EX OCCIDENTE IMPERIUM.
ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND
THE RISE OF THE MAURYA EMPIRE*

Abstract: Since the nineteenth century, many authors have seen the campaign of Alexander the Great in the Punjab as a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent. British historians writing during the apex of Britain's colonial rule perceived it as the coming of Western culture and civilisation. Nationalistic Indian historians saw the Maurya Empire, which was established shortly after Alexander's incursion, as a patriotic reaction to the foreign oppressor. This paper discusses both historiographical interpretations and questions Alexander's role in the emerging of the Maurya Empire, emphasising underlying structural reasons instead.

Contents:

O n 28 February 1793, Sir William Jones gave a lecture for the Asiatic Society of Bengal in which he presented an important discovery. As one of the first Westerners educated in the classical languages of ancient India, he had studied Sanskrit texts that tell the story of the young Candragupta[1] and his overthrow of the wicked king Dhana Nanda with the help of the Brahmin scholar Cānakya. In a stroke of genius, Jones linked Candragupta to Sandrokottos, an Indian king mentioned by Graeco-Roman historians. He concluded that they were one and the same person: the

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[1] For words and names from Indian languages I follow the IAST-transliteration.

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founder of the Maurya Empire, the first multi-ethnic empire in Indian history, which united almost the whole of the subcontinent in the fourth and third centuries BC.[2]

This discovery, together with James Prinsep's decipherment of the inscriptions of Candragupta's grandson Aśoka, is the cornerstone of our present understanding of the Maurya Empire. Yet Jones' connection between Graeco-Roman and Indian sources have also led to far-reaching and problematic interpretations which are still influential today. As Sandrokottos is mentioned only in respect to Alexander's conquests, many historians in the past two centuries have seen Alexander as a pivotal character in the emergence of the Maurya Empire, and thus in the whole history of India. Candragupta and Alexander appear to be inextricably linked to each other. But to what extent is this strong connection justified?

This paper has three main objectives. The first part provides an overview of both Graeco-Roman and Indian sources of Candragupta's rise to power, while the second discusses how these fragmentary and often contradictory testimonies were combined into full-fledged narratives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, the last part nuances Alexander's role in the emerging of the Maurya Empire, emphasising deeper, structural reasons instead.

1. Ancient Sources

1.1 Graeco-Roman Sources

Western classical sources know Candragupta Maurya as Σανδρόκοττος, Σανδράκοττος, Ανδράκοττος, Ανδρόκοττος, Sandracottus, or Androcottus.[3] In the nineteenth century some authors have argued for an original form ending in *-κυπτος* instead of *-κοττος*, the former being closer to the Sanskrit original Candragupta.[4] It is true that one manuscript of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* reads Σανδρόκυπτος, but Karttunen has shown that the *-κοττος* ending derives from a Middle Indo-Aryan form of Candragupta. The Middle Indo-Aryan language Prakrit was in Candragupta's time the popular language in the north of the Indian subcontinent.[5]

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[2] Jones (1795) 11. Also Philips (1961b) 218; Kejariwal (1988) 69–72.

[3] Str. 15.1.36, 15.1.53, 15.1.57, 15.2.9; Ath. 1.18.d–e; Arr. *Anab.* 5.6.2; *Ind.* 5.3.9; Plut. *Alex.* 62; *Mor.* 542; App. *Syr.* 9.55; Just. 15.4; Oros. *Hist.* 3.23.45–6.

[4] Schlegel (1820); Wilson (1840) 468 n. 21. See also McCrindle (1972) 45.

[5] Karttunen (1997) 34, 260. See also the rendering *Candagutta* in Pāli: *Dīpavaṃsa* 5.69; *Mahāvaṃsa* 5.21. Also Von Gutschmidt (1857) 261.

Candragupta is mentioned by no less than seven authors, yet they do not provide a lot of details about him. He operates only in the background of the authors' grand narratives about Alexander or his successors. In the accounts of Appian and Strabo he is the adversary of Seleucus I Nicator, who vainly tried to reconquer the Indus region around 304 BC.[6] The exact details of the war between the two are not known, but according to Strabo it led to Seleucus giving up parts of the old Persian satrapies Paropamisadae, Arachosia, and Gedrosia.[7] In exchange, Seleucus received some 500 war elephants which played a decisive role in defeating Antigonus Monophthalmus at Ipsus in 301 BC.[8] Athenaeus, quoting Phylarchus, relates that Candragupta once sent a powerful aphrodisiac to Seleucus, probably after peace was concluded between the two former adversaries.[9]

Arrian mentions Candragupta when talking about Megasthenes, 'who often speaks of his visiting to Sandrocottus, the king of the Indians'.[10] Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador to Candragupta's court and author of a book on India, which is only preserved in fragments. Megasthenes' writings are a fascinating testimony to the workings of the Maurya Empire, but unfortunately the fragments contain but a few references to Candragupta himself and no information about how he came to power. Only the accounts of Plutarch and, especially, Justin can teach us more about Candragupta's early life. Both make a connection between the young Candragupta and Alexander the Great. According to Plutarch, the Macedonian conqueror made quite an impression on Candragupta:

> Androcottus, when he was a stripling, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that he often said in later times that Alexander narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth.[11]

In his *Moralia*, Plutarch writes that Candragupta even honoured Alexander:

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[6] For this date, see Wheatley (2014) 509.

[7] For more details on the rearrangement of the frontiers between the Seleucid and the Mauryan Empire, see Wheatley (2014) 503–12. Also Karttunen (1997) 263 for an overview of the debate.

[8] See Scullard (1974) 97–8; Bar-Kochva, (1976) 76–9; Epplett (2007) 222.

