

## AN ALTAR OF ALEXANDER NOW STANDING NEAR DELHI

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**Abstract.** The vanishing of the twelve magnificent altars set up in India by Alexander the Great has intrigued many scholars. This article shows that one of the altars was re-inscribed by Emperor Asoka, who was the Indo-Greek King Diodotus I. There is an indication that Alexander may have tried to promote brotherhood in these altars. It is just possible that the four-lion emblem of India may be linked to Alexander.

Even in the heyday of Assyriology, when the lure of grand discoveries drew archaeologists to Sumer and Akkad, some eminent figures opted for India.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the enigma of the Indus culture, a prime attraction was the undiscovered altars of Alexander cited in several ancient texts. Alexander was the greatest ambassador of the West, and the failure to locate the altars saddened archaeologists like Wheeler, who writes:

And yet it is astonishing how very little actual trace we have of his passing . . . his material presence has eluded us. It is as though a disembodied idea had come and gone as a mighty spiritual force with little immediate tangibility.<sup>2</sup>

The vanishing of the altars was seen by some as an index of the insignificance of Alexander's legacy, and was at the root of much criticism levelled against him. However, survival of relics is often a matter of chance; to the layman the accounts of Arrian, Plutarch and others may appear trivial in contrast to the lustre of the Taj Mahal or the splendour of Tutenkhamun's relics, but the historian must tread cautiously. Natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, wilful destruction by political or religious reactionaries, and at times plain misjudgment by historians, may accumulate in order to diminish a legitimate hero. Lastly one must consider the effects of misappropriation. Had it not been for the ballasting of more than one hundred miles of the Lahore-Multan railway with bricks from the monuments of Harappa, the task of reconstructing the glories of the Indus civilisation would have been far easier. This background has other dimensions as well: only a little more than fifty years after the

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<sup>1</sup> In the preparation of this article, the author gratefully remembers the kind encouragement of the late N. G. L. Hammond.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler, *Flames over Persepolis* (London 1968) 129.

construction of the altars, all of which apparently disappeared, one encounters the majestic Asokan pillars. Since Asoka has a very strong presence in the northwest, it is natural to suspect a link between the vanishing of all the altars of Alexander and the simultaneous emergence of nearly the same number of Asoka’s Pillar Edicts, many of which had lion-capitals. It can be recalled that when Philip wanted to commemorate the momentous victory at Chaeronea he set up the famous lion statue. It is more than likely that his illustrious son had also erected lion capitals in India.

*Who Erected Pillars in India Before Asoka?*

The find-spots of relics are of great importance in the reconstruction of history; but one of the recurrent problems in Indian history is that pillars were often rewritten and re-erected at different locations. Unfortunately historians such as H. C. Raychaudhuri and R. Thapar have not taken this into account. Even though the weight of some of these pillars is about thirty tons, it is not safe to assume that they were erected in their present locations. Keay writes:

The question of how these pillars had originally been moved round India, and whether they were still in their ordained positions, was an intriguing subject by itself. It was now apparent that they were all of the same stone, all polished by the same unexplained process, and therefore all from the same quarry.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, although most writers place this quarry at Chunar near Benares, Prinsep locates it somewhere in the outer Himalayas.<sup>4</sup> The altars of Alexander were grand structures. Plutarch writes that in his day these were held in much veneration by the Prasians, whose kings were in the habit of crossing the Ganges every year to offer sacrifices in the Grecian manner upon them (Plut. *Alex.* 62). What happened thereafter? Was there a scramble among the later rulers to use these splendid monuments for their own purposes? The fame of Samudragupta as one of the greatest rulers of India rests on his Allahabad inscription which was rewritten on an old Asokan pillar; Kulke and Rothermund suggest that it was shifted from Kausambi.<sup>5</sup> In the fourteenth century, Sultan Feroz Shah was so impressed by the Asokan pillars that he had two of them shifted to Delhi, one from Meerut and another from Topra in Ambala district, about ninety miles northwest of Delhi. Monahan writes:

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<sup>3</sup> J. Keay, *India Discovered: The Achievement of the British Raj* (London 1988) 55.

<sup>4</sup> J. Prinsep, *Essays on Indian Antiquities: Historic, Numismatic and Palaeographic* (London 1858).

<sup>5</sup> H. Kulke and D. Rothermund, *A History of India* (London 1990) 86.

The fact that ten of the pillars bear inscriptions of Ashoka is proof they were erected not later than his reign; it does not prove that none of them was erected earlier.<sup>6</sup>

In the Sanskrit drama *Mudrarakshasa*, Chandragupta is called *Piadamšana* (Act 6). *Piadamšana* is a colloquial error for *Priyadaršana*. From this, Raychaudhuri concludes that it is not always safe to ascribe all epigraphs that mention *Priyadaršana* to Asoka the Great.<sup>7</sup> The intriguing fact is that Asoka says that pillars bearing edicts had been in existence in India before his time; he was not the first to use pillars for the propagation of *Dhamma* (Eusebia). In the seventh Pillar Edict [*PE*], after recording that he has erected ‘Dharma pillars [pillars of the Sacred Law]’ (*dhammathambhani*), Asoka writes:

Etam devānampiye āhā: iyaṃ dhamma-libi ata athi silā-thambāni vā, silā-phalakāni vā tata kaṭaviyā ena esa cila-ṭhitike siyā.

(Asoka *PE* 7)

Concerning this, the Beloved of the gods [the Devānampiya] said: Wherever there are either stone-pillars or stone-slabs, thereon this Dharma-rescript is to be engraved, so that it may long endure.<sup>8</sup>

This shows that there were already pillars in India before the Asokan era and also implies that, like Samudragupta, Asoka also had engraved his own message on at least some of them. To realise that no one other than Alexander could have erected these pre-Asokan pillars, one has to take a close look into an age-old blunder in Indology that has greatly falsified world history.

### *The Location of Palibothra*

Alexander historians have often been baffled by the scarcity of new sources, archaeological or textual, and new writers are usually content with re-interpretation of old documents.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately this is due to a faulty perspective; too much

<sup>6</sup> F. J. Monahan, *The Early History of Bengal* (Delhi 1974) 225. Monahan (like V. A. Smith) was a British Indologist who was also a civil servant. For the sake of consistency, future references (other than in titles of works, or direct quotations) in this article are to Asoka, rather than to Ashoka or other variants of the name.

<sup>7</sup> H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta 1972) 240.

<sup>8</sup> A. C. Sen, *Asoka's Edicts* (Calcutta 1956) 162f., 168f.

<sup>9</sup> Archaeologists have found little in India or Iran that can be directly linked to Alexander, and reference to him in Indian literature is scanty though not non-existent. There were about twenty contemporary accounts of Alexander but these are not extant. Aristoboulos and Ptolemy wrote many years later. Historians have been forced to use the later accounts of Arrian, Plutarch and other secondary sources.

stress has been laid on the Greek and Roman sources at the expense of crucial data from Sanskrit and Pali documents. Moreover, the value of the Indian sources has been impaired by one fatal error—Jones’ location of Palibothra at Patna.<sup>10</sup> This has not only blurred the identity of major conspirators in the history of Alexander, but has also left room for much unwarranted criticism against him. Once Jones’ idea is rejected and the scenario is shifted to the northwest, important clarifications emerge in the history not only of India but also that of Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> It turns out that Alexander was chasing through Gedrosia a very powerful adversary, and that he was not quite the villain that he has been made out to be.

Recounting the scenario after the Hyphasis mutiny (Arr. *Anab.* 5.25; Curt. 9.2.1-3.19; Diod. Sic. 17.93-95), Badian writes with an air of definiteness:

For the moment, he tried to use the weapon that had succeeded before. He withdrew to his tent, for three days. But this time it did not help. The men were determined, and as Coenus had made clear, they had the officers’ support. Alexander could not divide them. All that remained was to save face.<sup>12</sup>

Badian not only finds Alexander in an awkward position, but also notes his subsequent declaration that he would go on nonetheless and his ordering of sacrifices for crossing the river. Alexander’s vow to fight against the Prasii in the face of stiff opposition from both the soldiers and officers does appear somewhat comical but here lies a trap—where was their capital Palibothra? Could it really have been at Patna, so far removed from the northwest—the centre of early India?

