ANCIENT GREECE AND INDIA*

A. Treloar

In the winter of 366/7 A.D. Themistius speaking in the senate at Constantinople in the presence of the Emperor Valens congratulated him on the mercy he showed after the suppression of the revolt of Procopius in the previous May. Among other exempla he mentioned the famous confrontation of Alexander and Porus, when the latter had been taken prisoner after fighting bravely until overcome by the number of his wounds. The story is well known, as is the demand by Porus for treatment appropriate to a king, βασίλικως in Themistius’ version. There is perhaps some ambiguity here: most accounts make it appear that Porus demanded the privileges of his rank, but for Themistius it is Alexander who is to act like a king, and he goes on to argue that kingly behaviour includes all the virtues — which of course are all apparent in Valens.1

We need not follow him in this, but he had obviously been impressed by this brilliant confrontation of East and West nearly seven hundred years before his time and returns to it on two other occasions in his political speeches.2 Yet we are told that East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet — perhaps one of the silliest statements ever made, for East and West have been meeting since the dawn of history and in the Middle East have been inextricably entangled for as far back as we can trace the evidence. But however widely we use the term Middle East, India is clearly to the East of it and Greece without severe shock to tradition can hardly be denied a place in the West, although the Adriatic is perhaps a more significant boundary than the Aegean in this matter. My concern then is not to examine the tangled situation of Eastern and Western influences in the Middle East but to investigate the extent to which Ancient Greece and Ancient India on either side of this wide area gained some knowledge of each other and influenced each other.

A treaty between the Hittite king Šuppiluliumaš and Kurtiwaza of Mitanni made in the mid 14th century contains the names of several gods recognisably identical with typical Vedic gods,3 but this is rather evidence for an Aryan aristocracy ruling the non-Indo-European speaking people of Mitanni than for any direct Indian influence on the Ancient Middle East. In the same way there are resemblances between aspects of Homeric warfare and those described in the

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1. vii. 134.9 - 135.10 Downey.
2. xv. 275.30D; xix. 334.3-5 D.
3. Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra and the Nasatyās, cf. CAH3 II.i. 419.
Mahābhārata, but here again both peoples inherit common Indo-European institutions.4

It is only many centuries later that we can look for anything like direct contact or knowledge of Greeks and Indians of each other.

How far the Persian Empire helped in such contact cannot be precisely assessed, but this great Empire did stretch as far East as India and included the Greeks of Ionia on its Western borders. And it is significant that the Sanskrit word for Greek is yavana-, which is clearly * 'ίά Φων (a reconstruction with F supported by the Egyptian jwn(n) and Hebrew לונ, but not occurring in extant Greek), for the only time when the Ionians were likely to have given their name to Greece and Greeks generally was when they were the Greek people closely in contact with the Persians from whom the Indians are likely to have heard of them. It is inconceivable that Alexander’s conquests would have spread the name of the Ionians; this name for the Greeks was established in Sanskrit before his time, and we may note in passing that in later times it became the term for any Moslem, European or other barbarian.5 This name is found in the Mahābhārata,6 but that does not give a firm date in view of the interpolated character of that monumental poem. Nor does the occurrence of the word in Pāṇini7 help, in view of the uncertainty of his date. It is historical, rather than linguistic evidence, that makes it probable that yavana- was a word acquired long before Alexander’s time.8

The curiosity of the Greeks is well known and those living under Persian rule had ample opportunity to indulge it in travelling throughout the Empire. We know that Herodotus did this. In his case we also believe that he did not get East of Susa,9 but we need not share the naïve belief of the Cambridge Ancient History that his ‘record of private travel is surely unique, at least before the days of the Caesars and the Roman pacification of the civilized world.’10 For this shows the quaint Western prejudice that the only real and effective government is Western democracy, whatever that vague phrase means for those who use it. Actually, Greek traditions assert that their wise men travelled extensively, especially in Egypt, which over-awed the Greeks with its ancient civilisation, and which was in any case part of the Persian Empire made accessible by firm Persian rule. Nor is it simply a case of men travelling: ideas also travel, and it would be surprising if some knowledge of India did not cross the borders into the Persian

5. Mn. x. 44, and cf. Böhtlingk/Roth, Sanskrit Wörterbuch s.v. yavana-
6. MBh i. 80.26, 165.35, Appx. I. 80.42; ii. 13.13; vi. 10.64; vii. 10.18; viii. 30.80; xii. 65.13; xiii. 33.19; 35.18.
7. IV. i. 49.
10. CAH v. 417.
Empire and travel along the trade routes in however garbled a form. It is true that Vedic knowledge could only be revealed to those qualified to receive it, but this would not prevent some spread of information about typical Hindu institutions and beliefs.