[9] Ath. 1.18.d–e. (= *FGrHist* 81 F 35b).

[10] Arr. *Anab.* 5.6.2. See Bosworth (1996) and Primo (2009) 53–65, and the discussion below.

[11] Plut. *Alex.* 62.9 (trans. B. Perrin).

Therefore Alexander honoring Hercules, and Androcottus again honoring Alexander, in effect proposed themselves to be in like manner honored by others.[12]

In another fragment from the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch stresses the military might of Candragupta: he mentions a host of 600,000 soldiers, with which he 'overran and subdued all India'.[13] Interestingly, Pliny gives exactly the same number when discussing the army of the king of Palibothra in the Ganges valley. Although Pliny does not mention Candragupta by name, we can assume that he is talking about him, since Palibothra (Pāṭaliputra) was his capital.[14]

The most detailed Graeco-Roman source is, however, Justin's epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus.[15] It is worth quoting this fragment in full:

Then he [Seleucus] crossed into India, which, following Alexander's death, had shaken from its shoulders the yoke of servitude and put to death his governors. The man responsible for this liberation was Sandrocottus; however, after his victory he had turned the so-called liberty they had gained back into servitude; for on seizing power he began himself to enslave the people he had championed against foreign domination. He was a man of low birth, but he was called to royal power by divine authority. He had annoyed King Nandrus by his outspokenness; he was sentenced to death by him, and had relied on his swiftness of foot to escape. He was lying down, having fallen asleep from exhaustion, when a huge lion approached him as he slept; with its tongue it cleaned the sweat that was pouring from him and, then, when he awoke, calmly left him. It was this strange occurrence that first inspired Sandrocottus to hope for royal power. He then gathered a band of outlaws and incited the Indians to revolution. Later, as he was preparing for hostilities against Alexander's governors, a wild elephant of immense size came up to him of its own accord and, just as if it were tame, let him get on his back. It became his guide in the war and showed remarkable prowess in battle. Having gained the throne in this

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[12] Plut. *Mor.* 542 (trans. W. W. Goodwin).

[13] Plut. *Alex.* 62.2.

[14] Plin. 6.21.63. See also Wheatley (2014) 509. For Pāṭaliputra as capital of the kingdom of Magadha, see below and Schwarz (1970) 289–91; Karttunen (1997) 34, 88–9; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 284.

[15] See now Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) for a new translation and detailed commentary.

manner, Sandrocottus was ruler of India at the time that Seleucus was laying the foundations of his future greatness …[16]

So according to Justin, the Indian regions which Alexander had occupied were 'liberated' by Candragupta, after a divine omen had inspired him to become king. It is interesting to note the similarities of word use between this fragment and the story of the subjugation of Greece by Philip II. In both cases, Justin or Trogus talks about local liberty (*libertas*) as opposed to the Macedonian yoke of servitude (*iugum servitutis*), which may imply that the author saw an analogy between the the pursuit of civic autonomy by the Greek city states and the Indian regions.[17]

In Justin's text, the link between Alexander and Candragupta is not as strong as in the fragments of Plutarch. The author writes that Candragupta had to flee from a certain 'Nandrus', whom he had offended. This name has been subject to some debate. Only two of the many manuscripts read 'Alexandrum', which von Gutschmidt has shown to be an error in 1857.[18] He argued that the reading 'Nandrum' is correct, and that it refers to the Indian Nanda dynasty which Candragupta later uprooted. Some of his arguments are, however, very much products of his time: von Gutschmidt holds the 'noble' Alexander not capable of persecuting an adolescent; this rather suits 'oriental despots' like the Nandas. Yet he is right when arguing that his interpretation is in better agreement with the Indian sources, and that the reading 'Nandrum', the *lectio difficilior*, holds true for all but some (low quality) manuscripts. Further, von Gutschmidt's reading makes the structure of the text much more logical: first, Candragupta overthrew the Nanda dynasty in the Ganges valley and only afterwards (*deinde*) did he go to war with the Macedonian governors in the Indus region.[19] Despite von Gutschmidt's efforts, the unequivocal reading 'Alexandrum' instead of 'Nandrum' would have a long afterlife, as will be shown later.

To sum up, Graeco-Roman authors always discuss Candragupta within the framework of Alexander's conquests and the struggles of the diadochs. He is presented as a formidable adversary, who was perhaps inspired by Alexander and could keep the eastern ambitions of Seleucus in check. In a way, the connection between Candragupta and Alexander can be considered as a

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[16] Just. 15.4 (trans. J. C. Yardley).

[17] *Libertas*: Just. 8.1.3, 8.2.8, 9.1.4, 9.3.11, 12.1.6. *Iugum servitutis*: Just. 6.9.7. Another possibility is that Trogus, writing in the first century BC, was influenced by the acts of Julius Caesar, who claimed to defend the Republic's liberty but subdued it to his authority instead. For *libertas* and Caesar, see Wirszubiski (1968) 87–91.

[18] Von Gutschmidt (1857).

[19] Von Gutschmidt (1857) 261ff. For the succession of events in Candragupta's early reign, see note 170.

literary trope, or in Schwarz's words, 'eine literarische Annäherung Candraguptas an die Gestalt Alexanders', which was fully developed by the time of Plutarch.[20]

1.2 Indian Sources

In India, too, Candragupta is only known from literary sources, apart from one inscription from AD 150 which mentions him *en passant*.[21] The Indian literary sources on the rise of the Mauryas are numerous, but difficult to interpret. Since the eighteenth century, Western scholars have favoured Graeco-Roman over Indian sources, since the latter were not historiographical in nature and were written many centuries after the actual events. It is indeed hard to decide to what extent these sources can be relied upon. This does not mean, however, that they should be cast aside as worthless, as many colonial historians did. Instead, they require a different set of methodologies to be interpreted and estimated in their own right. This is no easy task, as will become clear.