The significance of this question has been generally overlooked. Only Hammond, discoverer of Aegai, recognises the crucial role of geography in this history, and states that ‘Patna is too far east’ to be a Palibothra.<sup>13</sup> Some

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<sup>10</sup> W. Jones, *On Asiatick History, Civil and Natural: The Tenth Anniversary Discourse*, delivered 28 February 1793 by the President at the Asiatick Society of Bengal.

<sup>11</sup> Jones’ error misled such erudite scholars as Rostovtzeff and Tarn into believing that Alexander is not mentioned in Indian literature and had little impact on Indian civilisation: see D. Musti, ‘Syria and the East’, in F. W. Walbank *et al.* (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History 7.1: The Hellenistic World*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1984) 217; W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* 1 (Cambridge 1948) 142.

<sup>12</sup> E. Badian, ‘Alexander in Iran’, in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge 1985) 466f. Ptolemy also reported that the omens were unfavourable (Arr. *Anab.* 5.29). But that may not have been the reason why he turned westwards.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to N. G. L. Hammond for this private communication to me.

archaeologists such as Ghosh also point out that Jones' discovery has no archaeological basis.<sup>14</sup> Kulke and Rothermund likewise doubt the Jonesian story.<sup>15</sup> It is known that the Maurya empire extended to the west as far as Aria, Seistan and Makran;<sup>16</sup> and this makes it likely that Palibothra was in this region. Elisséeff remarks that from the archaeological viewpoint, eastern Iran was closer to India.<sup>17</sup> Bivar may be unaware of Jones' error,<sup>18</sup> however, or of the alleged frauds in Nepalese archaeology,<sup>19</sup> since he comments about the Persepolis tablets as follows: 'So far as India is concerned, the Fortification Tablets attest an active and substantial traffic, though they shed no light on the geography of that province'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the tablets throw invaluable light on the geography of greater India. They also provide data that revolutionise Indology. Sedda Saramana of the tablets appears to be Siddhartha (Sedda-Arta) Gotama, and the ubiquitous Suddayauda Saramana seems to be his father Suddo-dhana. Alberuni writes that Gotama's real name was Buddho-dana,<sup>21</sup> which puts him in the same bracket as Daniel. Nunudda of the tablets may be Nanda, a relative of Gotama.

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<sup>14</sup> A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India* (Simla 1973) 66: '... of Pataliputra which is mainly known from non-archaeological sources'. For a more detailed discussion, see R. Pal, *Non-Jonesian Indology and Alexander* (New Delhi 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Kulke and Rothermund [5] 61.

<sup>16</sup> V. A. Smith, *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India* (Jaipur 1988) 75.

<sup>17</sup> V. Elisséeff, 'Asiatic Protohistory', in *Encyclopedia of World Art* 2 (New York 1960) 3: 'The Iranian region, with its affinity for the Orient, permitted the development of two different cultural areas: the northwestern one, more properly Iranian, with the localities of Tepe Giyan, Tepe Sialk, Tepe Hissar, and Anau; and the southeastern one, which can be considered Indian, of Baluchistan and the centers of the valley of the Zhob and of Quetta and Amri'. R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London 1962) 27, on the other hand, stresses only the linguistic diversity of Indo-Iranians, not their common heritage: 'To the south the Persians and other Iranian invaders found the land occupied by Elamites and related non-Indo-European speakers. Further east were probably Dravidian peoples in Makran, Seistan and Sind, represented today by their descendants, the Brahuis'.

<sup>18</sup> R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (Chicago 1969). See also M. B. Garrison and M. C. Root, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets 1: Images of Heroic Encounter* 1 (Chicago 2001).

<sup>19</sup> See 'Lumbini on Trial: The Untold Story', <http://www.lumkap.org.uk>.

<sup>20</sup> A. D. H. Bivar, 'The Indus Lands', in J. Boardman *et al.* (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* 4: *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean C. 525 to 479 BC*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1988) 205.

<sup>21</sup> E. C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India* 1 (London 1910) 40, 380. Apart from his father Suddhodana, Siddhartha's uncles all had dana-names—Amitodana, Dhotodana, Sukkodana and Sukkhodana. See E. J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha* (Delhi 1993) 24.

*Alexander’s Return Through Gedrosia After the Hyphasis Mutiny*

Through the mist of vague reports and geographical misconceptions, it is difficult to probe into the Hyphasis revolt, which came as a serious jolt to Alexander. After this, even though there were safer routes, Alexander chose to return to Iran through the desert of Gedrosia, suffering heavy losses in soldiers and civilians from lack of water, food and the extreme heat. That the motive behind this voyage has appeared so perplexing is due to two crucial lapses—the false location of Palibothra, capital of the Prasii, and the concomitant failure to recognise the mysterious Moeris of Pattala who played a determinant role.

‘Alexander, of course, had read Herodotus’, writes Badian,<sup>22</sup> but does not note the purport of his reference to Indians in the Gedrosia area. Toynbee writes on world history and makes no mistake to note the shifting nature of India’s boundary: ‘. . . and we can already see the beginnings of this progressive extension of the name ‘Indian’ in Herodotus’s usage.’<sup>23</sup> The reports of Alexander’s historians clearly indicate that southeast Iran was within Greater India in the fourth century BC. As Prasii was in the Gedrosia area, the question arises—did the army refuse to fight the Prasii or only to march eastwards? If Alexander wanted to move eastward it was not to defeat the Prasii. Tarn writes that he had nothing to do with Magadha on the Ganges.<sup>24</sup> If he had learnt that the fertile Gangetic plains were only a few days’ march away, and wanted to be there for mere expansion of empire, he would have met little resistance. Reluctance of the army could be due to the lack of any tangible gain, not fear of the mighty Easterners. If this was the case, then Alexander bowed down to the wishes of his men. However, if the reluctance was to confront the Prasii, it appears sensible due to their formidable strength. As Moeris had fought beside Porus, the Prasiian army cannot have been left intact, though it could still have been a fighting force. It is probable that Moeris and his agents fomented discord among Alexander’s officers and soldiers.<sup>25</sup> The magicians and other secret agents of

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<sup>22</sup> Badian [12] 462. Herodotus writes: . . . οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ ἡλίου ἀνατολέων Αἰθίοπες (διξοὶ γὰρ δὴ ἐστρατεύοντο) προσετέταχτο τοῖσι Ἰνδοῖσι . . . οὗτοι δὲ οἱ ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας Αἰθίοπες τὰ μὲν πλέω κατὰ περ Ἰνδοὶ ἐσεσάχατο . . . (‘The eastern Ethiopians—for two nations of this name served in the army—were marshalled with the Indians . . . Their equipment was in most points like that of the Indians’, Hdt. 7.70.1-7).

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *A Study Of History 7: Universal States; Universal Churches* (Oxford 1979) 650. Toynbee remarks that Herodotus’ India did not include Panjab and Gandhara.

<sup>24</sup> W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great 2* (Cambridge 2003) 281. Despite some errors, Tarn’s wide knowledge of both European and Asiatic history gave him a deep insight which remains unmatched.

<sup>25</sup> This can be inferred from the Sanskrit drama *Mudrarakshasa* which recounts the rise of Chandragupta. The fabulous strength of the Nanda army disagrees with the archaeological

Moeris probably overblew the might of the Prasii in order to frighten the invaders. From this point onwards, if not earlier, Eumenes, Perdikkas and Seleucus may have been in touch with Moeris.

