the Indian Ocean, a liminal space, became the vehicle through which Rome’s reputation spread and the external perception of Roman character took shape.⁵⁹⁹

These Mediterranean performers thus played a part in shaping the Chinese knowledge of Rome that survives in *Hou Hanshu*’s account. For our purposes, the Chinese account of Rome consists of two aspects. First, Rome enjoys political stability because of constructive interactions between the emperor and the people:

The state of the Great Qin: It is also called Lijian. Since it is situated to the west of the sea, it is also called the State of Haixi (the western sea state/or the state on the west of the sea). . . . The king travels each day to one of these palaces to hear cases. At the end of five days, he has thus completed a circuit [of these five palaces]. A man carrying a bag is constantly charged with following the royal chariot. When anyone has anything to say to the king, his document is thrown into the bag. Having arrived at the palace, the king

⁵⁹⁶ *Plin.*, HN, 6.84-5, trans. H. Rackham, slightly modified.

⁵⁹⁷ This story has a parallel in Pali Buddhist literature, confirming that it is not a Latin ethnographic forgery, see Schwarz (1974): 166-76.

⁵⁹⁸ For the way Roman coins acquired their own social meaning in India, see Majumdar (2015): 395-423. For Roman coins as a means to communicate imperial message, see Noreña (2011). For Pliny’s intellectual engagement with Roman imperialism, see Carey (2003); Murphy (2004).

⁵⁹⁹ An interesting comparison is how the Neo-Assyrian kings perceived the Ionians as a group of sea people (Wilson (2018): 58-65). From the Indian perspective, the Yavanas could be a group of sea people; see Ray (1988): 311-25; Vasant (1988): 331-38; Tiekens (2003): 261-75; Karttunen (2015).

opens the bag, examines the contents [of the document], and decides if the petitioner is right or wrong.⁶⁰⁰

This passage represents Rome through a legal lens. The focus is on the way the king interacts with the people to deal with their daily troubles.⁶⁰¹ What follows this passage is an explanation that kingship is not a hereditary position; the king is chosen based on merit and can be banished.⁶⁰² Scholars have identified an element of the Confucian ideal regime in this description.⁶⁰³ From the Mediterranean perspective, this description resembles the way the legal system functioned in Roman Egypt, as revealed by numerous legal papyri.⁶⁰⁴ The “king” is most likely a Roman *prefectus* in Egypt who travels around Egypt to deal with daily administration.⁶⁰⁵ Egypt, the region that linked the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, was thus the lens through which China perceived the Roman empire.⁶⁰⁶ This perception likely arrived in China via the Indian Ocean. The popular performers were ideal transmitters when they perceived themselves from an Indian Ocean–centric view.

Second, the Chinese depiction highlights that Rome is home to many exotica.⁶⁰⁷

These two aspects of the description thus portray Rome as a desirable destination for merchants

⁶⁰⁰ Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2919, trans. Yu Taishan.

⁶⁰¹ I own this insight to a conversation with Rob Cioffi.

⁶⁰² “When a calamity or uncanny event or winds or rains out of season occur in the state, then he is deposed immediately and someone else is put in his place. The one who is thus deposed accepts mildly his dismissal and does not get angry at it.” (Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2919).

⁶⁰³ Shiratori Kurakichi has noticed that the way this passage describes Rome contains the Confucian political ideal of kingship as it pertains to selecting a king based on merit; Shiratori (1941): 175. From the perspective of political thought, the Chinese account of Rome may entail some officials’ consideration of the ideal polity; cf. Josiah Ober and Barry Weingast’s discussion of institutional thinking in Lycurgus’ Spartan reform, Ober and Weingast (2018): 161-81.

⁶⁰⁴ For relevant studies, see Kelley (2010); Bryen (2013).

⁶⁰⁵ See Derda (2019): 59.

⁶⁰⁶ In a Chinese account, it is also mentioned that “The people are generally tall and straight featured. They resemble the people of the Middle Kingdom (i.e. China)” (Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2920, translated by Yu Taishan). It makes more sense if the description here is about the Egyptians.

⁶⁰⁷ “The soil produces lots of gold, silver and rare jewels, including: the jewel which shines at night, the full-moon pearl, the rhinoceros which frightens chickens, corals, amber, opaque glass; langgan (pearl-like stone), red cinnabar; blue-green emerald, embroidered tissues with gold threads, Zhicheng, woven gold-threaded tapestries, and damask of many colours, and make gold-painted (cloth), and ‘cloth washed in fire’ (asbestos). They also have a delicate

and travelers. Rome, in this account, has a favorable political environment for trade. It enjoys a wealth of exotica that has a large overseas market value. Like the topographic feature in the *Periplus*, the Chinese account of Rome highlights Rome's political stability and various precious goods.⁶⁰⁸ Because the *Periplus* is written from a Mediterranean perspective, Rome is absent from its account.⁶⁰⁹ The Chinese report on Rome thus corroborates the *Periplus*. In this sense, Rome becomes an Indian Ocean regime from the Chinese perspective. Although we should not attribute the entire Chinese account of Rome to the performers, they must have played a role in shaping the Chinese knowledge of Rome.⁶¹⁰ The Chinese report on Rome thus corroborates the *Periplus*. In this sense, Rome becomes an Indian Ocean regime.

Moreover, Pliny's account of the Ceylonian constitution can shed further light on the Chinese report on Rome. As demonstrated, while Pliny's ethnographic knowledge of the East is mostly based on Hellenistic repertoire, his depiction of Ceylon belongs to Roman knowledge.⁶¹¹ In particular, the ideal description of Ceylonian constitution maps Roman aristocratic ideals onto a faraway island during the time of Claudius.⁶¹² Reading the Chinese report on Rome and Pliny's account of Ceylon together further proves how Chinese knowledge of Rome originated from the popular narrative of Rome on the Indian Ocean and performers' role in this transmission.

cloth which some say is the wool of sea sheep, but which is really made from cocoons of wild silkworms. They mix all sorts of fragrances and boil the mixture to make storax. It is from this state that all the various marvellous and rare objects of foreign states come." (Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2920, trans. Yu Taishan).

⁶⁰⁸ For this structure in the *Periplus*, see Seland (2012).

⁶⁰⁹ For an examination of the tradition of writing the Indian Ocean trade from a Mediterranean perspective, see Marcotte (2015): 163-83.

⁶¹⁰ Another milestone of the Sino-Roman encounter is several Roman "envoys" (maybe merchants) who traveled to China and sent tributes to the court in 166 CE. The Chinese account recounts: "the document listing their tribute had nothing at all precious or rare. Thus one suspects that those who have transmitted about it (the Great Qin) have erred." (Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2920) This disappointment implies that there was already a utopian image of Rome among Chinese officials. The performers should have belonged to "those who have transmitted about it."

⁶¹¹ Trevor Murphy highlights this aspect, Murphy (2004): 105.

⁶¹² Starr (1956): 27-30.

For the sake of convenience, the following table lists all common features between Chinese perception of Rome and Roman imagination of Ceylon.⁶¹³

Table I: Ceylon in Pliny and Rome in *Hou Hanshu*

	Pliny: Ceylon	<i>Hou Hanshu</i> : Rome
Location	Beyond the confines of the world	West of the Sea
Exotica	Gold, silver, precious goods	Gold, silver, precious goods (a list of goods)
Grain	No inflation	Low price
Legal	No lawcourts/litigation but ad hoc jury based on people's demand	People can file their cases by throwing letters in the bags carried by staff accompanying the itinerant king
Kingship	Elective based on age/behaviors and subject to banishment based on performance	Elective based on virtues and subject to banishment based on performance
Royal assistants	Thirty governors (<i>rectores</i>)	Thirty-six generals (<i>jiang</i>)

(Table I continued)

⁶¹³ Pln, HN, 6.24; Hou Hanshu, Volume 88, 2919-20.