We find stories about Candragupta in Brahmanical Sanskrit literature such as plays and religious texts, in Buddhist religious chronicles and in Jain commentaries on the lives of their holy men. Thus, Candragupta is represented in the three great religious traditions of ancient India. In what follows I give a short overview of the most important of these sources on Candragupta's rise to power.[22]

The Brahmanical tradition has two vital testimonies concerning Candragupta and the Mauryas. The first comes from the *Purāṇas* ('ancient stories'), a class of texts considered *itihāsa* or sacrosanct history.[23] It is very difficult to fix a precise date of composition, since the *Purāṇas* are a mix of 'tales, anecdotes, songs and lore that had come down through the ages'.[24] In any case, these texts only attained their present form in the first millennium AD.[25] Their reliability is a matter of discussion. Smith, in his at the time authoritative work on ancient India, calls them a 'genuine and valuable historical tradition', while more recently Thapar stressed the confusion in the royal gene-

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[20] Schwarz (1970) 273.

[21] The inscription of king Rudraman, in which the construction of a water reservoir is attributed to Candragupta's reign. Thapar (1963) 13; Singh (2008) 330.

[22] For a more detailed overview, see Trautmann (1971) 10–48; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 275–91.

[23] Winternitz (1909) 441; Majumdar (1961) 13.

[24] Majumdar (1961) 14.

[25] Wilson (1840) lxxii; Winternitz (1909) 445; Majumdar (1961) 14.

alogies caused by transcriptions and interpolations.[26] For our subject the
Viṣṇu Purāṇa is most relevant, since it contains genealogical lists of the dynas-
ties of the Magadha Kingdom in the Ganges valley.[27] There we read that the
Nanda dynasty of Magadha was overthrown by Chandragupta Maurya with
the help of the Brahmin Kauṭilya:

> The Brahman Kautilya will root out the nine Nandas. Upon the cessa-
> tion of the race of Nanda, the Mauryas will possess the earth, for Kau-
> tilya will place Chandragupta on the throne.[28]

The second Brahmanical testimony is the famous play Mudrārākṣasa ('the
signet ring of Rākshasa') by Viśākhadatta.[29] Some scholars believe that the text
was written during the reign of the Gupta dynasty (fourth to fifth century
AD), making Viśākhadatta a contemporary of the greatest Sanskrit dramatist,
Kālidāsa, while others argue for a later date (sixth to eighth century AD).[30]
The Mudrārākṣasa is quite unique in its genre, since it is the only known San-
skrit play which deals with an entirely historical subject. The story revolves
around the Brahmin statesman Cāṇakya, also called Kauṭilya or Viṣṇugupta,
who had overthrown the Nanda dynasty of Magadha after being offended by
the king. With his exceptional talent for intrigue he had killed the entire
Nanda family and placed his protégé Candragupta, an illegitimate son of the
Nanda king, on the throne.[31] With a combination of relentless *Realpolitik* and
superior intellect, Cāṇakya stamped out the last opposition to Candragupta's
rule and ensured that Rākshasa, once a loyal follower of the Nandas, became
minister of the new king.[32]

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[26] Smith (1904) 12; Thapar (1961) 9. Mookerji (1966) 9–11 also puts great faith in the ob-
jectivity of the *Purāṇas*. For a more critical approach, see De La Vallee Poussin (1930) 213;
Basham (1961) 291–2; R. Jain in McCrindle (1972) xliii, who calls the *Purāṇas* 'monumen-
tal records of glaring falsehoods'.

[27] Genealogical lists were drawn up by so-called *sūtas*: 'The *sūta*'s special duty as per-
ceived by good men of old was to preserve the genealogies of gods, rishis and most glori-
ous kings, and the traditions of great men, which are displayed by those who declare sa-
cred lore in the *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*.' Pargiter (1922) 15.

[28] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.24 (trans. Wilson). See also Winternitz (1909) 462.

[29] Viśākhadeva in some manuscripts of the play. Winternitz (1920) 210 n. 2.

[30] Winternitz (1920) 210; Dhruva (1923) x; Schwarz (1970) 269; Trautmann (1971) 41;
Varadpande (2005) 222–3; Singh (2008) 30.

[31] Dhuṇḍhirāja, an eighteenth-century commentator on the *Mudrārākṣasa*, adds that
Candragupta's grandmother was a handmaiden. See Schwarz (1970) 269.

[32] For a short overview of the plot, see Dutta (1912) 75ff.

The Buddhist tradition recounts a similar story, but with different details. The relevant texts still available are Pāli chronicles written in Sri Lanka in the first millennium AD, which draw upon older Buddhist stories and legends.[33] They relate the Buddhist history of Sri Lanka, starting in the mythical past and ending in the fourth century AD.[34] The Maurya dynasty was quite important for these chroniclers, since the third Maurya emperor Aśoka heavily patronised Buddhism and encouraged its spread to Sri Lanka.[35] Most important to us are the *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvaṃsa*, *Mahābodhivaṃsa*, and especially the *Mahāvaṃsa-Ṭīkā* or *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*, a commentary on the *Mahāvaṃsa*. The main storyline is more or less similar to the Brahmanical sources:

> Then did the Brahman Cāṇakka anoint a glorious youth, known by the name Candagutta, as king over all Jambudīpa,[36] born of a noble clan, the Moriyas, when, filled with bitter hate, he had slain the ninth (Nanda) Dhanananda.[37]

Again an embittered Cāṇakya ends the Nanda dynasty by placing Candragupta on the throne. It is interesting to note, however, that the Buddhist sources emphasise the Kṣatriya (warrior caste) background of the Mauryas, as opposed to the *Mudrārākṣasa* and Justin's above-cited statement (*Fuit hic humili quidem genere natus*).[38] Of all the chronicles the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* provides the most details: it further elaborates on Candragupta's early years, his

[33] For the older sources used by the chroniclers, see Trautmann (1971) 16–19; Mookerji (1966) 15. For general information on the Pāli chronicles, see Perera (1961); Von Hinüber (2000) 87ff.