### *Victory Over Moeris at Palibothra*

Only Justin reports that Alexander had defeated the Prasii (Just. *Epit.* 12.8). Palibothra, the Prasiian capital, was famous for peacocks. Lane Fox writes: ‘. . . Dhana Nanda’s kingdom could have been set against itself and Alexander might yet have walked among Palimbothra’s peacocks.’<sup>26</sup> Curiously, Arrian writes that Alexander was so charmed by the beauty of peacocks that he decreed the severest penalties against anyone killing them (Arr. *Ind.* 15.218).<sup>27</sup> The picture of Alexander amidst peacocks appears puzzling: where did he come across the majestic bird? Does this fascination lead us to Palibothra? It is implausible that eighteen months after the battle with Porus, Alexander suddenly remembered his victory over the Indians in the wilderness of Carmania and set upon to celebrate it with fabulous mirth and abandon (Arr. *Anab.* 6.28.1-4). Surprisingly it did not jar with the common sense of anyone why this was not celebrated in India. The victory over the Indians in southeast Iran can lead to only one judicious conclusion—this was India in the fourth century BC. Moreover, if Alexander had indeed defeated the Indians, who could have been their leader but Moeris or Maurya? This clearly indicates that Alexander had indeed conquered the Prasii in Gedrosia.

Bosworth writes that the name of the place where the victory was celebrated was Kahnuj.<sup>28</sup> The name tells all, for Kanauj was the chief city of the Indians, the name of which is echoed in the famous city in eastern India which later became most important. Smith is aware that Kanauj in eastern India was not the city mentioned in the ancient texts;<sup>29</sup> yet he does not suspect that the same could be true of Jones’ Palibothra. Firista identifies Sandrocottos with Sinsarchund, who

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scenario of fourth century Bihar, and reminds one of the powerful Prasiian army. A century later the Jats and other fierce fighters of Seistan under the Surens humbled the Roman army.

<sup>26</sup> R. Lane Fox, *Alexander The Great* (London 1974) 372.

<sup>27</sup> Asoka’s Edicts hint that ritual slaughter of the bird (*Mayura*) was practised by the Mauryas (*RE* 1; *PE* 5): see Sen [8] 64f., 154-57.

<sup>28</sup> A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988) 150, who gives the name Khanu (maps usually give the name Kohnouj or Kahnuj). See Cultural Heritage News Agency: ‘Traces of the 3rd and 4th Millennia BC Found in Pateli’, <http://www.chnpress.com/news/?section=2&id=6623>; nearby Pateli may have been Palibothra.

<sup>29</sup> V. A. Smith, *Early History of India* (Oxford 1961) 181.

ruled from Kanauj.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore clear that Alexander did not run away from the Prasii, as Badian imagines, but had in fact pursued Moeris, their leader, through Gedrosia. The palace at Kahnuj where Alexander rejoiced must have been the fabled one which, according to Aelian, excelled those at Susa and Ekbatana (Ael. *NA* 13.18).

Nearchus certainly had other tasks than scientific fact-finding; the army was ordered to keep close to the shore and the navy moved in tandem (Arr. *Ind.* 20.1-42; Plin. *HN* 6.96-100).<sup>31</sup> This orchestration and the large number of troops and horses on ships (quite unnecessary for a scientific mission) show that the navy was not only carrying provisions for the army which was engaged in a grim and protracted battle with a mighty adversary, but that the troops on the ships were also ready to support the army if needed. This is why the navy waited for twenty-four days near Karachi.<sup>32</sup> The names Pataliputra and Pattala and Moeris and Maurya leave little to imagination.<sup>33</sup> But Badian does not recognise that Moeris was Chandragupta Maurya of Prasii; and his allusions to Alexander’s insanity, Dyonisius and Semiramis, *et cetera* do not follow readily from what can legitimately be inferred from available data.<sup>34</sup> Badian is unaware that the food crisis was due to the collusion of Alexander’s officers with Moeris. As a general, Alexander can hardly be blamed for imposing a levy in order to arrange for the supplies for his army; this is the reason why the people of Pattala had fled. In seeking to cast Alexander in a stereotype, Badian overturns the whole episode and goes on to compare him with Chengiz Khan.<sup>35</sup> Further

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<sup>30</sup> A. Dow (ed. and tr.), *The History of Hindostan. From the Earliest Account of Time, to the Death of Akbar: Translated from the Persian of Mahummud Casim Ferishta of Delhi* 1 (Dublin 1792) 5, 9f. The geographer J. Rennel, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* (London 1778) 49 was the first to identify Patna as Palibothra but later opted for Kanauj. W. Francklin, *Inquiry Concerning the Site of Ancient Palibothra* (London 1815) 47 disagreed with Jones and placed Palibothra at Bhagalpur. See also S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India*<sup>2</sup> (London 1987) 97.

<sup>31</sup> W. Heckel, *The Marshals of Alexander’s Empire* (London 1992) 248 notes that thorough descriptions of the voyage by the two key participants, Nearchus and Onesicritus, are preserved in these primary source-references.

<sup>32</sup> J. W. McCrindle (ed. and tr.), *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great as Described by Arrian, Q. Curtius, Diodorus, Plutarch and Justin* (New Delhi 1973) 396f.

<sup>33</sup> Pattala is said to have been a great city and could have been another Mauryan capital.

<sup>34</sup> M. Wood, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great: A Journey from Greece to Asia* (Berkeley 1997) 214 discards the Dionysius-Semiramis stories, and proposes that Alexander may have been exploring whether cities could be founded along the coast for trade with India.

<sup>35</sup> There may have been a smear campaign launched by the generals who took over after Alexander. The very existence of the junta depended on an extensive falsification and defamation campaign. That Ptolemy had to defend Alexander only shows the extent of such a campaign (Diod. Sic. 18.4.1-6). Sasigupta could have justified his role by blackening



clarifications in Alexander's history come from an unexpected quarter—the history of Asoka.

*Who Ruled Arachosia: Asoka the Saviour or Diodotus I Soter?*

A powerful heuristic in artificial intelligence research is 'coalesce', which consists in assigning the same value to two different variables.<sup>36</sup> In ancient history also a similar approach at times leads to great simplification. It is not often that *Soters* rub shoulders with Saviours, but at first sight this is what seems to have happened in Arachosia. Macdonald writes: 'Who was the lord of Arachosia when it was traversed by the Seleucid troops, it is difficult to say. It had once been Asoka.'<sup>37</sup> That Asoka was the ruler of Arachosia is clear from the fact that his bilingual Kandahar Edict was in Aramaic and Greek;<sup>38</sup> but curiously evidence from coins seems to suggest that the Indo-Greek king Diodotus I was the master of this area.<sup>39</sup> To unravel this seemingly unsolvable mystery one has to delve deep into the persona of the two men. The picture of Asoka in the Indian sources is that of a fearsome warrior who later turned into a pious missionary king, a matchless propagator of *Dhamma*.<sup>40</sup> Tradition has it that in his youth he had a very violent disposition and killed his elder brother Susima on his way to the throne.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in the thirteenth Rock Edict the

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Alexander. The expedition probably did not bring economic prosperity immediately to Greece, and some Athenians, perhaps the Peripatetics and Demosthenes, may have spared no effort to belittle Alexander.

<sup>36</sup> D. B. Lenat, 'Computer Software for Intelligent Systems', *Scientific American* 251 (1984) 157.

<sup>37</sup> G. Macdonald, 'The Hellenic Kingdoms of Syria, Bactria and Parthia', in E. J. Rapson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India 1: Ancient India* (New Delhi 1962) 398.

<sup>38</sup> See B. N. Mukherjee, *Studies in the Aramaic Edicts of Asoka* (Calcutta 1984) 52f. for discussion. Many aspects of Asoka's life are obscure. Although some punch-marked coins have been associated with his name, this has been disputed. Apart from the Edicts, archaeology has unearthed few inscriptions. Palaces unearthed near Patna have been said to be his, but in the absence of inscriptions this is uncertain. Even Taxila, so often associated with his name in the texts, has proved disappointing. Recently inscribed relics of Asoka have been found from Kanganhalli in Karnataka which are said to belong to a later period.

<sup>39</sup> While Diodotus I has numerous coins but no inscriptions, Asoka has many inscriptions but no coins. The satisfaction shown by H. P. Ray, *Ancient India* (New Delhi 2001) 55 about Asoka's coins is unusual. Kulke and Rothermund [5] 75, on the other hand, write: 'Whereas the Maurya emperors had only produced simple punch-marked coins, even petty Indo-Greek kings issued splendid coins with their image'.