(Table 1 continued)

Clothes	Arabian dress	Thin clothes made of silk from wild silkworms
Animals	Hunting tigers and elephants	Wild tigers and lions (only mentioned in <i>Weilue</i>)
Agriculture	No wine but orchard	Many mulberry trees
Physical features	The long span of life	Tall and flat like Chinese

As we can observe, while the two accounts are not identical, they share several similarities in emphasizing luxury and political institutions. Chinese elites, like their Roman counterparts, construct a regime that practices Confucian ideals in the west of the sea, echoing the Roman mapping of aristocratic ideals onto a faraway island with elective-kingship-based political institutions. The most plausible explanation for these similarities is the common source of utopian tales based on the existing imagination of Roman state power between the Mediterranean and China. Chinese knowledge of Rome was derived from the narrative of Rome circulating around the Indian Ocean as transmitted by performers, while the Roman perception of Ceylon reworked this narrative by attributing it to an island off the South Asian continent.⁶¹⁴

In particular, while we can detect the Homeric motif in the Ptolemaic story of the Indian refugee, this motif further unfolds in Pliny's account of Ceylon. The story of the Roman refugee in Ceylon resembles Odysseus' experience on the island of Phaeacia, where a refugee

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Island seems to be a favorable utopian narrative to map an imperial power in Greco-Latin ethnography, see Christy Constantakopoulou's discussion of how the Atlantis narrative in Plato's *Critias* is Athens' self-image as an imperial power, Constantakopoulou (2010): 163-72.

arrives on a utopian island and is warmly received by local authorities.⁶¹⁵ This Homeric motif is employed to create a utopian narrative of Rome that circulated on the Indian Ocean. As previously discussed, the value of the Sophytos inscription lies in its illustration of how an Indian performer from Kandahar, through which Gan Ying traveled to the Persian Gulf, used a Homeric motif to tell his diasporic experience. The presence of Mediterranean performers in China thus further indicates their agency in transmitting this narrative about Roman state power on the Indian Ocean to China. When the Mediterranean performers went to the farther east, they likely had an existing repertoire of narratives to tell foreign monarchies about Rome. In turn, Pliny's account of Ceylon reveals how Roman elites used this repertoire to imagine a South Asian island as its self-mirror.

Both China and Rome use this popular lore to reflect upon themselves, with Rome employing the way other people perceived it to construct a utopia and China using Rome to write on itself by fully appreciating Rome as a comparable power to China.⁶¹⁶ Nevertheless, from an empirical perspective, this utopian narrative still finds some traces in actual legal practice in Roman governance of Egypt.

Performing the Southwest

Though we can consider the arrival of Mediterranean performers in China as an important episode in the Sino-Mediterranean cultural exchange, their travels were embedded

⁶¹⁵ For Phaeacia as a utopia in Homer, see Dougerhty (1993): 84-98; Olsen (2018): 23-51. For Odysseus and Roman imperialism, see Johnston (2019): 211-39.

⁶¹⁶ It is interesting to note that in Pliny's representation, the Seres is narrated from the lens of Ceylon by highlighting its primitivity (Ply, HN, 6.84-88). While the description may resemble people in the Tarim Basin (Lieberman (1957): 174-7), it is more consistent with the ethnographic trope that the Seres is Ceylon's northern "other" when Ceylon is Rome's self-mirror (cf. Murphy (2004): 109-10). In this light, Rome's and China's mutual accounts is geared to a kind of "complementary schismogenesis": "a competition by contradiction, in which each side organizes itself as the inverse of the other" can be found in this mutual knowledge between Rome and China (Sahlins (2004): 69).

within relations between the imperial center and the southwestern Chinese highland. Broadly, compared with the 2nd century BCE, when the Han dynasty first marched southwest beyond Sichuan, southwest China/Southeast Asia demonstrated a new ethnic configuration from the 2nd century CE onward. Two new states emerged: the Shan state from today's upper Burma to upper Vietnam and the Ailao state in today's western Yunnan. Chinese imperial authorities converted Ailao into Yongchang County under the Sichuan-centered Yizhou prefecture in 82 CE.⁶¹⁷ The first Shan envoys came to China through the intermediacy of Ailao in 98 CE.⁶¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Sichuan basin, through which China governed various ethnic groups in the southwest, was much more Sinicized, yet Sichuan displayed a strong regional identity as evidenced from its unique art styles and contents.⁶¹⁹

Moreover, southwest China demonstrated a geographical connection with the Mediterranean via the Indian Ocean, as can be seen from both Greek and Chinese sources. In the *Periplus*, the text refers to the end of the Indian Ocean system as Thina:

μετὰ δὲ ταύτην τὴν κώραν ὑπ' αὐτὸν ἤδη τὸν βορέαν, ἔξωθεν εἷς τινα τόπον ἀποληγούσης τῆς θαλάσσης, παράκειται [δὲ] ἐν αὐτῇ πόλις μεσόγης μεγίστη, λεγομένη Θίνα, ἀφ' ἧς τό τε ἔριον καὶ τὸ νῆμα καὶ τὸ ὀθόνιον τὸ Σηρικὸν εἰς τὴν Βαρύγαζαν διὰ Βάκτρων πεζῆ φέρεται καὶ εἰς τὴν Λιμυρικὴν πάλιν διὰ τοῦ Γάγγου ποταμοῦ. Εἰς δὲ τὴν Θίνα ταύτην οὐκ ἔστιν εὐχερῶς ἀπελθεῖν· σπανίως γάρ ἀπ' αὐτῆς τινὲς οὐ πολλοὶ ἔρχονται.

“Beyond this region, by now at the northernmost point, where the sea ends somewhere on the outer fringe, there is a very great inland city called Thina from which silk floss, yarn, and cloth are shipped by land via Bactria to Barygaza and via the Ganges River

⁶¹⁷ Hou Hanshu, Volume 86, 2848-9. The history and archaeology of Ailao are surprisingly understudied, especially in Western academia; for an overview, see Geng (2016).

⁶¹⁸ Hou Hanshu, Volume 86, 2851.

⁶¹⁹ For Sichuan art and identity in Eastern Han China, see Elias (2018). For Sichuan artisans' contribution to Roman theme in material culture from southeast China, see Barbieri-Low (2001): 52-8.

back to Limyrike. It is not easy to get to this Thina; for rarely do people come from it, and only a few.”⁶²⁰

Thina is the final major region covered in the text of the *Periplus*. Before proceeding to this region, the text recounts the Ganges Valley and then moves eastward to Thina.⁶²¹ Though in Greco-Latin ethnography, the standard reference to China in the form of Seres should be related to the Tarim Basin in Central Asia,⁶²² it makes no sense for the author of the *Periplus* to jump to the Tarim Basin after going through the Ganges in eastern India, especially since the author specifies that Thina is located in an inland region from which the sea ends. Thina here must refer to the Sichuan area, especially the Shu County (Chengdu): the Chinese region most famous for silk production.⁶²³

In this light, as I will presently show, Mediterranean performers provided a means for these various regimes (Shan, Ailao/Yongchang, and Sichuan) to assert their existence by celebrating the Indian Ocean connection they had. China incorporated the Ailao kingdom (in today’s western Yunnan) into its imperial structure in 82 CE. This imperial expansion had repercussions beyond Ailao by attracting envoys from Shan. The arrival of Mediterranean performers in China in 120 CE is a follow-up event in Sino-Shan diplomacy. We can observe how the Shan king Yong Youdiao actively used Mediterranean performance culture to style the Shan state in front of Chinese imperial authorities through the Indian Ocean connection he could access. The result is that he was awarded an official title signaling the nominal incorporation of

⁶²⁰ PME, 64, trans. Casson

⁶²¹ Ibid, 63.