[34] Von Hinüber (2000) 88; Trautmann (1971) 11–21. In this respect they can be compared to Greek local histories, which also started in the mythical past. See for instance Jacoby (1949) 105ff.

[35] According to the chronicles *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa*, the son of Aśoka himself introduced Buddhism on the island. See *Dīpavaṃsa* 12.1–15; *Mahāvaṃsa* 13. Also Perera (1961) 29.

[36] The Indian subcontinent as opposed to the island of Sri Lanka. See e.g. *Mahāvaṃsa* 14.12, where the Buddhist missionaries in Sri Lanka say that they came from the mainland.

[37] *Mahāvaṃsa* 5.21 (trans. W. Geiger).

[38] Bhargava (1935) 26ff; Prakash (1962) 119–21 and Mookerji (1966) 7–15 have argued ardently for Candragupta's high-caste background, mainly based on the Buddhist tradition. It is impossible, however, to penetrate the fog of legend that has descended on these matters. The Buddhist chroniclers had in any case good reasons for elevating the Mauryas to a Kṣatriya status, thus enhancing the prestige of the patrons of their faith. They even connected them to the Śākyas, the clan of the Buddha himself. See also Thapar (1961) 12; Schwarz (1970) 271; and especially Bussagli (1956) 231–4.

meeting with Cāṇakya, his predestination to become king, his education in Takṣaśilā[39] (Greek: Taxila) and the eventual overthrow of the Nandas.[40] Internal evidence indicates that the story in the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* is a combination of separately transmitted anecdotes.[41]

Stories of Candragupta's rise to power are also found in the Jain tradition. This tradition crystallised in the *Pariśiṣṭaparvan* ('the appendix') by Hemacandra, a twelfth-century Jain scholar-monk and polymath.[42] The work, actually a supplement to an epic poem by the same author, is a mix of legends and folk-tales which serve an explicit didactical goal. It recounts the edifying lives of the oldest Jain teachers and reinterprets history through Jain eyes.[43] The bulk of the story takes place during the rise of the Magadha kingdom and the subsequent installation of the Maurya dynasty, i.e. from about 480 to 220 BC.[44] Hemacandra's version of Candragupta's story is again similar to the Brahmanical and Buddhist legends: the inevitable Cāṇakya, here in the disguise of a Jain monk, takes the young Candragupta under his wing and helps him overthrow the wicked Nanda king.[45] The Jain story, however, has more to say on Candragupta's later rule. According to the story, the elderly Candragupta abdicated during a huge famine to become a Jain monk, after which he voluntarily fasted to death.[46] Keith is quite critical of these legends and warns against putting too much faith in them. Trautmann, however, remarks that the Jain version of the story is in many ways superior to the Pāli version: it is clearly more consistent and logical, which implies that the story was probably handed down as a whole until the final redaction by Hemacandra. Despite Hemacandra's late date, Trautmann further considers this version to be much older than the one from the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*.[47]

By now it has become clear that these Indian sources, despite their differences and contradictions in many details, have some important core elements

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[39] Takṣaśila was one of the most important cities in the Punjab and was according to Indian sources a famous intellectual centre. For these sources, see Prakash (1962) 95; Schwarz (1970) 278. In the early twentieth century Takṣaśila was excavated by Sir John Marshall; see Marshall (1918).

[40] Mookerji (1966) 15–16; Schwarz (1970) 277–8; Trautmann (1971) 11–15.

[41] Trautmann (1971) 46.

[42] The *Pariśiṣṭaparvan* is also known as the *Sthavirāvalīcaritra* or 'The Lives of the Jain Elders' and has recently been translated by R. C. C. Fynes under that name. For the different traditions which Hemacandra combined, see Trautmann (1971) 28–30.

[43] Keith (1961) 294; Fynes (1998) xxii–xxiv.

[44] Fynes (1998) xxviii.

[45] Hemacandra, *The Lives of the Jain Elders*, 8.194–326.

[46] Hemacandra, *The Lives of the Jain Elders*, 8.415–45.

[47] Keith (1961) 294 n. 2; Trautmann (1971) 25–9.

in common. Every time the political genius Cāṇakya takes the lead role: after being offended by the Nanda king (or having offended the king himself, as in the Jain version), Cāṇakya meets Candragupta, overthrows the Nanda dynasty (most sources agree that there were nine Nandas) and places his young protégé on the throne. This would imply that all the Indian testimonies discussed above stem from what Trautmann termed as 'a popular cycle of tales concerning Nanda, Cāṇakya and Candragupta, a *Cāṇakya-Candragupta-Kathā*', more or less comparable to the Alexander Romance.[48]

The question remains open whether the *Candragupta-Kathā* can be used to reconstruct the rise of the Mauryas. Many authors, especially Indians writing around the time of Indian independence, believed so (see below). They saw Cāṇakya as a historical figure, all the more since one of the most famous Sankrit works is traditionally connected with him: the *Arthaśāstra* ('science of politics'), a manual on ancient Indian political theory, statecraft, and military strategy which has been compared to the works of Machiavelli and Sun Tzu.[49] The author of the work calls himself Kauṭilya and Viṣṇugupta, the same names which also recur in the *Mudrārākṣasa*.[50] This would mean that the author of the *Arthaśāstra* is Cāṇakya himself, the minister of Candragupta and mastermind behind the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty.[51] This idea is reinforced by one of the last stanzas of the *Arthaśāstra*:

> This science has been composed by him, who in resentment, quickly regenerated the science and the weapon and the earth that was under control of the Nanda kings.[52]

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[48] Trautmann (1971) 10, 45–8; Wheatley (2014) 512. Still, the possibility of separate source traditions cannot be ruled out entirely.