<sup>40</sup> E. J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought* (London 1933) 154.

<sup>41</sup> Coins of Abd Susim, probably a relative of Asoka, have been found at Persepolis. This again hints that Asoka belongs to the northwest.

emperor himself recalls his enterprises with the sword, and admits that he found pleasure rather in conquests by the *Dhamma* than in conquests by the sword (Asoka *Rock Edict* [RE] 13).<sup>42</sup> In the Edict, he writes that he had sent emissaries to distant kingdoms, including that of Epirus.<sup>43</sup> The circumstance of a king of Patna writing to the King of Epirus, of all persons, is a jarring incongruity which under normal circumstances would have led the investigators to a valuable clue regarding the true identity of Asoka; but no one suspected that Jones’ identification of Palibothra could be wrong. For instance, Rhys Davids chooses to distrust the king’s account instead.<sup>44</sup> The Ceylonese chronicles give the exaggerated story of his killing of ninety-nine brothers in his youth (*Dipavamsa* 6.21f.; *Mahavamsa* 5.20, 40).<sup>45</sup>

It is astonishing that the picture of Diodotus I has exactly the same mien. As already noted, the Mauryas ruled Aria and Seistan. This in a way opens up a Pandora’s box, for if Seistan and Aria were within the Mauryan kingdom it immediately follows that some of the Indo-Greek kings of Bactria and Seistan were Mauryas. Was Diodotus I a Maurya? Diodotus belonged to the same space and time as Asoka and just like the latter he was a fierce warrior in his youth. Macdonald writes: ‘The spectacle of the greatness of the Maurya empire would not be lost upon a satrap of such force of character as the elder Diodotus’.<sup>46</sup> The figure of Zeus wielding the thunderbolt in his coins is perhaps awesome, but there is much more to Diodotus than just brute power. On his gold and silver coins he sometimes calls himself *Soter*, ‘the saviour’. That he was regarded as a saviour long after his death is clear from the coins struck in his memory by the later Graeco-Bactrian kings Agathocles and Antimachus, which mention Diodotus Soter.<sup>47</sup> The title has baffled all scholars. Tarn considers it as mere royal rhodomontade, but this is unwarranted.<sup>48</sup> Narain also grapples with the problem and proposes that Diodotus I took the title *Soter* as he considered himself as the saviour of the Bactrian Greeks.<sup>49</sup> Narain does not consider the real likelihood that Diodotus the warrior may have transcended into a great missionary and holds the view that his name Theodotus (*Theos* = God), quoted

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<sup>42</sup> Sen [8] 98-105.

<sup>43</sup> Sen [8] 24, 102f., cf. 27.

<sup>44</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India* (London 1903) 298.

<sup>45</sup> R. Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford 1963) 25.

<sup>46</sup> Macdonald [37] 393.

<sup>47</sup> P. Gardner, *Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British Museum: Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India* (London 1886); see also A. von Sallet, *Die Nachfolger Alexanders des Grossen in Baktrien und Indien* (Berlin 1879).

<sup>48</sup> W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge 1951) 73.

<sup>49</sup> A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford 1957) 18.

by Justin (Just. *Epit.* 41.4), was just a scribal error.<sup>50</sup> The story of civilisation is replete with instances of fierce men and women who later responded to higher callings but, due to Jonesian misunderstandings, scholars such as Holt have not noted that the image of Diodotus in conjunction with Zeus' thunderbolt is not at all irreconcilable with that of a Bodhisatva-like *Soter* spreading the message of homonoia.<sup>51</sup> That the history of Asoka matches that of Diodotus I line by line can only imply that they were one and the same person.

### *Devanampiya Was the Same as Devadatta*

As Seleucus' daughter had come to the Mauryan household, Asoka could have been an Indo-Greek; yet his true face remains veiled because he has been placed at Patna. Wheeler writes:

It is just possible that Ashoka had Seleukid blood in his veins; at least his reputed vice-royalty of Taxila in the Punjab during the reign of his father could have introduced him to the living memory of Alexander the Great, and, as king, he himself tells us of proselytizing relations with the Western powers.<sup>52</sup>

Wheeler does not mention that there is no archaeological relic that links Asoka with Patna, but notes the strong Achaemenian influence on him.<sup>53</sup> Tarn is impressed by the very wide scatter of Diodotus' coins, but does not note the true bearings of Diodotus: ' . . . coins of Diodotus, for example, have been found in Seistan and in Taxila, places where he never ruled and never even was'.<sup>54</sup> Narain remarks with acuity:

It may be more than coincidence that almost at the same time as Euthydemus established his authority in Bactria Asoka died in India. It is not impossible that he was among those who tried to feed on the carcass of the dead Mauryan empire.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Narain [49] 12.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, F. L. Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria* (Berkeley 1999) 19, 68, 74-78, 98, 115, 122, 140-46, 151-53; he writes much on the Bactrian Greeks but (like Tarn) does not recognise the true Diodotus.

<sup>52</sup> R. E. M. Wheeler, *Early India and Pakistan to Ashoka* (London 1959) 170; see also Thapar [45] 20.

<sup>53</sup> Wheeler [52] 174.

<sup>54</sup> Tarn [48] 216.

<sup>55</sup> Narain [49] 20.

But, due to Jonesian misunderstandings, Narain does not contemplate that if Euthydemus had not tried to feed on a carcass, he had in fact killed a Maurya, namely Diodotus II, son of Asoka.<sup>56</sup>

By which name was Asoka known in the West? From the fact that the Graeco-Roman writers do not refer to Asoka or his other name *Piyadassi*, Thapar concludes that he was unknown in the West.<sup>57</sup> This is implausible: Asoka was one of the greatest emperors of history, and had sent religious emissaries to the farthest corners of the civilised world. The classical writers must have used a different name—the name Asoka is rare even in his Edicts. Only Jones’ error obscured that, apart from *Piyadassi* and *Devanampiya*, *Devadatta* was also a name of Asoka. The name *dmydty* in Asoka's Taxila pillar Aramaic inscription refers to *Devadatta*; the line *ldmy dty 'l*, which Marshall and Andreas translated as ‘for Romedatta’, in fact refers to *Damadatta* or *Devadatta* (‘M’ and ‘B’ were often interchanged).<sup>58</sup> Tarn notes that *Diodorus* of the Greeks can be the same as *Devadatta* of the Indians.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, *Devanampiya*, his most common name in the Edicts, has the same meaning as *Devadatta*. Its literal Sanskrit rendering, ‘Beloved of the Gods’, is only a secondary sense aimed at his subjects in the sub-continent. Like the Greek word νόμος (*nomos*), the word *Nam* in Persian means ‘law’, another Persian word for which is *Dat*. Thus *Devanam* has the same meaning as *Devadat*; *Piya* stands for a redeemer (like Priam of Troy). This clearly shows that Asoka was the same as Diodotus I. After embracing Buddhism, Asoka had to change his name from *Devadatta* since it was the name of Gotama’s hated adversary. In the eighth Rock Edict he states that his ancestors were also *Devanampiyas* (Asoka *RE* 8),<sup>60</sup> which shows that it is a cognomen, not a title—thus even Chandragupta could have been a *Devadat* or *Diodotus* (of Erythrae).<sup>61</sup> The term *Deva*, as known from the *Shahnama*, the *Avesta* and Xerxes’ daiva inscription, initially meant a clan, not god. But without these considerations, references in Asoka's Edicts have been translated incorrectly as ‘Gods mingled with men’.

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<sup>56</sup> That cats fed on the carcass of Artaxerxes III was reported by the Greek sources (Ael. *VH* 6.8); it is uncanny that this is also confirmed by the *Mudrarakshasa*.

<sup>57</sup> The remark by Thapar [45] 20 that ‘Greek sources speak of Sandrocottus and Amitrochates but do not mention Aśoka’ presupposes that the Greeks would also use the name ‘Asoka’ current among the Indians.

<sup>58</sup> Mukherjee [38] 24, 26; J. H. Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila* (Delhi 1936) 90.

<sup>59</sup> Tarn [48] 392.