⁶²² De la Vaissière (2009): 527-35.

⁶²³ For the existing argument that Thina refers to Chengdu, especially in Buddhist texts, see Duan (2019): 424-52; Yang (2020). It is also interesting to note that the Chinese character for Shu is a pictorial representation of an insect, which is interpreted as a silkworm by philologists during the Han period (Duan (2019): 323). In this regard, the image of silk production has already been present in the standard ancient north-centered Chinese perception of Sichuan.

Shan into the Chinese imperial structure. In contrast, in the diplomatic relationship in 98 CE, the king relies on *chongyi* (multiple levels of interpretation) to communicate with the Chinese court.⁶²⁴ *Chongyi* is a Chinese term designating a process of multilingual interpretation for two regimes (like Shan and China) to communicate.⁶²⁵ We can imagine that this way of communication involves a great deal of inconvenience.

In an essay called *Rhapsody of Ping-le Palace (Pingle guan fu)*, the author Li You (55-135 CE) describes performances at the Pingle Hall, an establishment that Emperor Wu built in Chang'an to host performances. It was later transferred to Luoyang in Eastern Han. Li celebrates it as a place hosting foreign travelers by listing some performances including *tunren tuhuo* (swallowing a sword and pouring out the fire) and *feiwan tiaojian* (juggling and jumping on the sword).⁶²⁶ By listing various public spectacles, Li implicitly suggests that they demonstrated Chinese power to foreigners when China was involved in global affairs.⁶²⁷

In contrast, the Han polymath Zhang Heng (78-139 CE) writes *Rhapsode of the Western Capital (Xijingfu)* to criticize imperial luxury. While Zhang Heng pretends to write about the Western Capital (*Xijing*) Chang'an, what is in his mind is the Eastern Capital (*Dongjing*) Luoyang: criticizing the Western Han past represented by Chang'an was a safe way

⁶²⁴ Hou Hanshu, Volume 86, 2851.

⁶²⁵ See Haun Saussy's discussion of this problem in Chinese diplomacy, Saussy (2022): 2-3.

⁶²⁶ Quan houhan wen (Collected Essays from Late Han), Volume 50, 1492.

⁶²⁷ In 79 CE, Emperor Zhang held a council among Confucian scholars of different schools at the *Baihuguan* (the White Tiger Hall) (Hou Hanshu, Volume 3, 137-8). The result of this council is an official consensus concerning their doctrinal differences. We can find the consensus in a work called *Baihutong* (Consensus at the White Tiger Temple) expounding various aspects of Han imperial political and ritual order. Its chapter on music has a section called *Siyi zhiyue* (Music of Foreign "Barbarians") which suggests that the incorporation of ethnic or foreign music contributes to imperial governance of foreign people and ethnic minority groups (Baihutong Shuzheng, Volume 3, 107-114. For a recent discussion, see Saussy (2022): 33-5).

to criticize imperial politics in the Eastern Han period.⁶²⁸ In particular, in one paragraph, Zhang writes about various performances at the Pingle Hall including *qihuanshuhu* (rapid miracle illusion), *yimao fenxing* (changing faces and doppelgängers), and *tundao tuhuo* (swallowing a sword and pouring out the fire).⁶²⁹ This description is consistent with what Mediterranean performers presented in 120/1 CE.

Despite Li's and Zhang's different attitudes toward popular performance, they both write of similar performances, which are identical to the Chinese description of the pantomime solo performance in *Hou Hanshu*. In particular, Li's essay provides an important hint at the background of Shan's use of pantomime performance as a diplomatic means in 120/1 CE. The literary scholar Peng Chunyan convincingly dates the essay around 98 CE based on two considerations : 1.) the mention of the program of *yulong manyan* (fish and dragon' wandering) in this essay indicates a *terminus ante quem* for composing this essay in 106 CE since Emperor An forbode this performance from the court in this year; 2.) the mention of *shufang chongyi*, *jueyu zaoting* (depending on multiple levels of interpretation, arriving in the court from a faraway land) indicates a diplomatic event, especially resembling the way Chinese officials write on Shan's first diplomacy with China in 98 CE.⁶³⁰

In this light, the scenario we can reasonably construe with regard to Shan's use of pantomime performance to display itself in its second diplomacy to China in 120/1 CE is as follows: when hosting Shan diplomats in 98 CE, Chinese imperial authorities displayed various

⁶²⁸ To celebrate Luoyang as a Confucian capital, Ban Gu composed *Liangdu Fu* (The Rhapsody of Two Capitals) imagining a dialogue between someone from the Western Capital (*xidu*, Chang'an) and someone from the Eastern Capital (*dongdu*, Luoyan). While Chang'an's deficiency due to the Qin imprint on Chang'an is highlighted, Luoyang is praised as an ideal Confucian capital and Emperor Ming's contribution to it are particularly highlighted, *Quan houhan wen*, Volume 24, 602; for imperial ideology in this work, see Chang (2007): 68-80.

⁶²⁹ *Quan houhan wen* (Collected Essays from Late Han), Volume 52, 1527.

⁶³⁰ Peng (2019): 32.

performances including acrobatics to display Chinese imperial power in front of Shan diplomats. As a response, Shan diplomats found pantomime performers based on its Indian Ocean connection, among whom the pantomime dancer was able to execute a series of more difficult acrobatics involving the use of fire and sword than what Chinese imperial officials had staged for the Shan diplomats in 98 CE. We can thus detect Shan's implicit negotiation with the Chinese imperial power by using the pantomime performance to display itself.

Broadly, during Emperor An's time, when those Mediterranean performers arrived, Chinese imperial authorities witnessed both further imperial penetration to the southwestern frontier and rebellions: the most notable was simultaneous rebellions in December 119 among ethnic groups in Yongchang, Shu, and Yuexi, in which cities and towns were burned and local governors were killed, but the Yizhou prefect Zhang Qian crushed them.⁶³¹ These rebellions concerned the Chinese governance of key junctures in the southwest: Yongchang governed the previous Ailao kingdom between China and Shan, Shu was Yizhou's capital, while Yuexi was located in today's northwestern Yunnan, linking Yongchang and Shu. In particular, all of these places had rebelled before.⁶³² By coincidence, Shan sent Mediterranean performers to China in December 120, one year after these revolts. Before their arrival in the capital, Luoyang, Yongchang-Yuexi-Shu should be the route by which the Mediterranean performers traveled.

Shan's second diplomacy with China in 120 thus could not be a coincidence. For China, staging these Mediterranean performers via southwest China at the imperial new year banquet in 121 CE must also be a Chinese imperial demonstration of its successful governance

⁶³¹ Hou Hanshu, Volume 5, 230; Volume 86, 2853-4.