[49] Boesche (2003) 37. For the discovery of the *Arthaśāstra* in the early twentieth century, see Singh (2008) 321.

[50] *Arthaśāstra* 1.1.19; 15.1.73. Viṣṇugupta would be his personal name and Kauṭilya a *gotra* (clan) name: Burrow (1968) 25–7. Some manuscripts, however, read Kauṭalya instead of Kauṭilya: Kangle (1972) II.5. While Kangle prefers the rendering Kauṭilya, Burrow (1968) 24–6 believes Kauṭalya to be correct. However, Scharfe (1993) 73 shows that both forms are essentially identical, Kauṭalya being influenced by the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects. I stick to Kauṭilya for the sake of convention. See also Schwarz (1970) 285 and Trautmann (1971) 67.

[51] *Kāmandakīya Nītisāra* 1.2–7 also connects Viṣṇugupta, author of the *Arthaśāstra*, with the mentor of Candragupta. The *Nītisāra* by *Kāmandaka* is a metrical abridgement of the *Arthaśāstra*.

[52] *Arthaśāstra* 15 (trans. R. P. Kangle).

In this capacity the *Arthaśāstra* has often been used as a direct source for the workings of the Maurya Empire.[53] Not without controversy, however: ever since its discovery in 1909 the *Arthaśāstra* has given rise to an enormous mass of scholarly literature, the date and authorship being the most fiercely contested points.[54] Only in 1971 did Trautmann attain some form of consensus with a statistical analysis of the text. Trautmann concluded that the *Arthaśāstra* has not one author but several, and that it was compiled in the second or third century AD.[55] While this makes clear that Cāṇakya, the prime minister of Candragupta, did not write the *Arthaśāstra*, some elements of the work may go back to the Maurya period. In any case we cannot be sure whether Cāṇakya, Kauṭilya, and Viṣṇugupta were the same person, or whether a historical Cāṇakya ever existed. The correspondence between the names in the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Mudrārākṣasa* is no argument, since both the author and his audience must have been familiar with the contents of the *Arthaśāstra*; in fact, the plots and ploys of Viśākhadatta's Cāṇakya are completely in line with the strategies described in the *Arthaśāstra*.[56] Viśākhadatta merely embedded his protagonist in an existing Cāṇakya storyline.

Many hypotheses have been proposed to clarify the Cāṇakya conundrum: Thapar, for instance, believes Cāṇakya/Kauṭalya, the historical prime minister of Candragupta, to be the original author of the *Arthaśāstra* and Viṣṇugupta the reviser of the text, while Burrow radically separates the semi-legendary Cāṇakya from Viṣṇugupta Kauṭalya, the true writer of the *Arthaśāstra*. The two would have been confounded into one 'archetype of political cleverness and cunning', an identification universally accepted by AD 800 at the latest.[57] Although it is impossible to fully unravel this tangle of vague evidence and conjecture, Burrow's hypothesis seems quite convincing since it fits in well with Trautmann's findings.[58]

All this does not imply that we should be overly critical about the story of Cāṇakya. Of course, the legends strongly exaggerate his genius and his importance, in order to conform to the 'brahminical dream of an inactive

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[53] See for instance Kosambi (1975) 199: 'the Mauryan administration before Aśoka is described in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭalya'.

[54] For an overview, see Thapar (1961) 218–25; Trautmann (1971) 1–9.

[55] Trautmann (1971); Kartunnen (1997) 13.

[56] Compare for instance Cāṇakya's heavy reliance on spies with chapter one of the *Arthaśāstra*.

[57] Thapar (1961) 223–5; Burrow (1968) 17–31.

[58] Trautmann (1971) 67 n. 1. Still, Scharfe (1993) 74–5 sees a discrepancy between Viṣṇugupta, a *vaiśha*-name, and Kauṭalya, who is always presented as a Brahmin. For him Kauṭalya is a figure of legend and Viṣṇugupta the later compiler of the text.

king who entrusts all business of state to a brahmin'.[59] Nevertheless, the layers of folklore and ideology which have been added throughout the ages do not necessarily prove the invention of Candragupta's prime minister out of thin air. At least his name Cāṇakya is not just a descriptive name; it rather stems from an existing *gotra*. Trautmann rightly remarks that doubting Cāṇakya's existence 'places a greater strain on the imagination: some other origin for the stories of him would have to be found'.[60] All the Indian sources and their concordances taken together, it is reasonable to assume that Cāṇakya is a historical figure and that he played a certain role in Candragupta's rise to power.