That this happened, cannot I think be proved; but much that is puzzling in early Greek philosophy would be somewhat more intelligible if we could see in this striking change from the views of the Homeric poems some influence from the East.

The Ionian Monists were after all living in the Persian Empire and their search for one underlying substance, not quite the same as any one of the physical elements, or the even more surprising doctrine of Anaximander who made τὸ ἀπειρον the ἀρχή, so at variance with the Greek love of the defined and precise, might well represent attempts to express in Greek ideas based ultimately on already established Hindu views of the all-pervading atman.

Here let me quote from the Rgveda: the Puruṣa hymn:

1. Thousand-headed was Puruṣa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He having covered the earth on all sides, extended beyond it the measure of ten fingers.
2. Puruṣa is this all, that has been and that will be. And he is the lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through food.
3. Such is his greatness, and more than that is Puruṣa. A fourth of him is all beings, three-fourths of him are what is immortal in heaven.12

(Transl. A.A. Macdonell).

From the Hymn of Creation:

1. There was not the non-existent nor the existent then; there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond. What did it contain? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, unfathomable, profound?
2. There was not death nor immortality then. There was not the beacon of night, nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own power. Other than that there was not anything beyond.
3. Darkness was in the beginning hidden by darkness; indistinguishable, this all was water. That which,

11. Cf. MBh xiii. 10, for the sad fate of the rṣi who offended against this rule by instructing a śūdra.
12. RV x. 90.1-3. Prof. A.L. Basham has pointed out to me that a more accurate rendering of dasaṅgaśalāṃ would be 'a distance equal to the width of 10 fingers'. Ancient systems of measurement used the width, not length, of the fingers.
coming into being, was covered with the void, that One arose through the power of heat.

4. Desire in the beginning came upon that, (desire) that was the first seed of mind. Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the non-existent.\(^\text{13}\)

(Transl. A.A. Macdonell).

Finally, from a hymn to Vāta:
4. Breath of the gods, germ of the world,  
this god fares according to his will.  
His sounds are heard, (but) his form is not (seen).\(^\text{14}\)

(Transl. A.A. Macdonell).

All the passages come from the Tenth Book, which is a late addition to the Rgveda, and the Puruṣa-hymn is one of the very latest hymns of the Rgveda; but on any dating of the Rgveda, they would be some centuries earlier than any Greek thinking on these lines.

From a later Vedic work, the Aitareya Āranyaka, I would cite two passages from a section of the work dated by Keith to 700 – 600 B.C.:\(^\text{15}\)

Was it water? Was it water? This world was water. This was the root, that the shoot. This the father, those the sons. Whatever there is of the son’s, that is the father’s; whatever of the father’s, that is the son’s. So it is said.\(^\text{16}\)

(Transl. A.B. Keith).

The last saying perhaps suggests early Christian theology rather than early Greek philosophy. Then from ‘the most philosophical part of the whole Āranyaka’\(^\text{17}\)

He who knows more and more clearly the self obtains fuller being. There are plants and trees and animals, and he knows the self more and more clearly (in them).

For in plants and trees sap only is seen, in animals consciousness. In animals the self becomes more and more clear, because in them sap also is seen, while thought is not seen in others. The self is more and more clear in man. For he is most endowed with intelligence, he says what he has known, he sees what he has known, he knows to-morrow, he knows the world and what is not the world. By the mortal he desires the immortal, being thus endowed. As for the others, animals, hunger and thirst comprise their power of knowledge. They

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13. Ibid. 129. 1-4.
16. II. i. 8.
say not what they have known, they see now what they have known. They know not to-morrow, they know not the world and what is not the world. They go so far, for their experiences are according to the measure of their intelligence.\(^{18}\)

(Transl. A.B. Keith).

That is surely not an unworthy fore-runner to some of the essence of the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and of later Neo-platonism. There is, however, no proof of influence here. It can only be an argument from probability, but is it more probable that Thales at the Western limit of the Persian Empire conceived his revolutionary ideas quite independently while contemplating the waters of the sluggish Ionian rivers apparently solidifying into silt at the deltas, and that the Ionian materialists were materialists in our sense, or that they were trying to cope with exciting new ideas about a divine universe filtering through from the Eastern limits of the Empire?