⁶³² Yongchang rebelled in 76 CE, Hou Hanshu, Volume 86, 2851; ethnic minorities in nearby Shu revolted in 114 CE (Volume 5, 221), and Yuexi revolted in 116 and 119 CE (Volume 5, 227-8).

of the southwestern frontier. Mediterranean performers came to China via Shan as part of China's policy and ideology of using foreign music to show its cosmopolitan power.⁶³³ We thus can better understand the reason behind the court debate on the Mediterranean performers, which will be discussed in the next chapter: Chen Zhong asked to put Chen Shan, who was opposed against their appearance at the Chinese court, into jail after the latter raised objections to this performance: not only did Chen Shan disrupt the emperor's and the officials' enjoyment of a Mediterranean performance, but this objection also went against Chinese imperial ideology celebrating Chinese governance of the southwestern frontier.⁶³⁴

For Shan, these performers, especially the solo dancer, served as vehicles to display Shan's power based on its maritime connection. Shan thus was shown to possess the capacity to employ pantomime bodies that were able to produce more marvelous acrobatic skills than Chinese performers.⁶³⁵ Overall, the arrival of Mediterranean performers in China in 120 CE was contingent upon the agency of ethnic groups on the southwestern Chinese highland. The pantomime performance at the court in 121 CE represented an implicit negotiation with Chinese imperial power and Shan's ethnogenesis in southwest China/Southeast Asia. The remapping of the ethnic landscape in southwest China/Southeast Asia represented by Shan and Ailao provided

⁶³³ To prove successful dealings with southwestern ethnic groups, the Yizhou (Sichuan) governor Zhu Fu sent three songs composed by Tang Qu, the king of a southwestern ethnic regime called Bailang (the White Wolf) under Yizhou's purview, to the imperial court, *Hou Hanshu*, Volume 76, 2885-6; for discussion from a translation perspective, see Saussy (2022): 45-6.

⁶³⁴ We have an interesting local response to this event preserved in local historiography about southwest China called *Huayang Guozhi* by a local Sichuan historian Chang Qu (291-361 CE) that, given that Chen Shan is a Sichuan native from the Ba County (today's Chongqing, traditionally eastern Sichuan), the Ba people praised Chen's bravery through a ballad (*Huayang guozhi*, Volume 1, 14). This local praise can be regarded as a local dissident view on the imperial misgovernance in southwest China. For trade crossing the Bay of Bengal, Cobb (2018): 173-179; also see Amrith (2013).

⁶³⁵ In particular, as the eastern Indian coast region, Odissi not only demonstrated vibrant connections with the Indian Ocean trade as evidenced by its Roman material culture (Tripathi, Patnaik, and Pradhan (2016): 215-30) but also vibrant state-sponsored musical culture as evidenced by the Hathigumpha inscription (Banerji (2019): 71-5).

the main condition for the journey of Mediterranean performers to the Chinese court. While the anthropologist Alice Yao has shown how Yunnan chiefs actively appropriated Chinese material culture to come to terms with the presence of Chinese imperial governance in Yunnan during Western Han,⁶³⁶ the process of ethnogenesis-cum-state formation in Yunnan and Southeast Asia during the Eastern Han showed a different picture of how people used foreign cultures to negotiate with Chinese imperialism.

Pantomimic Buddha and Reimagining Rome in Post-Han China

After the second century CE, the Chinese perception of Rome continued to be shaped by the accounts of wandering performers on the Indian Ocean, even during the 3rd century CE, when the Indian Ocean trade was declining. This is evidenced by the way in which this knowledge entered Buddhist-Taoist debates, with Roman pantomime performers impacting the portrayal of deities in both traditions.

The report on the arrival of a Roman merchant named Qin Lun to the southeast-based Wu court during the Three Kingdoms period provides the best evidence of China's persistent fascination with Rome as a far western land. As reported in *Liangshu*, the merchant arrived in the Wu capital Jiankang in 226 CE via the Jiaozhi prefecture, which governed the Gulf of Tonkin and linked Wu's maritime connection with Southeast Asia.⁶³⁷

During the 3rd century CE, the direct contact between Rome and India was much more limited than in the previous two centuries. Instead, from a Mediterranean point of view, the

⁶³⁶ Yao (2014).

⁶³⁷ For the Gulf of Tonkin in antiquity, see Taylor (1991): 35-65; Wang (2003): 1-30; Li (2011): 39-52.

connection became much more indirect by relying on Rome's interactions with Ethiopia.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, Rome still imagined its direct contact with India when it perceived Ethiopia as India.⁶³⁹ I argue that a similar ethnographic mechanic operated in contemporary Three Kingdoms China, where Sino-foreign contacts were more limited to India and Southeast Asia, but China imagined an Indian as a Roman.

Yu Huan, a Wei official who privately wrote the historical work *Weiliue* (A Sketch of Wei), during the 3rd century CE, provides a contemporary testimony to this ethnographic interest in imagining south China's connections with Rome, even though the actual maritime link was more limited to Southeast Asia and India. Concerning Shu's indirect maritime network with Rome, Yu Huan's comment goes as follows:

“Not only is there a route to the Great Qin communicating from north of the sea by land, but there is also one coming south following the sea, which connects with the barbarians outside the seven prefectures of Jiaozi and the others. There is also a water route communicating with Yizhou and Yongchang, and that is why Yongchang produces exotica. Former generations only mentioned a sea route, they did not know a land route.”⁶⁴⁰

While Jiaozi was the Chinese prefecture governing today's Gulf of Tonkin, Yongchang was a border county between China and the Shan state in today's upper Burma. Both were two sites linking China to Southeast Asia and beyond.⁶⁴¹ Although we know that the southwest-based Shu kingdom vied with Wu for control of Yongchang in relation to external commercial networks,⁶⁴² their external interest was more limited to Southeast Asia rather than farther western regions.

⁶³⁸ McLaughlin (2010): 57-9; Andrade (2018): 105.

⁶³⁹ For confusion between India and Ethiopia as an ethnographic trope, see Schneider (2015): 184-202.

⁶⁴⁰ Wei Lue, preserved in *Sanguo zhi*, Volume 30, 861, trans. Yu Taishan, edited by Victor Mairs

⁶⁴¹ For the Gulf of Tonkin in Han, see Taylor (1991): 35-65; Wang (2003): 1-30; Li (2011): 39-52. Yongchang was built on the land of the old Ailao kingdom, see discussions in the previous section.

⁶⁴² The Jiaozi governor Shi Xie, who won Sun Quan's favor for acquiring foreign exotica, induced the Yongchang governor Yong Kai to stand in Wu's side in 223 CE (*Sanguo zhi*, Volume 49, 1193; Volume 43, 1045). As a result, the Shu chancellor Zhuge Liang made a Yunnan campaign to establish Shu's governance in Yongchang. We thus can detect the competition for external connections with Southeast Asia between Shu and Wu.