<sup>60</sup> Sen [8] 84f. and n. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Sen [8] 10f.

*Asoka Ruled Parthia*

That Diodotus could have ruled Parthia is natural, but it is difficult to place Asoka so far west. *Mahālake hi vijitam* ('large indeed is [my] dominion'), he proclaims majestically in an Edict (*RE* 14):<sup>62</sup> but how vast really was his kingdom? Asoka's voice reverberates throughout the length and breadth of India, and his Edicts usher in a new era in Indian history; but a careful study reveals that his dominion in the West was far more extensive than anyone could imagine. Macdonald writes that the first Arsaces 'is sometimes a Parthian, sometimes a Bactrian, sometimes even a descendant of the Achaemenids'.<sup>63</sup> Significantly, Asoka is also sometimes a Parthian, sometimes a Bactrian, and sometimes even a descendant of the Achaemenids. Many Parthian Kings assumed the title *Arsaces*, which was also written as *Assak*. The similarity of *Assak* with Asoka may appear fortuitous, but it is not so. Another Parthian royal title, *Priapati(us)* also resembles *Piadassi*, Asoka's title. Asoka's hold on Bactria is beyond dispute, and scholars such as Wheeler note the strong Achaemenian imprint on his architecture.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the Mauryas are said to be descendants of the Nandas in some Indian texts (*Dhundiraja*).<sup>65</sup> Due to Jones' error, no one realised that the Nandas were great Indo-Iranian kings. Darius II, whose title was Nonthos, and Artaxerxes III, who is cited in the Babylonian records as Nindin, were Nanda kings.<sup>66</sup> Although the archaeological scenario for this view is bleak, Thapar places Asoka at faraway Patna; yet she wonders why there are no Edicts at his so-called capital.<sup>67</sup> She also asserts that the king of Patna could have been a second cousin of the Syrian king Antiochus II. Was Diodotus a descendant of the great Vedic hero Divodasa the *Parthava*? Indeed, Hillebrandt asserts that Parthia was once within the sphere of greater India.<sup>68</sup> Rostovtzeff's suggestion of Parthian influence on Buddhist art has been

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<sup>62</sup> Sen [8] 106f.

<sup>63</sup> Macdonald [37] 394. Although nearly all scholars reject the Achaemenian link as a fabrication, this is unwarranted. The name Arsaces or Assak could also have been used by Chandragupta who may be Ashkh of the Shahnama; the eldest son of Darius II was Arsaces.

<sup>64</sup> Wheeler [52] 174-76, 178f.

<sup>65</sup> Smith [16] 13; Thapar [45] 12.

<sup>66</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, 'The Babylonian Evidence for Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia', in Gershevitch [12] 533.

<sup>67</sup> Thapar [45] 233f. writes that 'the identification of Pataliputra is certain . . . extensive excavations have shown that the city existed in certain sites in and around modern Patna'. But she does not mention that no relic of the Mauryas or the Nandas has been found at Patna; nor that the wooden palace unearthed at Patna cannot have belonged to Asoka, whose architecture lays such stress on stone.

<sup>68</sup> A. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* 1 (Breslau 1929) 96.

greeted with quiet disbelief in academic circles, but this scepticism is groundless.<sup>69</sup> Another art critic, Yazdani, also identifies the characteristic Parthian dress of some women in Ajanta paintings.<sup>70</sup> Bussagli writes:

It should be borne in mind that at the time of its maximum expansion the Parthian kingdom covered an area far greater than that of Iran proper and included the Indian subcontinent, Mesopotamia, Armenia and some of the regions where Indian and Iranian influences overlap.<sup>71</sup>

Armed with this definition of Parthia, one can turn to an invaluable clue in Asoka’s Edicts on the Mauryas and the Bactrian Greeks. In the Minor Rock Edict 1, Asoka explicitly calls himself the ‘king’ of ‘Pathavi’ (Asoka *MRE* 1), an unmistakable allusion to Parthia (Parthava of the Achaemenian records).<sup>72</sup> Association of the word *Pathavi* with *Prithvi*, the Sanskrit word for the Earth, and interpretation of the statement as just another instance of royal vainglory, is negated by the fact that his name, Asoka *Vardhana*, links him with Parthian Kings like Vardanes. Rostovtzeff’s suggestion of Parthian influence becomes only natural if one notes that the king of Pathavi was Asoka. Smith is certain that Seleucus surrendered to Chandragupta the districts of Aria (Heart area), Gedrosia (Baluchistan area), Arachosia (Kandahar region) and Paropamisadae (Kabul region).<sup>73</sup> But Tarn maintained that Asoka received no part even of the Paropamisadae. Tarn’s view became untenable in the light of the discovery of Asoka’s Kandahar Edict, and he conceded that Asoka ‘established some sort of suzerainty over Paropamisadae’.<sup>74</sup> Asoka’s own claim of being the king of Pathavi in a way lays the controversy to rest. The Parthian Prince An-shih-kaio, who dedicated his life to the spread of Buddhism, is clearly Diodotus.<sup>75</sup> Tsung

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<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford 1938) 89-92; cf. M. Bussagli, ‘Parthian Art’, in *Encyclopedia of World Art* 11 (New York 1966) 114.

<sup>70</sup> M. K. Dhavalikar, ‘Foreigners in the Ajanta Paintings’, in D. C. Sircar (ed.), *Foreigners in Ancient India and Lakshmi and Sarasvati in Art and Literature* (Calcutta 1970) 11-24.

<sup>71</sup> Bussagli [69] 106.

<sup>72</sup> Sen [8] 51-57; cf. Mukherjee [38] 60, 62. In this Edict, Asoka describes his dominion as *Jambudvīpa*, which is usually assumed to be the same as modern India. In the version of the Edict found at Nittur in Tumkur district of Karnataka, the emperor calls it *Pathavi*. It is possible that *Jambudvīpa* was a much wider territory covering nearly the whole of civilised Asia.

<sup>73</sup> Smith [16] 75.

<sup>74</sup> Tarn [48] 101.

<sup>75</sup> Frye [17] 172 writes that An-hsi is the same as Arshak. R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Harmondsworth 1954) 243 notes that the name is also given as Assak.

Ping (AD 375-443) writes in his *Ming-fo-lun* that Buddhism was first brought to China by Asoka.<sup>76</sup> Thomas notes that in his Edicts Asoka does not mention his neighbour Diodotus *Theos*.<sup>77</sup> He tries to explain this within the Jonesian framework; but it is strange that the man whose religious overtures won the heart of the entire civilised world failed to impress upon his god-like neighbour. Asoka also does not mention Iran in his Edicts; the nearest foreign king that he mentions is Antiochus II *Theos* of Syria (Asoka *RE* 2, 13).<sup>78</sup> This shows that the Syrian King stationed at Selucia near Babylon was indeed his neighbour. Asoka does not refer to *Diodotus* because he was *Diodotus* himself. According to Wheeler, the first Edicts were inscribed 'in and after 257 BC'.<sup>79</sup> Narain holds that Diodotus proclaimed himself as king by about 256 BC.<sup>80</sup> Macdonald points out that Chaldaean records indicate that by about 273 BC, Diodotus sent twenty elephants to assist Antiochus I in his war against Ptolemy Philadelphus.<sup>81</sup> The elephants remind one of the gift of five hundred elephants by Chandragupta to Seleucus in return for suzerainty over Aria, Arachosia, Paropamisadae and Gedrosia (Str. 15.2.1; cf. App. Syr. 55; Plut. *Dem.* 28f.). It is judicious to assume that Diodotus also extracted some favours from Antiochus I in return, and this may correspond to Smith's view that Asoka became king in 273 BC.<sup>82</sup>

Asoka seems to have died when Diodotus died. His Edicts stopped appearing by about 245 BC. Thapar writes:

The issuing of pillar edicts was the next known event of Aśoka's reign, and these are dated to the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth year . . . It is indeed strange that for the next years until his death in 232 BC there were no further major edicts. For a man so prolific in issuing edicts this silence of ten years is difficult to explain.<sup>83</sup>

Significantly, according to most scholars, Diodotus died in 245 BC, and this may be the reason why the Edicts stopped appearing. The year of Asoka's death

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<sup>76</sup> W. Lai, 'The Three Jewels in China', in T. Yoshinori (ed.), *Buddhist Spirituality* (Delhi 1995) 275.