In the case of Pythagoras the question is even more to the point. Greek tradition claimed that he studied in the East\(^ {19}\) and he certainly returned with quite un-Greek doctrines about the transmigration of the soul, which was another well established doctrine in India at this time, as was of course, the belief in the need to liberate the soul from the damaging contact of the body, although the Greeks saw Egypt as the source of these doctrines.\(^ {20}\)

However, in one of the Funeral Hymns in the *Rgveda* we find:

8. Unite with the Fathers, unite with Yama, with the reward of thy sacrifices and good works in the highest heaven. Leaving blemish behind go back to thy home; unite with thy body full of vigour.\(^ {21}\)

(Transl. A.A. Macdonell).

The Hindu doctrine of *karma*, that one’s deeds produce fruit resulting in the appropriate re-incarnation is based on this belief. It is also one of the Pythagorean elements that appears in Plato’s thought, but Plato cannot reject personal responsibility. So in the *Republic* when the souls are about to return to the world they themselves make the choice of the way of life to be followed, but θεός αναίτιος they are told.\(^ {22}\)

It is at this period that we might seem to have clear evidence of direct contact with India in that Diogenes Laertius records that Democritus in the latter half of the 5th century\(^ {23}\) and Pyrrhon in the latter half of the 4th numbered among their teachers the naked sophists,\(^ {24}\) that is the Brahmans. Indeed in the opening

\(^{18}\) II. iii. 2.

\(^{19}\) Diog. Laert. viii. 2-3.

\(^{20}\) Herodotus ii. 123.2.

\(^{21}\) *RV* X xiv. 8.

\(^{22}\) *Rep.* x. 617 e5.

\(^{23}\) Diog. Laert. ix. 35.

\(^{24}\) *Id. ibid.* 61.
section of his *Lives of the Philosophers*, he records that some assert that philosophy had its origins among the barbarians, for the Magi lived among the Persians, the Chaldaeans among the Babylonians and Assyrians, the naked sophists among the Indians, and the Druids among the Celts and Gauls.\[25\]

Unfortunately, while Diogenes writing in the 3rd century A.D. is good evidence for the later conviction that no real knowledge of spiritual matters was possible without recourse to the Brahmins and other Oriental sages, he can hardly be treated as an unquestioned authority for the early period. Nor can much be made of the widely spread pantheistic views in the later Greek thought.\[26\]

But the 4th century produced Alexander, and his conquests established a direct link with India; that may not have brought about a lasting political connexion, but did make India a reality for the Greeks, not just a fairy-land at the Eastern extremity of the world.

Herodotus had had some accurate knowledge of Indians subject to Persian rule\[27\] and also beyond the Persian frontier,\[28\] but he also tells us of the gold-digging ants almost as big as dogs and as swift as male camels.\[29\]

The ants cannot however be dismissed as mere fantasy. However strange the version in Herodotus, it does go back to a genuine Indian tradition, which, like most things, can be found in the *Mahābhārata*.\[30\] We there find a reference to *pipilīka*, which means a kind of gold supposed to be collected by ants. The word is originally one of the words for ‘ant’. Moreover, Nearchus and Megasthenes report the story and both had actually been to India: indeed the former claims to have seen skins of these ‘ants’.\[31\] The explanation appears to be that *pipilīka* was surface gold dust, which the Indians supposed had been dug up by ants, confused with gold dust actually dug up by burrowing animals such as the marmot—but this admittedly leaves unexplained their successful pursuit of camels and killing of the riders, if caught.

Moreover, Herodotus has the credit for the first Western mention of the forest-dwelling ascetics with their vegetarian diet.\[32\]

Although Indians do not come into Xenophon's *Anabasis*, they inevitably come into his historical novel about the romantic East, the *Cyropaedia*.\[33\] In his

25. Id. i. 1.
26. Cf. the passages collected at Stobaeus 1 i.
27. Herodotus iii. 94.
28. Ibid. 98 seq.
29. Ibid. 102.2-105.
30. MBh ii. 48.4.
31. Arrian Ind. 14.4-6.
32. iii. 100.
33. I. i. 4, v. 3; II. iv. 1-9; III. ii. 25-30; VI. ii. 1-3, 9.
more practical vein he knows of Indian dogs as effective in hunting the wild boar and deer.  

Against this background there must have been some disenchantment for Alexander's men when they eventually found themselves in the romantic East. Perhaps Alexander campaigning with Homer under his pillow could believe himself to be another Achilles, but if his admiral Nearchus had hopes of being another Odysseus he was disappointed in his hopes of meeting a Circe or Calypso, for the island of Nosala reputed sacred to the Sun or inhabited by a Nereid who turned any man who landed on it into a fish, turned out to be uninhabited, when Nearchus bravely went ashore himself in search of a missing crew.