However, the emphasis on both Yongchang's and Jiaozhi's connections with Rome is based on the East Han past when Yongchang mediated the arrival of pantomime performers in China.⁶⁴³

In this light, we can better understand the Jiaozhi setting in the text of *Lihuolun* (Treatise Dissipating Confusions), the *first* Chinese indigenous Buddhist text composed during the 3rd century CE.⁶⁴⁴ This text presents a dialogue between the Taoist-converted Buddhist Mouzi and a Confucianist who is skeptical about Buddhism.⁶⁴⁵ Although scholars have demonstrated that Buddhism was transmitted to China via Central Asia instead of the maritime network,⁶⁴⁶ the Southeast Asian setting in this text deliberately highlights Buddhism as a foreign religion in Jiaozhi, where Wu demonstrated dynamic maritime connections with Southeast Asia through this area. In particular, *Lihuolun* employs pantomime imagery to illustrate the omnipotence of Buddha, as follows:

Buddha is an epithet, similar to the way we call the Three Augustus and the Five Emperors as Holy. Buddha is the original ancestor of the way and the moral and the progenitor of spiritual illumination. Buddha is the synonym for the Enlightened. (He is able to) transform himself suddenly while dismembering himself: he sometimes exists and sometimes disappears, he can be small and big, he can take shape like a circle and a square, his age can be old and young, and he can hide and shine. Fire is unable to burn

⁶⁴³ Zhuge Liang's Yunnan campaign turned out to provide important economic and human resources for Zhuge Liang's subsequent northern campaigns, of which the aim is to take Chang'an from Wei, since 226 CE. For this purpose, Zhuge Liang had two petitions (228 CE) to the young emperor Liu Shan justifying the *raison d'être* of the northern campaign. In both of them, Zhuge highlights the Yunnan campaign as the precondition for northern campaigns (Zhuge Liang ji qianzhu, 137, 194). What is implicit is Zhuge's rhetoric is that the Yunnan campaign is the first step toward re-establishing the Han dynasty by "returning" from the Sichuan basin to Chang'an, As Zhuge highlights, "restoring the Han royal house, returning to the old capital" (*xingfu hanshi, huanyu jiudu*), Zhuge Liang ji, 137.

⁶⁴⁴ Most Chinese Buddhist texts from this period are translations, Nattier (2008).

⁶⁴⁵ *Lihuolun* itself is not free from textual problems. As the way the text presents itself, its supposed author Mouzi composed it in Jiaozhi, a Han commandery encompassing the Gulf of Tonkin in today's Chinese Guangxi province and northern Vietnam, after the death of Emperor Ling in 189 CE. We can neither disprove nor prove the historicity of this account. Given this ambiguous situation, a safe way to use this text effectively is to highlight its performative aspects: not to regard Mouzi as a historical person who is the "author" of this text but to consider him as a constructed persona in it; not to take Jiaozhi as a place in which this text is composed but to regard Jiaozhi as an imagined geographical setting where Buddhist doctrines are elucidated, including the myth of Emperor Ming's dream. See Beecroft (2010): 266-89; L'Hardio (2017): 21-30. Yang Lu's critical discussion of the famous Kuchan translator Kumārajīva in the 4th century CE represents a constructionist approach toward early Chinese Buddhism, Lu (2004): 1-43.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. Xinjiang Rong disputes with the maritime origin of Buddhism in China, Rong (2004); also see Eric Zürcher's discussion of Buddhism's transmission to China via the Tarim Basin, Zürcher (2013): 353-76.

him, a sword is unable to hurt him.he does not suffer when encountering trouble. When he would like to walk, he flies. When he sits, light shines (from him). He is thus called Buddha.⁶⁴⁷

While the term *huanren* (illusionary people/illusion-maker) for Roman performers conveys a mysterious feeling, the term *huanshu* (illusion-making technique) illustrates Buddha's illusionary nature. Specifically, both the performer and Buddha demonstrate an ability to dismember themselves and to deal with fire and sword. The description above is more elaborate in showing Buddha's capacity to exist and to disappear, to be small and to be big, to be a circle and a square, and to be old and to be young, and to be hidden and to be manifest. This further demonstrates the pantomimic nature of Buddha, which recall various themes in Ovid's work, as discussed in the previous chapter.⁶⁴⁸

We can argue that the performative imagery is based on Indian performance tradition, as India certainly demonstrates similar complicated performance and dance techniques to pantomime during the same period.⁶⁴⁹ Moreover, the arrival of pantomime performers to China through Southeast Asia inevitably came through an Indian intermediary.⁶⁵⁰ However, what commands Chinese elites' ethnographic imagination from the 2nd century CE onward is Rome. As discussed in the previous section, when some Roman merchants who pretended to be envoys arrived in China in 166 CE, Chinese officials felt disappointed with what they presented given they were not consistent with what they expected.

⁶⁴⁷ Lihuolun, 2

⁶⁴⁸ Dong Lili helpfully highlights this aspect by suggesting that Buddhism employs popular performance to do missionary, Dong (2021): 168. Also see Wu (1994): 119.

⁶⁴⁹ According to *Sou Shenji* (In Search of Deities), an Indian performer came to the south between 307 and 313 CE who is able to cut up the throat and fix it while pouring out the fire, *Sou Shenji*, Volume 2, 33. For strange writings in early medieval China, see Campany (1996).

⁶⁵⁰ For possible pantomime images on Gandharan art, see Brancaccio (2021).

The following passage from a 3rd-century CE Taoist text *Liezi* (Master of Lie), which contains similar pantomime imagery, helps further understand the use of pantomime imagery in the portrayal of Buddha in *Lihuolun*:

“During the time of King Mu of Zhou, a transformative person comes from a country in the extreme west. This person can enter water and fire, pierce gold and stone, turn upside down mountains and rivers, move cities and towns, and stay still in the air without falling down...By demonstrating tens of thousands of transformations and changes, this person has an unlimited number of forms. She/he can not only change the form of materials but also reshape people’s minds. King Mu reveres her/him as a deity and serves her/him as the sovereignty.”⁶⁵¹

Liezi was a Warring States philosopher during the 5th century BCE who was mentioned by Zhuangzi. However, unlike Zhuangzi, his work only emerged during the Western Jin period, which allowed for subsequent rewritings and insertions. The chapter *Zhou Muwang* (King Mu of Zhou), which contains the above passage, presents a portrayal of *huanren* (illusionary person) that has been compared to the image of *huanren* in Buddhist texts.⁶⁵² This passage shares similar pantomime imagery as *Lihuolun*. However, by suggesting that the performers come from the *xijizhiguo* (a country in the far west), which invokes the Chinese awareness of Daqin/Rome, this Taoist text implicitly rejects the use of pantomime to emphasize the mysterious nature of its deity.⁶⁵³ As will be discussed, Yu Huan’s *Weilue* explicitly uses Rome to challenge Buddhism for a Neo-Taoist purpose. I view this passage as another example of Taoists using existing knowledge of Rome to counter Buddhist missionary efforts.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵¹ Liezi jishi, Volume 3, 90-1.

⁶⁵² L. Chen (1981): 26; Y. Chen (2012): 132-3.

⁶⁵³ Wang Zijin recognizes the performance imagery in this depiction, see Wang (2011): 230. Moreover, as the text goes, the *huaren* leads King Mu to her/his palace made of gold and silver (Liezi jishi, Volume 3, 92), which is consistent with the Chinese imagination of Rome.

⁶⁵⁴ The text *Mutianzi zhuan* (The Biography of King Mu) about King Mu was excavated during Western Jin. When Liezi rewrites the story of King Mu by fabricating his meeting with a Roman pantomime performer, we may research how this excavated text assumed its own intellectual significance during the Western Jin period when China was already enlightened about foreign lands. For this text, Frühauf (1998): 45-71.