<sup>77</sup> F. W. Thomas, 'Ashoka', in Rapson [37] 453.

<sup>78</sup> Sen [8] 24, 66f., 102f. From Asoka's references to Antiochus, the relation between the two appears to be cordial. It is not impossible that he also took a favourable view of Asoka's *Dharmavijaya*.

<sup>79</sup> Wheeler [52] 176.

<sup>80</sup> Narain [49] 16.

<sup>81</sup> Macdonald [37] 393.

<sup>82</sup> Smith [16] 19.

<sup>83</sup> Thapar [45] 51.

given by Thapar and others is 232 BC, but this may be incorrect.<sup>84</sup> Diodotus’ son, who was also a Diodotus, died in 232 BC. However, an alternative scenario is also possible: some writers give 232 BC as Diodotus’ death, which agrees with the Indian texts, but the Indian accounts of Asoka after the death of his wife Asandhimitta (*ca.* 245 BC) are so fanciful that it is more sensible to infer that he had died by *ca.* 245 BC. Asoka’s Queen Tissarakshita is blamed for ordering the death of his son Kunala by the Indian sources (*Asoksavadana*),<sup>85</sup> which may be an echo of the alleged marriage of Diodotus with a Seleucid princess.

### *Lion of Chaeronea and Lions on Asokan Pillars*

The vanishing of the altars and the true bearings of Sasigupta and Diodotus cast a flood of light on a vexing problem of art history. When the Sarnath pillar with a lion-capital was discovered, it created a flutter all over the world.<sup>86</sup> Marshall writes that ‘the Sarnath capital, on the other hand, though by no means a masterpiece, is the product of the most developed art of which the world was cognisant in the third century BC’.<sup>87</sup> However, despite its Indian symbolism, it bespeaks a strange fusion of Hellenic as well as Achaemenian traditions which has baffled all. At first sight there seems to be nothing unnatural for Asoka, considered by Thapar to be a native of Bihar, to appoint Greek or Persian artisans.<sup>88</sup> But apart from Jones’ assertion nothing links Asoka to Patna.<sup>89</sup> Wheeler notes the strong Achaemenian influence on Asoka, and recognises the double-lion capitals at Persepolis as the precursors of Asoka’s lions, but does

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<sup>84</sup> Thapar [45] 51.

<sup>85</sup> Thapar [45] 52f.

<sup>86</sup> It can be argued that Asoka’s lions were borrowed from Nebuchadrezzar’s Babylon—lions guarded the famous E-Sagila—or from the Sumerians who also preferred the lion symbol. As F. Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago 1911) 163 n. 75 notes, the lion was a symbol of ancient Lydia; see also A. H. Krappe, ‘The Anatolian Lion God’, *JAOS* 65 (1945) 144-54. Four lions also guarded the Meghazil tomb near Amrit; but Gudea’s double lion mace-head is also relevant. See Pal [14] 185-268; R. Pal and T. Sato, *Gotama Buddha in West Asia* (Osaka 1995) 69.

<sup>87</sup> J. H. Marshall, ‘The Monuments of Ancient India’, in Rapson [37] 562.

<sup>88</sup> Thapar [45] 9, 20f.

<sup>89</sup> In an article by B. M. Barua, *Indian Culture* 10 (1944) 34, the author sees no link between Chandragupta, Asoka’s grandfather, and Bihar. He writes that the language of Asoka’s stone masons was the West Asian Kharosthi. Only two names of Asoka’s governors are known, and by no stretch of imagination can they be linked to Patna: Tushaspa was surely from the northwest. Smith [29] 103 writes that the elaborate hair-washing ceremony of the Mauryas is a Persian custom.



not address the crux of the problem.<sup>90</sup> Ray writes that the Mauryan artists owed much to the Achaemenians, but attributes the stylistic impetus to Hellenistic art.<sup>91</sup> Marshall points out that Asoka's lion capitals represent a totally new era in Indian art: their fixed expression, authentic spirit, canon-based form and stylisation all betray a strong Hellenistic influence.<sup>92</sup> Foucher does not explain how the lion symbol sprang up in Sarnath.<sup>93</sup> Both Marshall and Smith hold that the finest of the Asokan pillars were the work of foreign artists.<sup>94</sup> In retrospect, one must pay tribute to scholars like Marshall, Foucher and Ray who were not aware of the true identity of Diodotus I, yet recognised the Hellenistic content of Mauryan art.

Surprisingly, no one mentions that Alexander had come to Punjab. After the middle ages the first Westerner to notice the Asokan pillars was the Englishman Thomas Coryat, who in 1616 was greatly impressed by the superbly polished forty-foot-high monolithic column and presumed that it must have been erected by Alexander the Great 'in token of his victorie' over Porus.<sup>95</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>90</sup> Wheeler [52] 174: 'It has long been recognised that these columns, without precedent in Indian architectural forms, represent *in partibus* the craftsmanship of Persia. Actually, the name 'Persepolitan' which is commonly given to them by writers on Indian architecture is not altogether happy, since the innumerable columns of Persepolis are invariably fluted, whereas those of Ashoka are unfluted, as indeed was the normal Persian custom. But if for 'Persepolitan' we substitute 'Persian' or, better still 'Achaemenid', there can be no dispute'.

<sup>91</sup> N. Ray, 'Mauryan Art', in N. Sastri (ed.), *Age of the Nandas and Mauryas* (Delhi 1967) 346 indirectly hints at Jones' error: 'The fact remains therefore that we have no examples extant of either sculpture or architecture that can definitely be labelled chronologically as pre-Mauryan or perhaps even as pre-Asokan'. He adds later (376) that: 'Compared with later figural sculptures in the round of Yakshas and their female counterparts or the reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya, the art represented by these crowning lions belongs to an altogether different world of conception and execution, of style and technique, altogether much more complex, urban and civilised. They have nothing archaic or primitive about them, and the presumption is irresistible that the impetus and inspiration of this art must have come from outside'.

<sup>92</sup> Marshall [87] 562-64.

<sup>93</sup> A. Foucher (trr. L. A. Thomas and F. W. Thomas), *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art: and Other Essays in Indian and Central Asian Archaeology* (New Delhi 1994).

<sup>94</sup> Marshall [87] 564; V. A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon* (Oxford 1930) 16; cf. Thapar [45] 269.

<sup>95</sup> T. Coryat, *Thomas Coriate Traveller for the English Wits. Greeting: From the Court of the Great Mogul, Resident at the Towne of Asmere, in Easterne India* (London 1616) 29. Philostratos' statement that Apollonius of Tyana, on his journey into India in the second century AD, found the altars still intact and their inscriptions still legible probably indicates that they were in places where Alexander had erected them (Philostr. *VA* 2.43; McCrindle [32] 215 n. 1, 349): see E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography Among the Greeks and Romans from the Earliest Ages till the Fall of the Roman Empire* (London 1883) 503.

although the lion is an intrusive symbol in India, it was common in Macedonia. Not many years before Alexander’s arrival in India, his father Philip had erected a famous lion statue after the historic victory at Chaeronea. Even though we know nothing about the artistic pedigree of the altars, it is sensible to assume that the son had also erected lion capitals in India. Were the inscriptions in Greek? This may explain why all of them were summarily re-inscribed. The history of the altars throws a flood of light on not only Mauryan and Gandhara art but also the nature of the Hellenistic phenomenon spearheaded by Alexander—a world-citizen. As Herzfeld writes:

There is no deeper Caesura in the 5000 years of history of the Ancient East than the conquest of Alexander the Great, and there is no archaeological object produced after that period that does not bear its stamp.<sup>96</sup>