Here the discrepancy between Western and Indian texts is most striking. Cāṇakya's prominent role in the Indian tradition stands in shrill contrast to a complete silence in the Western sources, and, conversely, Alexander is no-where mentioned in the Indian texts. The first observation led Karttunen to consider a later origin of the Cāṇakya story.[61] We should be careful, however, to differentiate between 'more reliable' Western sources and 'fictional' Indian sources. A closer reading may reveal more analogies than first assumed. In Justin's account, Candragupta has to flee after offending king Nanda; this reminds us of Cāṇakya's quarrel with Dhana Nanda in the Indian sources. As Trautmann argues, this may show that Cāṇakya later replaced Candragupta in the stories or that Pompeius Trogus made one character out of two.[62] Further, Justin's description of the elephant which took Candragupta on its back is very similar to the elephant omen in Hemacandra's *Pariśiṣṭaparvan*, where not Candragupta but the first Nanda king is the protagonist.[63] Another indication that Graeco-Roman authors directly or indirectly borrowed from Indian sources is found in the accounts of Diodorus and Curtius. Both related that Agrammes or Xandrames (the Greek names of Dhana Nanda)[64] was the

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[59] Scharfe (1993) 76. See also Hemacandra, *The Lives of the Jain Elders*, 8.271–2: 'Candragupta said, "Master, this is what I thought: master is more intelligent than I am." Then Cāṇakya thought, "Surely he will always be obedient, and never stray from me, like a well-trained elephant."'

[60] Trautmann (1971) 67.

[61] Karttunen (1997) 260.

[62] Trautmann (1971) 65.

[63] Hemacandra, *The Lives of the Jain Elders*, 6.231–43; Just. 15.4; Stein (1929) 358; Trautmann (1971) 62. For Trogus' use of Indian sources, see Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 277, 286–7.

[64] According to Raychaudhuri (1923) 118, the name Agrammes is derived from Sanskrit *Augrasainya*, meaning 'son of Ugrasena'. Ugrasena is the name of the first Nanda in the *Mahābodhivaṃsa*. See Prakash (1962) 122; Mookerji (1966) 19–20; Schwarz (1970) 276. For a more detailed discussion on the names Agrammes and Xandrames, see Kartunnen (1999) 36; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 284.

son of a barber and a queen. This is quite similar to Hemacandra's first Nanda, who is portrayed as the son of a barber and a courtesan.[65]

Attempts have been made to identify the Indian sources of these Graeco-Roman authors. According to Matelli, the information of Diodorus and Curtius about the low origins of the Nandas was ultimately derived from Candragupta himself, who, as a pretender to the throne of Magadha, tried to discredit the Nandas when he was living in the Punjab at the time of Alexander's invasion.[66] Matelli further tried to trace the origin of Justin's story to the court of Candragupta's grandson Aśoka, arguing that the many ambiguities in Justin's text (Candragupta as both a liberator and an oppressor, sanctioned by divine omen but using a band of robbers to gain the throne) have to be understood in the context of Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism and the adoption of new moral guidelines.[67] Bussagli, on the other hand, believed that Deimachus, ambassador to the court of Candragupta's successor Bindusāra, had heard the information from Jain teachers.[68]

Attractive though they might be, these theories remain very hypothetical. Of course some elements may originate from Maurya propaganda, like the baseness of the Nanda dynasty. One of the Greek ambassadors at the Maurya court may well have passed them on. On the other hand, the legendary aspects in Justin indicate that his story was derived from popular folk-tales of the *Candragupta-Kathā*. It is possible that the development of legends around Candragupta already occurred during or shortly after his own lifetime, as happened with Alexander. In that case, again a Greek ambassador could have been responsible for the transmission of the legendary elements. If they developed in later centuries, however, it is harder to find out how they reached the West. According to Tarn, this was due to a Greek historiographer who had lived in India around 100 BC, where he had read Jain literature.[69] Another possibility is that the stories were transmitted in a trading context.[70] Yet is it likely that historians of Alexander and the diadochs con-

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[65] Diod. 17.93.2–3; Curt. 9.2; Trautmann (1971) 55.

[66] Matelli (1984) 60–4. See Stein (1929) 367 for a similar idea. However, the theory is based on the strong connection between Alexander and Candragupta, which was probably not more than a literary trope; see the discussion in chapter 3. Trautmann (1971) 56 believes that the Maurya propaganda was transmitted in post-Alexandrian times by one of the ambassadors. See also Karttunen (1997) 258 n. 28.

[67] Matelli (1984) 68–71.

[68] Bussagli (1956) 238. For more information on the supposed Indian sources of Western authors, see Schwarz (1970) 272–3; Karttunen (1997) 260; Wheatley (2014) 512.

[69] Tarn (1951) 45–50. Karttunen (1997) 260 argues, however, that there is no evidence of Indian literature being read in the Greek world, and that the story was orally transmitted to the West.

[70] Trade between the Hellenistic world and India gradually intensified, reaching a climax in Roman imperial times. We know that Graeco-Roman traders in India were inter-

sulted stories passed on by traders, when so much material from older historiographers was available?

We can conclude that the Western and the Indian sources represent two different traditions on the rise of Candragupta, despite some occasional borrowing between the two. In the Western tradition the rise of Candragupta is embedded in the story of Alexander's conquests and the struggles of the diadochs; Plutarch, and to a lesser extent Justin, forge a link between Alexander and Candragupta. In the Indian texts Candragupta is connected to the figure of Cāṇakya, the Machiavelli who holds all the strings.[71] It is, of course, logical that both Western and Indian authors recounted the story of Candragupta within their own cultural framework. This need not entail that both traditions should remain radically separated when researching this subject, yet too enthusiastic a combination can readily lead to quasi fictitious results. The next section elucidates how such combinations were used to construct modern narratives on the rise of the Maurya Empire.