The account of the court debate over the Mediterranean performance at the Chinese imperial new year banquet in 121 CE provides insight into the ideological framework that underlies the use of pantomime imagery in the debate between Buddhism and Taoism:

In the year of Yongning, the king of Shan, a southwestern Yi state, sent musicians and magicians. (The performers) could do magic and pour out the fire, dismember themselves, and switch the heads between oxen and horses. In the imperial new year banquet the next year, (these performers) performed at the court. Emperor An and his officials watched the performance together and greatly marveled at it. But (Chen) Shan alone left his seat, raised his hands, and delivered a speech: “In the past when the states of Qi and Lu held a meeting in Jiagu, the Qi presented the music performed by dwarfs. Zhongni (Confucius) executed these dwarfs. He then said ‘we need to ban the music of Zheng (“wanton music”) and be away from evil persons.’ The amusement of Yi and Di (“barbarians”) should not be displayed at the imperial court.” Chen Zhong, the prime minister, argued against Shan: “In antiquity, people performed a dance that brought delight to all people at the hall; the music of four Yi (“all foreign people”) was displayed in front of the gate. So, the Book of Odes (The *Shi*) mentions ‘the elegant music from the central plain and the folk music from the south, and the music from four directions including Guan, Ren, and Zhuli are performed simultaneously.’ Today, (people from) the state of Shan crossed the desert and India, traveling across thousands of li to send their tributes. (Their music) is not the music of Zheng and Wei, and (their performers) should not be compared to evil persons. Shan is defaming the court politics and I implore your majesty to put him in jail.”⁶⁵⁵

While their initial performance in 120 CE took place at the imperial diplomatic office (the Grand Honglu Temple, *Honglu si*),⁶⁵⁶ this account indicates that the diplomatic officials presented them to the new year banquet later. As discussed earlier, there was practical concern about Chinese imperial governance in the southwest. Additionally, as the only recorded instance of foreign culture at the imperial level during the Eastern Han, this debate underscores the apprehension of Chinese Confucian elites regarding the proper place of foreign culture, as represented by pantomime performance, in Chinese imperial culture. At the time of the debate, the Chinese empire had once again established its influence over Central Asia and the southwestern highland

⁶⁵⁵ Hou Hanshu, Volume 51, 1685.

⁶⁵⁶ Hou Hanshu, Appendix 25, 3583.

during the last three decades in the 2nd-century CE.⁶⁵⁷ Similar to Lucian's presentation of the debate on whether pantomime performance is a Greek paideia or not,⁶⁵⁸ the court debate reveals the Chinese elites' employment of Confucian canon to establish or disprove the suitability of Mediterranean performance.⁶⁵⁹

Moreover, as discussed earlier, since the Ailao kingdom in today's western Yunnan acted as a mediator for Shan's access to China, Shan must be located in Southeast Asia. However, in chancellor Chen Zhong's presentation, Shan is situated west of India. I consider this geographical presentation to be a misunderstanding of Shan's access to the Mediterranean via the Indian Ocean, while assuming that Shan is a neighboring country to Rome. In other words, as the chancellor, Chen Zhong's knowledge of the outside world may not be as precise as that of diplomatic officials. However, this misunderstanding still indicates the geographical imaginary of top-ranked Chinese officials during the 2nd century: Rome held a central role in the geographical imaginary while India mediated this connection.

To corroborate this evidence, Zhang Heng wrote *Rhapsode of the Eastern Capital* (*Dongjingfu*), in which he represents the Chinese imperial space as surrounded by Dingling in the north, the Yue people in the south, Daqin in the west, and Lelang (in today's North Korea) in the east.⁶⁶⁰ This representation engages with the First Emperor's spatial display in the Langye inscription in 215 CE. The First Emperor considers the Qin empire to be surrounded by empty space.⁶⁶¹ As demonstrated, the knowledge of the outside world that Zhang Qian brought back implicitly challenged this view. However, Zhang Heng's representation directly challenges this

⁶⁵⁷ This aspect is highlighted in the edict commemorating Emperor Ming in 76 CE when the emperor passed away, Hou Hanshu, Volume, 133.

⁶⁵⁸ See chapter 3.

⁶⁵⁹ This debate is also related to the broad concern about music culture in imperial politics since Western Han, see Loewe (2019/1974): 193-210.

⁶⁶⁰ Quan Houhanwen, Volume 53, 767.

⁶⁶¹ Kern (2001): 32-3.

ideology. In particular, while the First Emperor regards flowing sands as the space west of China (*xishe liusha*), Zhang Heng uses the phrase *xibao daqin* (surrounded by the Great Qin) to show China's imagined western neighbor. We can definitely attribute the geographical imprecision to regarding Rome as China's western neighbor. Yet, this "mistake" further demonstrates Rome's role in the Chinese spatial imaginary: it is the most important state west of China.⁶⁶²

In this light, the significance of this Mediterranean performers' arrival, emphasized by Ma Duanlin (1245-1322), a Yuan Chinese encyclopedist should not be exaggerated:

"Non-official music (*sanyue*) and acrobatics (*zaxi*) (in China) mostly consist of illusion-making techniques (*huanshu*) and they are all derived from the Western Regions (*Xiyu*, i.e. regions from the Tarim Basin to the Mediterranean). (This importation) started from the illusion-maker's arrival in China in the time of Emperor An of Late Han (reign 106-125 CE). From then on, every dynasty has this illusion-making."⁶⁶³

We can assume that, Ma accessed some lost documents that are unavailable to us, though Ma may have his agenda in making this suggestion given the popularity of Yuan drama during his time. Putting existing evidence together, we can detect the significance that Rome holds in Chinese spatial imaginary. In particular, the court debate on Roman pantomime as the only recorded instance in which a foreign culture exerted controversy at the Han imperial center epitomizes Rome's role in Chinese ethnography during the 2nd century CE.

We are now ready to return to the use of pantomime imagery in the portrayal of Buddha in *Lihuolun*. In particular, given India's mediating role in Chinese access to pantomime performers, Buddhists must have directly transferred their existing experience of using Mediterranean performance culture to illustrate Buddhist doctrines, as evident from the

⁶⁶² Moreover, in this rhapsode, Zhang Heng mentions: "After translating for nine times by multiple tongues, they came to prostrate in front of the king." (Quan houhanwen, Volume 53, 767), signaling actual diplomacy.

⁶⁶³ *Wenxian tongkao* (A Systematic Investigation of Documents), Volume 147, 1287.

Dionysiac scene from Gandhara.⁶⁶⁴ In turn, a similar presentation of *huanren* in the Taoist text *Liezhi* entails ideological confrontation between Buddhists and Taoists during the 3rd century CE. The existing pantomime-mediated knowledge of Rome is featured in this debate.

In this light, I further contend that the effort to use Roman pantomime performers to explain the power of Buddha applies to the Buddhist foundation myth in China in *Lihuolun*:

Mouzi says: in the past, the Filial Emperor Ming dreamed about a divine person: (this person) flies in front of the court hall with sunshine radiating from him. (The emperor) was glad about this dream. Tomorrow, (the emperor) asked around the officials about which god he is. A generalist named Fu Yi said: “your subject heard that someone in India who obtains the way is called Fo (Buddha). (The Buddha) flies on the visionary sky and its body radiates sunshine. I suspect it is this god.” Then his majesty realized (what had happened). (He thus) dispatched eighteenth persons in total, including the palace official Cai Yin, the chief of the imperial palace guard Qin Jing, and the imperial doctor student Wang Zun (to search for Buddha). In the Great Yuezhi, they copied the Forty-Two Sutra. (After they had brought it back), the sutra is stored in the fourteen room at the imperial library archive, the Lantai.⁶⁶⁵

In contrast to Yu Huan’s account of Buddhism being attributed to late Western Han, where a Yuezhi prince teaches the imperial academic student Jing Lu,⁶⁶⁶ this story reimagines the Chinese imperial past in the post-imperial period by elevating the role of Buddhism. Although Yu Huan’s account of Jing Lu is an anecdote, it is closer to the actual transmission of Buddhism to China during daily Sino-Bactrian connections, given the solid testimony about the presence of Buddhism practiced by King Ying of Chu during Emperor Ming’s time.⁶⁶⁷ Yu Huan’s version

⁶⁶⁴ Brancaccio and Liu (2009): 219-44. For Buddhism in Kushan, see Skinner (2017). The most important corroborating evidence for this “Dionysiac” culture in the Chinese context is a military lord called Ze Rong in southeast China during the late Eastern Han used banquet including alcohol to do Buddhist missionaries (Sanguozhi, Volume 11, 179-80), indicating the use of mundane pleasure for a higher spiritual purpose.