Alexander's conquest had surprisingly little effect on India. It is true that trade routes were opened up through the N.W. Frontier linking India and the Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms, and that trade also developed by the sea routes. But it is not possible to show Greek influence in the development of Sanskrit drama, which like so much in India can be traced back to the Veda, which has dramatic dialogues and monologues forming quite adequate bases for a great drama.

Although by the 1st century a section was added to the Mahābhārata recording the conquest by an Indian prince of Antioch, Alexandria and Rome, this reveals rather an Oriental view of the attempts by Augustus to establish diplomatic contacts with the East. At least it shows some knowledge of the great cities of the Mediterranean, and in the case of Rome this could hardly have happened much before the 1st century.

In the Augustan period also we find Strabo recording some comparatively well informed facts about the geography of Northern India, but only of the regions actually traversed by Alexander and his lieutenants. Moreover he tells us of the annual sailing of over a hundred ships from Egypt to India. This was a coastal traffic subject to the exactions of all the petty chieftains along the coast, and Augustus sought to get control of it by the unsuccessful expedition of Aelius Gallus into Arabia in 25 B.C. The diplomatic missions recorded by Augustus were probably connected with these expeditions and must have brought some information, however garbled, to the Roman world.

But the need for this kind of intervention passed, when Hippalus in the middle of the 1st century A.D. discovered how to use the monsoons for a direct passage to India and return. The monsoons were accordingly known by the name of Hippalus, and we are told that the voyage took forty days. For about 150

35. Arr. Ind. 31.2-6.
37. MBh ii. 28.49.
38. RG 31.
39. II. i. 19; v. 32.
40. II. v. 12.
years there was constant and extensive intercourse between the Mediterranean and Dravidian worlds, but with the disturbances of the 3rd century in the Roman Empire and the transfer of the capital to Constantinople this direct contact ceased, for the interests of Constantinople were rather in the age-old land caravan route to the East. Control of the sea passed to Axum and Persia, and eventually the rise of Islam cut off Europe from the East: until centuries later a new route was discovered round the Cape.41

The Western world had little to offer in return for the luxuries imported from the East, which had to be paid for in gold and silver, and Pliny deplores the annual payment of 55,000,000 HS to India for goods sold at a 100 times their original value.42 Moreover, the Roman denarius is established as the dinara in Sanskrit.

There was thus available to the West comparatively accurate information about the Indus and Ganges Valleys dating back to Alexander’s expedition in the case of the Indus and the mission of Megasthenes to Candragupta at the end of the century in the case of the Ganges. While the sea trade with Southern India had brought much reliable information on the Dravidian South, recorded for us in the Periplus Maris Erythraei.

There is no need to note the well known adventures of Alexander in India, but we can deplore the loss of the works of Nearchus and Megasthenes recording their experiences. Fortunately, Arrian has preserved something of both in his Indike; but the details of Nearchus’ voyage from the mouth of the Indus are not strictly relevant to a study of Greek knowledge of India, so it is time to turn to Arrian’s report of what Megasthenes observed at the end of the 4th century B.C.

Firstly, there is a sketch of the geography of the country, bounded by the Taurus, Indus and the Great Sea. Its rivers are more numerous than all in the rest of Asia, and include the Ganges and Indus, from which the country gets its name, both greater than the Danube and Nile even if these were combined.43

At this point Arrian frankly admits that he has no certain information on that part of the country not traversed by Alexander,44 and asserts that in his opinion even Megasthenes did not see much of India although he did get beyond the limits reached by Alexander, and spent some time with Candragupta, an even greater monarch than Porus.45

Returning to Megasthenes’ account he notes the peaceful attitude of the Indians even then and their refusal to fight aggressive wars, and comparative freedom from aggression, in that apart from Dionysus only Alexander invaded their country, for Semiramis’ plan to do so was frustrated by death.46

41. Cf. C. Kaeppel, Off the Beaten Track in the Classics, p.76.
42. NH vi. 23.
43. Arr. Ind. 1.1-3.9.
44. 4.1.
45. 5.3.
46. 5.4-8.
Indeed he finds philological evidence of a sort for the expedition of Dionysus in the city of Nysa and Mount Meros. This would be an early Greek reference to the mythical Mount Meru of Hindu legend, while the drums, cymbals and speckled dress of the Indians when on military duty all belong to the cult of Bacchus. The evidence for an invasion by Herakles is slighter, amounting to not much more than his failure to capture a mountain fort that Alexander did capture, so this ancient sceptic suspects a Macedonian fabrication to the greater glory of Alexander, or at least the existence of another Herakles, not the Theban or Tyrian or Egyptian one.

