

# PREFACE

This book has been written for a non-specialised audience. It aims to provide general information about the main historical developments in politics, society and religion in the areas in which Greeks lived after the Classical period. The book covers two historical periods which are commonly treated separately: the Hellenistic period, which conventionally starts with the campaigns or the death of Alexander the Great (334 or 323 BC) and ends with the death of Cleopatra (30 BC), and the early Imperial period, from the establishment of Augustan monarchy (27 BC) to the death of Hadrian (AD 138). In the Introduction, I explain how the joint treatment of these two periods contributes to a better understanding of social and cultural developments. The title *Age of Conquests* does not only refer to the fact that the main turning points of these two periods are military conquests (of Philip and Alexander, the Hellenistic kings, Roman generals and emperors, the Parthians and other eastern states); it also metaphorically refers to an unprecedented expansion of knowledge, technical skills and intellectual horizons.

The narrative part presents, with inevitable brevity, the main political developments from the foundation of a Greek alliance by Philip II of Macedonia and the campaigns of Alexander the Great to the death of Hadrian. Because of the complexity of the relevant military and political events, the narrative must move back and forth to different theatres of events; the Chronology (pp. 427–35) will help the reader establish the synchronicity of the various episodes. It has been impossible to narrate in detail the history of individual kingdoms or cities, to describe battles or to present biographies of the protagonists. The narrative is selective, and the main criteria for the selection were the historical significance and the exemplary character of a given event. I interrupt the account of events at

the end of the fourth chapter, when Rome enters the scene, in order to provide overviews of kingship, the administration of kingdoms, the institutions and political life of city-states, and the rise of federal states, an important innovation of the third century BC, in Chapters 5 and 6. The subsequent four chapters examine the Roman expansion into the East, from the first wars against the Illyrian pirates to the death of Cleopatra and the end of the Roman civil wars. Chapter 11 is a short overview of the major developments in the world of the Greeks under the first Roman emperors. Chapter 12 deals with the main institutions of the Imperial period from the perspective of the Greek and Hellenised provinces: the position of the emperor, provincial administration and the changed political systems of the cities and the Roman colonies. The next three chapters are dedicated to important changes in society, culture and religion. An adequate and differentiated discussion of philosophy, literature, science and technology, the visual arts and architecture would have required space that was not available in this book. Finally, in the last chapter, I briefly summarise how the 'long Hellenistic Age' changed the position of the Greeks in the *oecumene* (the inhabited earth), making their history an integral part of ancient 'global' history. Unavoidably, sometimes the depth of the analysis had to be sacrificed for the sake of the geographical breadth, exactly as the presentation of general features and trends left little space for an adequate discussion of local differences.

Until the late nineteenth century, Hellenistic history was primarily written on the basis of the surviving narratives of historians – especially Polybius, Diodorus and Appian – the information provided by the geographer Strabo, the *Lives of Plutarch* and a few other literary sources. The study of the Greek world under Roman rule was underdeveloped, with the exception of literature and art. Things changed in the course of the twentieth century, with the progress of archaeological research, especially in Macedonia, Asia Minor and central Asia (e.g. at Ai-Khanoum), the publication of inscriptions and the study of papyri and coins. New textual sources – inscriptions and papyri – are continually added to the known source material, answering some questions, confronting us with new ones and adding nuances to established knowledge. Today, the Hellenistic and the Imperial periods are extremely dynamic areas of research. New discoveries continually enhance scholarship, calling for revisions, usually small but sometimes dramatic.

If I were to list all the books, articles and corpora of inscriptions on

which the content of this book is based, the bibliography would probably be much longer than the narrative part. In the notes, I have limited myself to references to sources that are quoted or mentioned in the text and to a small selection of articles and books which are recommended for further reading and which contain references to sources and further bibliography. The general bibliography is also very selective.

Neither the bibliography nor the notes do justice to the contribution of editors and interpreters of inscriptions to the study of the Hellenistic world and the Roman East. Among them I mention with great respect only those who are no longer alive, and on whose work our understanding of the post-Classical Greek world is based: Wilhelm Dittenberger, Philippe Gauthier, Peter Herrmann, Maurice Holleaux, Louis Robert, Frank Walbank and Adolph Wilhelm.

A note on the transcription of Greek names is required. Generally, I do not use the Latinised forms of Greek personal and geographical names – I use Miletos and not Miletus, Pyrrhos and not Pyrrhus – except for the cases in which the Latinised form is very common (e.g. Polybios and not Polybios) or the modern English form is familiar (Ptolemy and not Ptol-*emaios*, Corinth and not *Korinthos*).

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# AGE OF CONQUESTS