⁶⁶⁵ *Lihuolun*, 21

⁶⁶⁶ Wei Lue, preserved in *Sanguo zhi*, Volume 30, 859-860.

⁶⁶⁷ “The King of Chu recites the subtle words of Huangdi and Laozi and is fond of Buddhas (*futu*)’s benevolent sanctuary; moreover, he has practiced fasting by being clean for three months. What kind of suspicion with which he is associated so that he should repent? In returning (the silk and clothes that he submitted as) expiation, it will help the splendid feasting of for upsāka (*yipu*) and śramana (*sanmen*).” Hou Hanshu, Volume 42, 1428. This decree is from the office of the State Secretary (*guoxiang*) in the Kingdom of Chu who justified King Ying’s supposed guilty after Emperor Ming had ordered the guilty people to expiate themselves by submitting silk in 66 CE. The Chinese transcriptions of upsāka (*yipu*) and śramana (*sanmen*), the laymen and monks respectively, alongside the first attested Chinese term for Buddha (*futu*), are the first attestation of the Buddhist community in China (Demiéville

also identifies the time when Kushan already dominated northwest India as 2 CE. However, this story in *Lihuolun* is a latter elaborate version. In contrast to Yu Huan's account of China's passive reception of Buddhism, this story emphasizes Emperor Ming's active search for Buddhism by sending envoys to Bactria for Buddhist sutras.

While *Lihuolun* reimagines Emperor Ming, who was instrumental in building Eastern Han as a Confucian empire, to be the first Chinese Buddhist emperor,⁶⁶⁸ this foundation myth retells existing Chinese experience with the outside world during the Han. The sending of Chinese officials to Bactria to search for Buddhist sutra is evidently a reworking of the existing story of Zhang Qian's journey to Bactria. Yet, Emperor Ming's dream of Buddha does not find its ready counterpart in the narrative about Zhang Qian.

In light of the discussion on elucidating Buddha through pantomime imagery, I suggest that the prototype of Emperor Ming's dream of Buddha's presence at the court is the presence of pantomime performers at the court in 121 CE. As discussed earlier, the ensuing court debate epitomizes the ideological significance that Rome held among Chinese officials. The story of Buddha's flying at the Chinese court in the emperor's dream, which prompts the emperor's active search for Buddhism, can be attributed to the existing cultural imaginary of Mediterranean performers.

(1986): 821). Moreover, this account shows how early Chinese Buddhism subscribes to Taoism, cf. Seidel (1969); Seidel (2008): 125-65.

⁶⁶⁸The Council of the White Tiger Temple (*Baihu guan huiyi*) in 79 CE is particularly a milestone in establishing Confucian orthodoxy by compromising doctrinal differences among various Confucian schools (Hou, Zhao, Du, and Qiu (2004/1957): 223-47). The discourse of witchcraft in the early 70s CE thus shows how the Confucian ideology served Emperor Ming's political agenda. In Mou Zhe's recent art historical account of the imperial ideology of Eastern Han, there is an unusual insight that Wang Mang (45 BCE-23 CE), whom Mou notes as a near-contemporary with Augustus (63BCE-14CE), is the real architect of Eastern Han ideology like what Augustus contributed to imperial Rome; the only difference is that, as Mou comments, while the posterity has perceived Augustus through accounts colored by Augustan propaganda, the posterity has approached Wang Mang via anti-Wang Mang ideology during Eastern Han, Mou (2021): 12-3. Concerning witchcraft and Confucian ideology in Western Han, see Cai (2014).

Although the attribution of the emperor's dream to pantomime performance at the court in 121 CE is tentative, this suggestion goes beyond the determined view based on hindsight that the Chinese were ready to recognize Buddhism as a distinct religion and Buddha as a distinct deity or enlightened wise being when Buddhism began to grow in China.⁶⁶⁹ The use of pantomime imagery to explain the power of Buddha suggests that China's initial reception of Buddhism as another foreign culture came through the existing perception of pantomime performers as illusionary persons (*huanren*), when Buddha is called divine person (*shenren*) in the story of Emperor Ming's dream. Yu Huan's lengthy account of Rome for his Neo-Taoist agenda with regard to the limitation of human experience by downplaying the role of Buddhism helps us understand the ideological conditioning of narrating Rome during the 3rd century CE.⁶⁷⁰ In contrast, the India-centric view in the text of *Lihuolun* suggests the view that Yu Huan argues against. Moreover, the similar use of pantomime imagery to illustrate a transformative person (*huaren*) from the extreme west whom King Mu treats as a deity in the contemporary Taoist text *Liezi* further shows this ideological negotiation as far as pantomime is concerned. In particular, as both *Liezi* and *Weilue* suggest, when Buddha comes from India which is west of China, there is a greater state further west of India called Daqin.

Conclusion

⁶⁶⁹ Concerning research on early Chinese Buddhism, for a Buddhological account, see Tsukamoto (1985): 41-50; Tang (2011/1938): 11-4. For discussions in general historical account on Eastern Han, Demiéville (1986): 823-4; Cheng (1998): 357; He (2013): 639-40.

⁶⁷⁰ "Yu Huan makes the following observations: It is generally realized that a fish living in a small pond is unaware of the grandeur of [the Yangtze] River or the ocean, and that an insect like the fuyou (which lives only for a day) knows nothing of the four seasons. Why is this? It is because the place where the one lives is too small, and the life of the other too short. As for me now, looking at the foreign tribes and upon such states as the Great Qin, I have found it a great task from which I have learned a lot, let alone those deduced by Zou Yan and those estimated by the Major Book of Change and the Great Abstract!" Wei Lue, preserved in *Sanguo zhi*, 863, trans. Yu Taishan, edited by Victor Mair, modified. For *qingtan* (pure dialogues) culture behind this passage, see Lo (2019): 511-30.

Following the discussion of the Roman theater as a vehicle for imagining the former Hellenistic landscape, this chapter explores how the cultural connections between the Mediterranean and China intensified during the first two centuries after the common era through popular performance. The Indian Ocean trade presented an opportunity for time-space collapse, allowing for the eastern spread of Mediterranean performance culture to China. These performers stimulated the further growth of ethnographic knowledge in China. Parthia and Bactria commanded China's ethnographic imagination during the late 2nd century BCE, while Rome held a prominent role in Chinese elites' knowledge of the outside world from the late 1st century CE onward. This fascination with Rome continued into the 3rd century BCE when Rome made its way into the Buddhism-Taoism debate. While the arrival of Mediterranean performers to China prompted court debate, the way Chinese Taoists and Buddhists imagined the omnipotency and mysteries of their respective debates bear impacts from the existing fantastic view of Mediterranean performers.

Moreover, Homeric motifs were instrumental in this ethnographic knowledge formation. From the beginning of the direct Mediterranean participation in the Indian Ocean trade from the first half of the 1st century BCE, Homeric motifs came into focus to capture the diasporic experience on the Indian Ocean. Wandering performers likely played a role in shaping these motifs. The Sophytos inscription was a lynchpin in understanding this dynamic. Pliny's utopian account of Ceylon, which contains the Homeric motif of Phaenacia, further demonstrates this aspect when the report on Ceylon is surprisingly similar to Chinese account of Rome. Both reports derived from the popular narrative of the Roman state power on the Indian Ocean. The self-designation as the Western Sea people by the Mediterranean performers in China reveals agents behind this knowledge transmission. In this light, we can assert that these performers

embody the post-Hellenistic commonwealth by pushing the boundary of Hellenic culture beyond the regions where both Alexander and Indo-Greek kings reached.