#### *An Altar of Alexander from the Beas Area*

It turns out that Coryat was right—truth may be indestructible but at times it is stranger than fiction—as it was Asoka who re-inscribed the much sought-after pillars of Alexander. In Coryat’s time, the inscriptions on the pillar were unreadable. But today, thanks to Prinsep, we know that it contains an inscription of Asoka.<sup>97</sup> Yet there is more to it than meets the eye—many of Asoka’s pillars were not erected by him. One has to recall that after the Hyphasis mutiny, Alexander gave up his plans to march further east, and to commemorate his Indian expedition he erected twelve massive altars of dressed stone. Arrian writes:

Οἱ δὲ ἐβόων τε οἷα ἂν ὄχλος ξυμμιγῆς χαίρων βοήσειε καὶ ἐδάκρυον οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν. οἱ δὲ καὶ τῇ σκηνῇ τῇ βασιλικῇ πελάζοντες ἠύχοντο Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πολλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ, ὅτι πρὸς σφῶν μόνων νικηθῆναι ἠνέσχετο. ἔνθα δὴ διελὼν κατὰ τάξεις τὴν στρατιάν δώδεκα βωμοὺς κατασκευάζειν προστάττει, ὕψος μὲν κατὰ τοὺς μεγίστους πύργους, εὖρος δὲ μείζονας ἔτι ἢ κατὰ πύργους, χαριστήρια τοῖς θεοῖς τοῖς ἐς τοσόνδε ἀγαγοῦσιν αὐτὸν νικῶντα καὶ μνημεῖα τῶν αὐτοῦ πόνων. ὥς δὲ κατεσκευασμένοι αὐτῷ οἱ βωμοὶ ἦσαν, θύει δὴ ἐπ’ αὐτῶν ὡς νόμος καὶ ἀγῶνα ποιεῖ γυμνικόν τε καὶ ἵππικόν.

(Arr. *Anab.* 5.29.1.1-2.3)

He then divided the army into brigades, which he ordered to prepare twelve altars to equal in height the highest military towers, and to exceed them in point of breadth, to serve as thank offerings to the gods who had led him so far as a conqueror, and also as a memorial of his own labours. After erecting the

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<sup>96</sup> E. Herzfeld, *Iran in The Ancient East* (New York 1941) 303.

<sup>97</sup> J. Prinsep [4].

altars he offered sacrifice upon them with the customary rites, and celebrated a gymnastic and equestrian contest.

Curiously, unlike most writers who place the altars on the right bank of the river, Pliny places them on the left or the eastern bank:

. . . ad Hyphasim non ignobiliorem, qui fuit Alexandri itinerum terminus, exuperato tamen amne arisque in adversa ripa dicatis.

(Plin. *HN* 6.62.6-8)

The Hyphasis was the limit of the marches of Alexander, who, however, crossed it, and dedicated altars on the further bank.

Pliny's crucial hint suggests a reappraisal of the riddle of the altars. Precisely how far east had Alexander and his men come? Although Bunbury holds that the location of the altars cannot be regarded as known even approximately, the Indian evidence sheds new light.<sup>98</sup> Masson places the altars at the united stream of the Hyphasis and Sutlez.<sup>99</sup> McCrindle also writes that the Sutlez marked the limit of Alexander's march eastward,<sup>100</sup> and this is precisely the locality from where Feroze Shah brought the pillar to Delhi.

Thapar does not discuss Alexander's voyage in this context, and writes that, although at present there is no archaeological evidence, Topra must have been an important stopping place on the road from Pataliputra to the northwest.<sup>101</sup> But, contrary to Jonesian Indology, there can be little doubt that the Delhi-Topra pillar at Firozabad near Delhi, which bears Asoka's seventh Edict, is a missing altar of Alexander the Great.<sup>102</sup> The very name Chandigarh (Chandragarh) may be an echo of Alakh Chandra, Alexander's Indian name. In the thirteenth Rock Edict of Asoka, the name Alexander is given as Alikasudara or Alika Su(n)dalo (Asoka *RE* 13).<sup>103</sup>

### *Alexander and Asoka*

Historians have denied Diodotus his true place in world history. If almost no words seem to be sufficient for the description of Alexander, the same is true of

<sup>98</sup> Bunbury [95] 444.

<sup>99</sup> C. Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, and the Panjab* 1 (Karachi 1974) 454; McCrindle [32] 128f., 215 n. 1, 230, 234, 283f., 311, 348f.

<sup>100</sup> McCrindle [32] 120f. n. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Thapar [45] 230. Authors like Raychaudhuri and Thapar do not treat Alexander's voyage in detail, and hold that Alexander does not belong to Indian history proper.

<sup>102</sup> Sen [8] 160-69.

<sup>103</sup> Sen [8] 24, 102f.

Asoka who swept away all, as it were. His impact on the civilisations of both the East and the West is immense. As Droysen holds, Christianity grew out of an intercourse between Hellenism and the Eastern cultures.<sup>104</sup> There can be no doubt that the chief architect of the great expansion of Hellenism and Buddhism, which ultimately paved the way to the rise of Christianity and Islam, was Diodotus. Toynbee writes: ‘At its maximum extent, Hellenism had expanded in Latin dress as far westward as Britain and Morocco, and in Buddhist dress, as far eastwards as Japan’.<sup>105</sup> Smith is more specific:

Finally, the central religious literature of both traditions—the Jewish Talmud (an authoritative compendium of law, lore, and interpretation), the New Testament, and the later patristic literature of the Early Church Fathers—are characteristic Hellenistic documents both in form and content.<sup>106</sup>

If Alexander was the harbinger of this Hellenistic revolution, Diodotus was its greatest champion.<sup>107</sup> In the thirteenth Rock Edict, after declaring that he had himself found pleasure rather in conquests by the Dhamma than in conquests by the sword, he says that he had already made such conquests in the realms of the kings of Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Epirus, and Kyrene, among the Cholas and Pandyas in South India, in Ceylon and among a number of peoples dwelling in the borders of his empire. This was, as Asoka saw it, the Kingdom of God:

. . . şavatā devānaṃpiyaşā dhammānuşathi anuvatamti. Yata pi dutā devānaṃpiyaşā no yamti—te pi sutu devānaṃpiyaşā dhamma-vutaṃ vidhanaṃ dhammānuşathi, dhammam anuvidhiyamti, anuvidhiyisaṃti cā. Ye se ladhe etakenā hoti savatā vijaye, piti-lase se.

(Asoka RE 13)

Everywhere are followed the Dharma instructions of the Beloved of the gods [Devānaṃpiya]. Even where the envoys of the Beloved of the gods [Devānaṃpiya] do not go—they (the people of those countries) too, having heard of the Dharma practices, the (Dharma) prescriptions and the Dharma instructions of the Beloved of the gods [Devānaṃpiya], follow the Dharma and

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<sup>104</sup> R. Southard, *Droysen and the Prussian School of History* (Kentucky 1995) 24.

<sup>105</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *The Greeks and Their Heritage* (Oxford 1981) 44.

<sup>106</sup> J. Z. Smith, ‘Hellenistic Religions’, in P. W. Goetz *et al.* (edd.), *Encyclopedia Britannica* 8 (Chicago 1979) 751.

<sup>107</sup> Wheeler [52] 170 writes: ‘This book is not a History, but in its last chapter the impersonal disjecta of prehistory may fittingly be assembled in the likeness of a man. Ashoka came to the throne about 268 B.C. and died about 232 B.C. Spiritually and materially his reign marks the first coherent expression of the Indian mind, and, for centuries after the political fabric of his empire had crumbled, his work was implicit in the thought and art of the subcontinent, it is not dead today’.

will (continue to) follow (it). That conquest which has been won everywhere by this, generates the feeling of satisfaction.<sup>108</sup>

Diodotus not only utilised Alexander's monuments, but in many other respects he trod in the latter's footsteps. In the Rummindei Pillar Edict, Asoka reduced taxes for the local people as this was the birthplace of Gotama (Asoka *Rummindei PE*).<sup>109</sup> This has a very distant echo linked with Alexander and Gomata. Impressed by their way of life and civic administration, Alexander extended the boundary of the Ariasprians of Propthasia and conferred nominal freedom (Arr. *Anab.* 3.27.4f.).<sup>110</sup> Waiving part of the taxes may have been a part of his decree. In the prelude to his seventh Pillar Edict, Asoka states:

Devānampīye Piyadasi lājā hevaṃ āhā: ye atikaṃtaṃ aṃtalaṃ lājāne husu, hevaṃ ichisu—kathaṃ jane dhamma-vaḍhiyā vaḍheyā. No cu jane anulupāyā dhamma-vaḍhiyā vaḍhithā.