2. Modern Narratives

Works of history tend to tell as much about the times of the authors as about the period they study. This is no less true for the historiography of the early Maurya Empire. Ever since Sir William Jones made his famous connection between Sandrokottos and Candragupta, a myriad of historians tried to write solid narratives about the first Indian empire. In the wake of the establishment of the *Royal Asiatic Society* mainly British historians and orientalists painstakingly pieced together various, often newly discovered, sources to reconstruct India's ancient past. In the first half of the twentieth century, during the Indian struggle for independence, Indian historians tried to reclaim their history, yet continued to build on the foundations of Western Indology. In what follows I will discuss some general tendencies in these historiograph-

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ested in Alexander's expedition: *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 41, in which the author believes that traces of Alexander's campaign can be found in the region around the trade port Barygaza (Bharuch). The *Periplus* is a handbook on trade in the Indian Ocean written by an anonymous captain or merchant in the years AD 40–70. See Casson (1989). The transmission of stories and information through trading contacts is not unattested. It is presumably because of trading contacts that Clement of Alexandria, living in one of the great commercial hubs of the Indo-Roman trade, learned the name of the Buddha (Clem. Al. *Strom*. 1.15.71). The geographer Ptolemy also derived a lot of his information on India from traders: Stückelberger-Grasshoff (2006) 16–20.

[71] See also Schwarz (1970) 273: 'Candragupta und die Errichtung des Maurya-Reiches … bringt man mit zwei Persönlichkeiten in Zusammenhang: in der westlichen Literatur mit Alexander, in der indischen mit Cāṇakya.'

ical currents, highlighting the most important authors who have written about this subject.

2.1 British Colonial Narratives

2.1.1 From 1770 to 1857

The history of British rule in India is perhaps the best illustration of the close relationship between power and knowledge.[72] From the moment the British *East India Company* gained a secure foothold in Bengal in the 1770s and was transformed from a trading company to a colonial government, the need arose to understand the culture and history of the Company's Indian subjects.[73] In the early nineteenth century, the Company was spending more on research than even the British government itself.[74] The thirst for knowledge about India was not always dictated by reasons of rule and administration: many British officials were genuinely fascinated by the highly developed civilisations they encountered. In the case of Charles Stuart, officer in the Company army and also known as 'Hindoo Stuart', the cultural boundaries between West and East seemed to be blurred. He bathed every morning in the Ganges and remarked that the Vedas were written when the ancestors of the British were still 'savages in the forests'.[75] Many other Company officials enthusiastically adopted Indian dress, attended the in later times so despised *nautch* dances and even married Indian women. Although the intimate relationship between English and Indian society should not be exaggerated, the late eighteenth century remains a remarkable period of cultural and social tolerance compared to later phases of British colonial rule.[76]

Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of the Company, is another classic example of this sympathetic attitude. He encouraged research into Indian languages and history, ordered the Hindu laws to be codified by a col-

[72] The connection between imperial power and knowledge was strongly emphasised by Edward Said in his influential work *Orientalism*. Others have raised cautions against too extreme manifestations of post-colonial theory: see Peers (2006) 38. Kejariwal (1988) argues against Said's view that scholars like William Jones were agents of nascent British imperialism and asserts that relations between the *Asiatic Society* and the *East India Company* were never really close. But see the modest criticism of Arnold (1989) 366.

[73] Briant (2012) 386–92 discusses the Company's thirst for knowledge and the perceived relevance of Nearchus' expedition for their own colonial endeavours.

[74] Peers (2006) 37.

[75] Dalrymple (2002) 42–4, 48.

[76] Especially Dalrymple (2002) stresses the far-reaching cultural interactions of that period. For a more cautionary note, see Marshall (2000). Also Peers (2006) 54–5.

lege of paṇḍits (Brahmin scholars) and was himself proficient in Urdu.[77] The interest in the Hindu laws entailed the need to understand Sanskrit; in this context Sir William Jones, who admired the high degree of civilisation the Hindus had attained, helped establish the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1784. A few years later he equated Candragupta with Sandrokottos and Pāṭaliputra with Palibothra, thereby providing a historical framework for the study of ancient Indian history.[78]

In the fifth and ninth volumes of the *Asiatic Researches*, Francis Wilford continued along these lines and wrote the first analyses of the story of Candragupta by combining both Western and Indian sources. As for the latter category, Wilford heavily relied upon the Brahmanical sources, mainly the *Purāṇas* and the *Mudrārākṣasa*, since other sources like the Pāli chronicles were not yet known.[79] Despite the (up to this day unacknowledged) groundbreaking character of Wilford's research, his combination of Greek and Indian testimonies led to some bizarre conclusions. In the *Mudrārākṣasa* he read that Candragupta and his prime minister Cāṇakya had turned against their former allies after the defeat of the Nandas; since the play mentions *Yavanas* (the Sanskrit word for Greeks)[80] among these allies, Wilford assumed that this was the reason why Seleucus crossed the Indus to fight Candragupta.[81] The idea of Greeks helping Candragupta to win the throne would have a long afterlife, despite the fact that the *Mudrārākṣasa* is a work of fiction and that mentioning *Yavanas*, together with the *Śakas* (Scythians) and the *Hūṇas* (Huns), was a literary convention to convey the idea of 'barbarian foreigners'.[82] In his article in the ninth volume of the Asiatic Researches, Wilford discussed the meeting between Alexander and Candragupta described by Plutarch. Wilford was convinced by Justin's account that Candragupta had to flee after offending Alexander. It should be noted, of course, that von Gutschmidt corrected the reading 'Alexandrum' to 'Nandrum' only decades later.[83] In any case, hardly a trace of ideological bias can be found in Wil-

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[77] Peers (2006) 33.

[78] Jones (1975); Kejariwal (1988) 34–75.

[79] Basham (1961) 266–7; Arnold (1989) 366.

[80] The word *Yavana* is originally derived from Persian *Yauna*, which designated Ionian Greeks. Gradually the meaning shifted to include anyone 'from the West'. For an overview, see Fauconnier (2012) 94–5.