Conclusion: From the Hellenistic Empire to the Post-Hellenistic Commonwealth

This dissertation examines how common ethnographic knowledge of Hellenistic Asia was acquired in both Rome and China through the two major case studies. Part I explores how the Seleucid empire facilitated this knowledge formation. While Hellenistic Bactria has commanded fascination among some classicists and historians as the easternmost place where Hellenic culture can be found, this scholarly passion has also been entwined with traditional colonialism and neo-colonialism in Euro-American historiography.⁶⁷¹ Greco-Roman authors, as demonstrated in chapter 1, were precursors to creating this fantastic image. They depicted the dichotomy between Hellenism and nomads (Polybius), Bactria's defiance against the eastern empire (Diodorus), and Bactria as an expanding Hellenic empire (Pompeius Trogus and Strabo). Despite limited information from these accounts, they serve as the basis for modern European scholars to search for the lost Hellas in Afghanistan and India through coins and archaeological remains. In doing so, they mentally construct Hellenistic Bactria as a heterotopia by which to "feel" the "classical."⁶⁷² This chapter thus undertakes an ideological analysis of how these

⁶⁷¹ Milinda Hoo has the most recent reflection on this problem, Coloru (2020): 126-40; Fenet (2020): 142-70; Hoo (2022): 20-33

⁶⁷² For the structure of feeling in philhellenism, see Güthenke (2022).

accounts are snapshots of Roman imperial expansion from Greece to the eastern Mediterranean. In other words, these accounts capture Roman imperial expansion through which Greco-Roman authors accessed knowledge of former Hellenistic Asia.

In contrast, China developed an entirely different perception of Hellenistic Asia, especially Bactria, based on its dealing with the Xiongnu. While sharing some of the Greco-Roman knowledge of urbanization in Bactria, Chinese interest in Hellenistic Asia dwelled upon exploring alternative relationships between sedentary and nomadic regimes. Parthia demonstrated a model for China to be a Eurasian regime that manages to overcome nomadic challenges, while Bactria revealed the possibility of economic dynamism under nomadic rule. Without the ideological baggage of Hellenism, China developed a very different knowledge system of Hellenistic Asia. Nevertheless, in contrast with modern European scholars' antiquarian interest in singling out the Hellenistic past in Central Asia, a Hellenic understanding of Bactria in Greco-Roman knowledge arose from Rome's dealing with Hellenistic imperialism from the late 3rd century BCE onward. Similarly, Chinese knowledge of Hellenistic Asia was contingent upon China's military campaigns against the Xiongnu.

Part I thus demonstrates that imperial encounters (Rome-the Seleucids-Bactria-nomads-China) framed ethnographic knowledge formation in both Rome and China. Part II highlights Roman pantomime performance as a major vehicle for common ethnographic imaginations in both Rome and China from the 1st century CE to the 3rd century CE. As Rome's major rival empire, Parthia was indeed a major ethnographic for Rome during the imperial period. However, from the Chinese point of view, Chinese knowledge of Parthia remained the same as in the late 2nd century BCE. Instead, Daqin came to command Chinese fascination with the western regions outside China. While Daqin represents Chinese knowledge of Rome, the

eastern Mediterranean world (or the former Hellenistic Mediterranean) defined the way China imagined Roman power. Part II shows that wandering performers on the Indian Ocean, from both the Mediterranean and Central Asia, played an instrumental role in shaping this new ethnographic knowledge in China.

First, Part II examines pantomime-dominated Roman theater as the institutional mechanism of imagining the East based on case studies of Alexandria, Aphrodisias, and Antioch. From an ethnographic point of view, through the lens of Parthia, these imaginations conceive of the entity of former Hellenistic Asia through three Hellenic bodies: multilingual Cleopatra, Callirhoe's beauty, and Apollonius' wisdom. The Alexandrian theater had a multi-ethnic audience from Syria to Bactria through Alexandria's nexus role between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Staging the story of Cleopatra at the Alexandrian theater reimaged the former Hellenistic past of the city, especially concerning Antony's Parthian campaign. Similarly, Chariton's novel *Callirhoe* demonstrates how a Greek writer from Aphrodisias imagined the lands from Caria to Bactria through the trafficking experience of Callirhoe.

In turn, Roman theater in Aphrodisias underpins this ethnographic imagination as a Roman imperial institution when the Bactrian Mithridates who governs Caria in this novel comes into focus. Likewise, the actual dynamic of traveling performers from Syria to Parthia underlies Philostratus' portrayal of Apollonius as a mobile sophist when Antioch became a major pantomime theater, a dynamic that Lucian's *De Saltatione* attests to. While traveling performers served as brokers bringing knowledge of Rome to China externally, Roman pantomime performance was internally a site on which Roman authors developed ethnographic imagination of the East. Although Parthia dictated Roman interest in the East, the Hellenistic past still colored the way in which some Roman authors perceived the East.

Overall, although Eurasia during the first two centuries after our era can be characterized as the age of empires (Rome, Parthia, the Kushans, and Han China), wandering performers were an underlying force for cultural exchange across the vast swath of Eurasia. In this regard, this dissertation considers these two centuries as the “post-Hellenistic commonwealth” crisscrossed by merchants, diplomats, and performers. As a special commodity trafficked on the Indian Ocean as well as diplomatic gifts for inter-regime exchange, performers played their agency in transmitting information about foreign regions. In particular, when Indian Ocean communication was concerned, Homeric motifs that we identify from Greco-Latin sources (Strabo and Pliny), from Hellenic cultural remains in Central Asia (the Sophytos inscription and Gandharan art), as well as from China (Gan Ying’s story) speak of how “vulgar” *Odyssey* came to be used to capture the diasporic experience on the Indian Ocean. Wandering performers were the most important candidates in disseminating these motifs.

In this light, although these two major case studies cannot exhaust all ethnographic sources, they delineate the changing dynamics of transregional communications from the late Hellenistic to the post-Hellenistic period. When the Achaemenids and the Seleucids brought the vast lands from the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia into an overarching imperial framework, military and administrative interests commanded transregional interests. In contrast, even though Parthia played a pivotal role in linking the Mediterranean to the East from the late 2nd century BCE onward, non-political factors increasingly commanded exchange, and performance was one of them. Based on the fragmentary account of the Seleucus-Chandragupta treaty in 305/4 BCE, Paul Kosmin considers this diplomatic as a major breakthrough away from the Achaemenid imperial system when Hellenistic kings gave up universal pretense.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ Kosmin (2014): 31-2

Similarly, we can argue that the arrival of Mediterranean performers in China in 120/1 CE and their lasting impact on subsequent Chinese imagination, as revealed by Buddhist and Taoistic sources, signifies the role of non-imperial agents in transregional exchange during the first two centuries after our era. Whereas Alexander and Indo-Greek kings only brought “Hellenic” boundaries to India, these performers extended the sphere of Hellenic culture to China. However, it is important to note that the circumstances of their arrival were conditioned by the Chinese imperial dealings with the southwestern frontier, reminding us how this romantic Sino-Hellenic/Roman exchange was driven by local interest and how “Greco-Roman” culture became a local culture.

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