(Asoka *PE* 7)

The Beloved of the gods, King Priyadarśin, [King Devānampiya Piyadasi] spoke thus: The kings who were in times past, desired thus, (viz.) that the people might progress by the promotion of Dharma. But the people did not progress by the adequate promotion of Dharma.<sup>111</sup>

Who are these kings? Despite Asoka's measured silence on Alexander, it is possible that he is referring to him.<sup>112</sup> Asoka not only used Alexander's pillars,

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<sup>108</sup> Sen [8] 102f.

<sup>109</sup> N. A. Nikam and R. McKeon (edd. and trr.), *The Edicts of Asoka* (Chicago 1959) 69; Thapar [45] 261. This Edict has to be examined in view of the alleged frauds in Nepalese archaeology, as pointed by T. A. Phelps: see online resource above, n. 19. It is more than likely that this pillar was brought from the northwest. A careful study shows that Gomata of the Behistun inscriptions was the true Gotama. See Pal [14].

<sup>110</sup> The Ariasprians are the Hariasvas of the Indian texts, who were a lost tribe. The *Mahabharata* says that King Haryasva never ate flesh in his life (*Anusasana Parva* 11.67). See V. Mani (ed.), *Puranic Encyclopedia* (New Delhi 1975) 57. Alexander noted the similarity of their system of justice with that of the Greeks. It is said that the Ariasprians enjoyed special privileges as they had given succour to the starving army of Cyrus, but this cannot be the full story as the holiness of Seistan is well recorded in the *Shahnama*.

<sup>111</sup> Sen [8] 160f.

<sup>112</sup> The corpus of Asoka's inscriptions is vast, but one is mystified by what he did not say. He never names his father or his illustrious grandfather. Was he a nephew of Bindusara? See Lama Chimpa *et al.* (edd.), *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India* (Delhi 1990) 50. Was Asoka's proscription of *samajas* (revelling parties) (Asoka *RE* 1: see Sen [8] 11, 64f.) due to his horror of Alexander's poisoning in such a party (Arr. *Anab.* 7.28; Curt. 10.10.14-17; Diod. Sic. 17.118; Plut. *Alex.* 77.1-3).

but also undertook to spread the message of homonoia championed by Alexander with a greater resolve.

### *The Mission of Alexander the Great*

In so far as it failed to rout the Prasii, and in view of the great losses in human lives that it caused, Alexander’s Gedrosian operation cannot be called an all-round success. Nevertheless, this unique expedition achieved its goals and marks a high point in world history having no parallel in any other age. That it greatly augmented world trade and ushered in a new era of East-West intercourse cannot be denied. No one could have combined a scientific and a military expedition in the manner Alexander did. It is here that one can recognise the student of Aristotle. His Titanic voyage across so many continents and seas to mingle with the exotic peoples of Africa and Asia appears truly mind-boggling. Nothing could deter him, not the huge Prasiian army or the elephants, not the desert heat, not even the lack of water and food. His emergence from the desert inferno of Gedrosia was a superhuman feat. It is said that he had wept after seeing Nearchus in Carmania (Arr. *Ind.* 35.4-7).

When the Macedonians and Greeks first set out with the mandate of the Corinthian League, they were probably guided by simple nationalist motives. But after Alexander was declared a Son of Amon at Siwa, and also under the affectionate guidance of the great Buddhist philosopher Asvaghosa (Calanus), this changed into something far more pregnant.<sup>113</sup> More than just a lure for Persian gold or a yearning for the unknown (πόθος), Alexander and his followers were driven by a mission to usher in a new world. Russell squarely reproved Aristotle for his outlook in the *Politics*: ‘There is no mention of Alexander, and not even the faintest awareness of the complete transformation that he was effecting in the world.’<sup>114</sup> Like Cambyses, Alexander got a very bad press. Scholars such as Badian and Green stress the need for demythologizing, but this demands a precise knowledge of history and geography.<sup>115</sup> It is necessary to analyse history carefully to perceive Alexander’s greatness, which has been acknowledged through the ages.<sup>116</sup> Like many Eastern gods, he was not

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<sup>113</sup> The name given as Sphines by Plutarch is the same as Aspines or Asvaghosa (Plut. *Alex.* 65.5.2). Asvaghosa may have been an Ariaspian.

<sup>114</sup> B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London 1969) 196.

<sup>115</sup> Badian [12] 420f.; see also P. Green, *Alexander of Macedon 356-323 BC: A Historical Biography* (California 1974) 478-88.

<sup>116</sup> I. Worthington, ‘How “Great” was Alexander the Great?’, *AHB* 13.2 (1999) 39-55 attempts, relying almost exclusively on the Greek and Roman sources, to analyse why Alexander was called ‘Great’ even in ancient sources.

above sin; his role in his father's death is far from clear, and his killing of Cleitus (Arr. *Anab.* 4.8.8f.; Curt. 8.1.49-52; Just. *Epit.* 12.6.3; Plut. *Alex.* 51.9-11) and his treatment of Callisthenes (Arr. *Anab.* 4.10-14; Curt. 8.5-8; Plut. *Alex.* 52-55) were unfortunate yet not inhuman acts. He was certainly less prone to violence than Diodotus in his youth. It is important to consider the possibility that his alienation from his compatriots may have been due to his reinterpretation of Hellenic religion.

For about a century after the voyage, the Orient was witness to momentous events that altered human destiny. It was here that Hellenistic culture and religion were born. No study of the Hellenistic phenomenon can be complete without reference to Diodotus/Asoka. His Edicts indicate that apart from recording his achievements, Alexander's messages in the altars were also meant for the propagation of homonoia. This is the goal that Asoka took up with a greater zeal. As Bevan writes: 'One may notice first that nothing was further from Alexander's own thoughts than that his invasion of India was a mere raid'.<sup>117</sup> Material evidence for Buddhism in India starts appearing from the fourth century BC, and this is the era of Alexander. Alexander's role in this renaissance in Indian culture should not be denied. Tarn links Alexander and Asoka:

For when all is said, we come back at the end to his personality; not the soldier or the statesman, but the man. Whatever Asia did or did not get from him she felt him as she scarcely felt any other; she knew that one of the greatest of the earth had passed. Though his direct influence vanished from India within a generation, and her literature does not know him, he affected Indian history for centuries; for Chandragupta saw him and deduced the possibility of realising in actual fact the conception, handed down from Vedic times, of a comprehensive monarchy in India; hence Alexander indirectly created Asoka's empire and enabled the spread of Buddhism.<sup>118</sup>

The influence of Alexander's pillars, which were later modified by Asoka, on world history is inestimable. Although it cannot be proven conclusively from considerations of art history, it is not impossible that the Sarnath pillar is also a timeless relic of Alexander the Great modified by Asoka.<sup>119</sup> Due to Jones' error, scholars such as Tarn and Rostovtzeff underrate Alexander's role. Yet the staggering possibility that the four-lion emblem of India may in fact be a work

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<sup>117</sup> E. R. Bevan, 'Alexander The Great', in Rapson [37] 343.

<sup>118</sup> Tarn [11] 1.142.

<sup>119</sup> Wheeler [52] 174 writes: 'Equally Persian are the famous lions which crowned the Ashokan column at Sarnath, near Benaras, and have been assumed as the republican badge of India'.

of Alexander calls for a drastic reassessment of his true legacy. Alexander’s direct influence did not vanish from India. It was due to his vision that East and West first met, and the myriad effects of this fraternisation are beyond any estimate. If homonoia is still a living creed, the credit for part of it must be ascribed to Alexander’s wisdom and tireless energy. His dream of a Brotherhood of Man may forever remain unfulfilled, yet he remains the finest symbol of our vision of a United Nations.