He notes the summer rains and the effect of the catchment areas in the high mountains on the great rivers, a clear analogy to explain the flooding of the Nile, which cannot be explained by melting snow in the Aethiopian mountains since they must be too hot for snow which would not in any case produce the muddy waters of the Nile. There is in other respects a resemblance between Aethiopia and India, for instance both countries have crocodiles, although India lacks the hippopotamus. The peoples are alike too in that the southern Indian is dark, although he does not have the snub nose and curly hair of the Aethiopian, while the northern Indian is more like the Egyptian.

Megasthenes asserts that there were 118 peoples in India: Arrian cautiously concedes that there must be many but cannot see how Megasthenes could possibly have evidence for so precise a figure. Originally, the Indians were nomadic flesh-eaters until the coming of Dionysus, who introduced agriculture and urban civilisation. Moreover, on leaving the country he appointed as king of India one of his most enthusiastic followers: 153 kings or 6042 years later we find Candragupta on the throne. Dionysus himself preceded Herakles by 15 generations. Herakles has now acquired more substance as a conqueror of India and discoverer of pearls.

Indian houses on the coast and in the river-valleys were built of timber to protect them from inundation, but mud-brick was used on higher ground. The greatest city was Palimbothra, Pātaliputra (now Patna), Candragupta’s capital, stretching for 10 miles along the river bank and running inland nearly 2 miles, surrounded by a moat 600’ wide and 40’ deep, while the wall had 570 towers and 64 gates.
There was no slavery in India, but the population was divided into seven occupational classes: (1) Sophists, first in rank with no duties but the performing of religious rites, and given up to asceticism; (2) Farmers, the most numerous, their only duty agriculture, which not even war disturbs; (3) Pastoralists, who do not live in the cities; (4) Tradesmen; (5) Warriors, second to the farmers in number, practising only the art of war; (6) Overseers, who report all that goes on to the king; (7) Councillors, few in number, but outstanding for wisdom and justice, forming an administrative grade of the civil service.\textsuperscript{57}

Interrmarriage between classes is forbidden, and change of occupation, or the practice of more than one.\textsuperscript{58}

Megasthenes goes on to describe Indian hunting which is like that of the Greeks except for that of the elephant which he describes in detail. It is in fact the method practised into modern times, involving the isolation of the wild elephants in a compound until starvation reduced them to a point at which they could be handled by tame elephants. He then tells of their training and records an act by elephants with cymbals which he witnessed himself, and the elephant’s devotion to its master is duly recorded.\textsuperscript{59}

Nearchus had seen a tiger skin, but not a live tiger, but was told by the Indians that a real tiger was as big as the biggest horse and surpassed all creatures in speed and strength, so that it could easily strangle an elephant.\textsuperscript{60}

Nearchus also noted the Indian interest in parrots and the birds’ capacity for human speech.\textsuperscript{61} In fact, training birds to speak is one of the 64 arts recommended by the \textit{Kāmasūtra} as occupations for the man about town (\textit{nāgaraka}).\textsuperscript{62} He is surprised that the Indians find the monkey beautiful,\textsuperscript{63} but then he had not read the \textit{Rāmāyana}, and records the capture by a Greek of a snake 22’ long, but the Indians assured him that the biggest snakes were much bigger.\textsuperscript{64} No Greek doctor could cure an Indian snake bite, but the Indians could, so Alexander kept some Indian doctors on his staff and ordered that any soldier bitten by a snake should report at once to the king’s tent. The Indians were generally free of disease, but normal complaints were treated by the doctors: more serious inflictions were referred to the ‘sophists’, who not without divine aid cured what was curable.\textsuperscript{65}

Much later we shall find Nonnus referring to ‘a cure from the divine hand of

\textsuperscript{57} 10.8-12.7.
\textsuperscript{58} 12.8.
\textsuperscript{59} 13-4.
\textsuperscript{60} 15.1-2.
\textsuperscript{61} 15.8.
\textsuperscript{62} I. iii. 15.
\textsuperscript{63} Arr. \textit{Ind.} 15.9.
\textsuperscript{64} 15.10.
\textsuperscript{65} 15.11-2.
pain-releasing Brahmin murmuring the words of a hymn with supernatural incantation.\textsuperscript{66}

The Indians wore cotton clothing which reached half-way down the shin, a mantle about the shoulders, and a turban. Some wore ivory ear-rings. They dyed their beards various colours; and important persons used sun-shades. Their shoes were of white leather with the soles built-up to make them look taller.\textsuperscript{67}

Their weapons and warfare are also described.\textsuperscript{68}

Physically, the Indians are lean, tall and agile beyond all other men. Most of them ride on camels, horses and asses, but the wealthy on elephants. For the elephant is the royal vehicle, four-horse chariots rank second, and camels third. To ride on a single horse is not honourable. Only the gift of an elephant will persuade the chastest of women to yield to the donor; nor do the Indians think dishonour at this price a disgrace, but rather a distinction that the woman’s beauty should be worth an elephant.\textsuperscript{69}

Finally, we have a brief description of the \textit{svayamvara}, whereby a girl of marriageable age chooses from suitors assembled by her father and tested by contests in archery and so forth.\textsuperscript{70} The institution has obvious parallels in the Greek cases of Helen, Penelope and historically in the wedding of Agariste, daughter of the tyrant of Sicyon.\textsuperscript{71}

This then is India as seen by Greek soldiers and diplomats in the 4th century B.C. and recorded for us by a like-minded Greek in the 2nd century A.D., when the trade by the direct sea route was flourishing and India was of some general interest in the West.

We also learn of a visit of Indians to Syria in the reign of Antoninus, which may have brought some accurate information as well as an account of ordeal by water under the supervision of Brahmins, which may have influenced Philostratus in his \textit{Life of Apollonius}.\textsuperscript{72}

For India had more to offer than curiosities for the tourist and the social scientist, and it is time to turn to the growing realisation of the importance of the teaching of the Brahmins.

Philostratus flourished under the patronage of Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus and in the early third century, at her request, wrote the \textit{Life of Apollonius of Tyana}, the 1st century mystic and ascetic. Apollonius really existed and his life covered most of the 1st century in which he suffered under Nero and Domitian and yet survived until the reign of Nerva. Within a century of Philostratus, Hierocles compared Apollonius with Christ, to the latter’s

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{66} xxxix. 357-8.
\bibitem{67} Arr. \textit{Ind.} 16.1-5.
\bibitem{68} 16.6-12.
\bibitem{69} 17.1-3.
\bibitem{70} 17.4.
\bibitem{71} Herodotus vi. 126-130.
\bibitem{72} Stobaeus I. iii. 56.
\end{thebibliography}
disadvantage, which provoked in reply an extant tract from Eusebius.

Professor Harris has recently dismissed the Indian and Ethiopian episodes in the *Life of Apollonius* as imaginative, not historical: they are certainly imaginative, and there is perhaps nothing in them that could be called historical, but this does not rule out the possibility that Apollonius did visit India. In his time it would have been comparatively easy to do so.

I assume then that Apollonius did visit India, which is not surprising in view of the trade routes to India available in the 1st century, and Philostratus claims to base his account on the eye-witness account of Damis, Apollonius' constant companion. Unfortunately, we have a fanciful account of things no eye-witness ever saw and perhaps no mystic even dreamed, dragons with jewels in their heads, serpents 30 cubits long (the small ones, that is) and so forth, all the trappings of the romantic East — a sad decline from the sober account of Arrian, who used the work of a different sort of eye-witness tempered by his own *prudentia* gained as a serving officer and administrator.

What is more important is the tacit assumption that anyone seriously interested in spiritual matters would naturally turn to India. A late fiction even makes Aristotle a student of the Brahmins. No doubt, Julia Domna's Syrian origin made Oriental studies fashionable, but this can hardly be the only factor determining the attitude of Philostratus.

At any rate, we are told, that Apollonius while still a young man, decided to visit the Indians and their sages, who are called Brahmins and Hyrcanians, because he believed it proper for a young man to be uplifted by studies overseas.

There is no time to follow him in all his subsequent adventures by land and sea, but when he finally reached the tower of the sages and was admitted to their presence, the following dialogue (in Greek of course) with their leader followed: Iarchas: Ask what you will for you have come to men who know everything.

A. Do you know yourselves?
I. We know everything, since we first get to know ourselves, for no one would approach philosophy without first knowing himself.

A. What do you think you are?
I. Gods.
A. Why?
I. Because we are good men.
A. What are your views on the soul?
I. What Pythagoras passed on to you, and we to the Egyptians.

74. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* iii. 6-8.
76. Phil. *Vit. Apoll.* i. 18. For the significance of the reference to the Hyrcanians, see 'Aethiopians'. *Prudentia* iv 1972 42-50.
The arrogance of this may be more in keeping with a novelist’s conception of a sage than with what we know of the modesty of real sages like Confucius and Socrates, but to some extent it conforms with orthodox Brahminical doctrine as found in Manu:

Men of the good quality obtain the state of deities, and the passionate the condition of men, and those of the dark quality constantly the nature of beasts: this is the threefold transmigration.\(^{78}\)

This passage refers to the three qualities *sattva, tamas* and *rajas*, which have some analogy with Plato’s tripartite soul.

While in the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* we find:

> The gods are of two sorts. The gods of course are gods. Then those Brahmans who are learned and versed in scripture are gods among men.\(^{79}\)

In what follows the Indian shows his detailed knowledge of Homer, and reveals that one of his junior disciples is a reincarnation of Palamedes, who has a grudge against philosophical studies, since in spite of his wisdom as Palamedes, he was out-maneuvered by Odysseus and not thought worthy of mention by Homer.\(^{80}\)

On the following day the dialogue continued:

A. Of what does the universe consist?
I. Elements.

A. You mean, four?
I. Not four, but five.

A. And what would be the fifth after water and air and earth and fire?
I. Ether, which must be considered the origin of the gods, for all that breathes air is mortal, but what breathes ether is immortal and divine.\(^{81}\)

Here we may compare the *Aitareya Āranyaka* again:

> He who knows himself as the fivefold hymn from whence all this springs, he is wise. Earth,

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78. *Mn.* xii. 40.
79. II. ii. 2 (= Lanman LXIX). For an even bolder claim, attributed to Hermes Trismegistos, cf. Stobaeus I xlvii. 8, ὁ γὰρ ἀνδρόμος θείον ζώον ἐστι καὶ οἶδὲ τοῖς ὀλλοῖς ζώοις αὐχρημόμενοι τῶν ἐπεγείων τοῖς, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀνίκω ἐν οὐρανῷ λεγομένους θεοῖς. Μᾶλλον δὲ εἰ χρή τολμήσαντα εἶπεῖν τὸ ἄλληθε, ὑπὲρ ἔκεινοι εἰσὶν ὁ διότω άνδρόμος, η πάντως ἰσοδυναμίαις ἀλήθειας. Οὐδέσ καί γὰρ τῶν οὐρανών (θεών) ἐπὶ γῆς κατελεύσεται, οὐρανοῦ τὸν ὀρον καταλαμπὼν· ὁ δὲ άνδρόμος καὶ εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν ἀναβαίνει καί μετρεί αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ πάντως μείζον αὐτῷ τὴν γῆν καταλαμπὼν ἄνω γύρευται· τοιούτω τὸ μέγεθὸς ἦστω αὐτῷ τῆς ἐκτάσεως. Διό τολμήσαντα εἴπειν, τὸν μὲν άνδρόμον τὸν ἐπέγειον εἶναι θανάτου θεοῦ, τὸν δὲ οὐρανῶν θεοῦ ἀδάμαστον άνθρωπον. Διότερ διὰ τούτω τὰ πάντα (διοκεῖται) τῶν διό, κόσμου καὶ άνθρωπον, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ἕνοκ πάντα.
81. iii. 34.
air, ether, water, light, these form the self,  
the fivefold hymn.\textsuperscript{82}  
(Transl. A.B. Keith).

This is little enough to glean from a four-month visit to the Brahmins, but much of the discussion was secret,\textsuperscript{83} and much of what Philostratus does report is due to his own fantastic imagining.

However, his glorification of pagan wisdom was soon to be superseded in an Empire that became Christian, whatever the cost to those brought up on the Greek and Latin classics who now had to acquiesce in the barbarous style of the Bible in the Greek and Latin versions then available, and in the unfamiliar stories of the Old Testament.

But the arrival of Christianity did not cut off contact with the East and interest in India. Indeed, religious developments bound East and West together across the political frontier of the Roman Empire. For Mani, the Persian, preached his doctrines that were found heretical by both Christians and Zoroastrians on either side of the frontier, and Judaism and Christianity were established on both sides of the frontier.

So in the fifth century, Bishop Theodoretus in a work intended to make Christianity more acceptable to Greeks in spite of the defects in style of the Scriptures and the lack of education of the Apostles, argues that Greeks have always honoured barbarians as having wisdom from the time of Zamolxis the Thracian and Anacharsis the Scythian: ‘and’, he continues, ‘the Brahmins enjoy high honour among you, and they are Indians, not Greeks.’\textsuperscript{84} He returns to this theme later in his work,\textsuperscript{85} and asserts that while no one attempts to live by the Laws of Plato, the whole earth is full of the teachings of the Apostles and Prophets,\textsuperscript{86} and the Hebrew texts have been translated into all languages including that of the Indians.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, Persians and Indians are naturally wise, without the tortuous arguments of Greek philosophers to train them.\textsuperscript{88} Moreover, the work of the early Christian missionaries continues and their teaching has spread to the limits of the world, including Indians and Aethiopians.\textsuperscript{89} Towards the end of his book he goes even further, all races of men have accepted the laws of the Crucified One including Indians and even Chinese at this stage.\textsuperscript{90}

The tradition of the Church in South India is that it was founded by St. Thomas, but at the very latest it was clearly established in the early 5th century.

82. II. iii. 1.  
83. Philostratus, \textit{ibid.} iii. 41.  
84. \textit{Graecarum affectionum curatio}, 11.23-12.3 Raeder.  
85. 140.1-7 R; 144.18-145.8 R.  
86. 142.17-23R.; 236.21-237.3 R.  
87. 142.23-5 R.  
88. 144.18-145.8 R.  
89. 197.7-16 R.  
90. 223.19-25 R.
From the reasoned argument of Theodoret we turn to the fantastic exuberance of Nonnus in his epic treatment of the Conquest of India by Dionysus. It is difficult to know what to make of this strange work. It would seem to be the last manifestation of pagan sensuality before the evolution of Byzantine art cast everything in a Christian mould. The same spirit seems to breathe in classical Sanskrit literature, but there inspires poets of greater genius than Nonnus. There is no reason to suppose that Nonnus had any real knowledge of Indian history or geography. In fact his geography has little reference to this world as we know it: events alleged to take place in India are associated with names that we know as belonging to places in the Middle East. It is a relief to find on reaching Book 24, after 11 books describing the preliminary skirmishes, that Nonnus will let us off the next six years of the war and Book 25 starts with the seventh and last year — there was of course Homeric precedent for this sort of treatment — however the greater part of the remaining 24 books is needed to describe even the closing stages of the war.91 It is true that Philostratus had already recorded the inscription set up by Dionysus on winning the war,92 just like a good Roman emperor, but that seems a reasonably restrained fancy compared with Nonnus.

And yet even Nonnus seems to have heard something true about India for he refers to: 'The Indians who are dear to piety, whom world-famous Themis is believed to have suckled'93 and 'wise Brahmins who are unarmed,'94 and on describing, as a follower of Homer must, a truce for both sides to bury the dead, describes the Indians as

'with unweeping eyes they buried the dead,
seeing that they had escaped the earthly bonds of mortal life
while the soul was sent to the ancient term from which it came, in the cyclic course.'95

That κυκλάδι οἰερὴ can be taken to indicate that Nonnus had also heard the word संसार (samsāra) in such a context, is perhaps too much to believe in view of the superficiality of most of what he has to say about India, and it would be the only Sanskrit word of which he shows knowledge.96 Nevertheless without any conscious intention Nonnus gives in his opening books dealing with the struggle of Zeus and Typhon97 the nearest approach in Greek literature to the typical battle scenes of Sanskrit epic which are so far from the realism of Homeric epic or the Icelandic sagas.

Trade necessarily brings a more sober outlook and this was certainly the background to Cosmas Indicopleustes in the 6th century who eventually retired 91. xxv.-xl.
92. Philostratus, ibid. ii. 9.
93. xxxi. 93-4.
94. xxxvi. 344.
95. xxxvii. 3-6.
96. See, κυκλάδι οἰερὴ, Glotta L 1972 24-8.
97. i-ii.
from commerce to write his Christian topography. However, in spite of his name he seems unfortunately not to have travelled as far as India. But then came Islam and the severing of the direct sea route to India as far as Western Europe was concerned. The land route in any case was more profitable to Byzantium, but the close contacts with India that had taken centuries to establish were now cut after some five centuries of reasonably close and regular contact.

That may have given the Asian civilizations a welcome interval in which to reach some of the high points in their long and splendid histories, nor was Byzantium wholly without contact thanks to the medium of Islam, but Western Europe lapsed into the Dark Ages.