[81] Wilford (1799) 285–6.

[82] For this convention, see Trautmann (1971) 65–6. A Graeco-Roman equivalent is Virg. *A.* 8.685–706, where Bactrians and Indians are listed among Cleopatra's forces.

[83] Wilford (1809) 95–100.

ford's reconstruction of the story.[84] The first goal for the orientalists of the *Asiatic Society* was to make sense of the Indian sources that lay before them, and to fix the so confusing chronology of ancient India.[85]

From the turn of the century onwards, British attitudes towards Indian society and culture began to change.[86] Evangelicalism and the giant leaps of industrialisation fuelled feelings of cultural and racial superiority. The growing intolerance and exclusivity of the British colonial administration replaced Warren Hastings' desire to reconcile 'the people of England to the nature of Hindustan' and the earlier admiration of India's ancient past made way for harsh criticism of the 'stagnancy' of India's present. Romantic notions about 'timeless' India evolved to the conviction that India was in need of real progress.[87] From the 1820s to the 1850s, large-scale administrative reforms tried to rapidly modernise Indian society by applying Western practices and beliefs.[88] A staunch advocate of the reforms was Thomas Macaulay, who introduced English education in India in the 1830s. Macaulay firmly believed in the superiority of the West: in his time, classical antiquity became gradually embedded in British imperial ideology. Macaulay saw the British as the true inheritors of the Roman Empire—they had bested Alexander by subjugating India, and they had surpassed Rome by the sheer extent of their world empire.[89] The ancient languages of India, on the other hand, could not evoke his interest at all: 'while others read Sanskrit with paṇḍits before breakfast, he read ancient Greek for pleasure at a prodigious rate.'[90] The desire to shield Greek and Latin from 'eastern impurities' was to become widespread in the nineteenth century.[91]

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[84] Wilford went to Benares to discuss with local paṇḍits the marriage-alliance between Chandragupta and Seleucus mentioned by Strabo and Appian. Wilford (1799) 286.

[85] See also the chronological endeavours of Jones (1790). Also Kejariwal (1988) 85–7.

[86] For the cultural impact of this change, see Dalrymple (2002) 46–54, who especially emphasises the role of Lord Wellesley, Governor-General from 1798 to 1805.

[87] For the conflicting views on the permanence of Indian society and on the superiority of Europe vis-à-vis India, see Briant (2012) 410–20, including an interesting discussion on how the example of Alexander was used in this debate.

[88] Philips (1961b) 220; Peers (2006) 51–5.

[89] Mantena (2010) 63–5. The architecture of British India, especially in Victorian times, also reflects the importance of classical antiquity for the colonial project, yet at the same time the eclecticism of many imperial buildings occluded explicit debts to Greece or Rome. See the discussion in Broughall (2014) 7–8.

[90] Killingley (2007) 129; Mairs (2006) 21.

[91] See for instance Friedrich August Wolf, who maintained that the Greeks and Romans had attained a higher intellectual culture than 'Egyptians, Hebrews, Persians and other nations from the Orient'. According to the philosopher Dugald Steward, Sanskrit was invented by Brahmins after the invasion of Alexander the Great. See Vasunia (2013) 16, 19.

These ideological and cultural shifts were reflected in the historiography of that time. In 1818 James Mill, utilitarian philosopher and writer, published his *History of British India*, actually the first comprehensive work on Indian history. The *History* is extremely hostile towards the Hindus—in complete opposition to the legacy of Sir William Jones, Mill argued ardently that almost all aspects of Hindu India, ancient as well as contemporary, were barbarous.[92] According to Mill, 'The Hindus, at the time of Alexander's invasion, were in a state of manners, society, and knowledge, exactly the same with that in which they were discovered by the nations of modern Europe.'[93] The only cure for the stagnancy and backwardness of Indian society was the application of European government and law based on utilitarian principles.[94] Mill had never been to India, spoke not a single word of its languages and was highly selective in his use of sources, yet despite all this the *History* became an instant classic. During almost the whole of the nineteenth century it formed the basis of British thought on India and the way to govern there. Until 1855 it was used as a text-book at Haileybury college, where the Company's civil servants were trained.[95]

Mill's views on Indian culture strongly influenced his perceptions of the Macedonian conquests and the rise of Candragupta. When reading the relevant passages of the *History*, it becomes clear that Mill was not really interested in the historical events themselves, but rather used some anecdotes to prove his ideas about the rudeness of Hindu civilisation. For instance, he adopted Jones' and Wilford's investigations into ancient Indian chronology to ridicule the huge time spans in the king lists of the *Purāṇas*.[96] As for Candragupta's story, he was especially interested in Plutarch's fragment and the idea that Alexander 'narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth'. Without deeper historical investigations Mill used this fragment merely to illustrate the cruel despotism of Hindu rulers.[97] Mill also focused on Candragupta's war with Seleucus Nicator: in his conviction that Indian armies were unvariably an undisciplined and chaotic mass 'without regard to rank and file', Mill contended that Seleucus was victorious in his war against Candragupta, but forced to make peace because of the threat of Antigonus in

[92] See especially Mill (1820) II.135–206, 424–60. Mill was more favourable towards the Islamic civilisations and made elaborate comparisons between them and the Hindus. See also Philips (1961b) 219–23.

[93] Mill (1820) I.146. Cf. Briant (2012) 530.

[94] For similar ideas about Europe's destiny to revive the stagnant Orient, see Briant (2012) 541–56.

[95] Philips, (1961b) 219–21, 226.

[96] Mill (1820) I.133–52.

[97] Mill (1820) II.171ff.

the West.[98] While Mill used the above-mentioned research of Wilford, he ignored the latter's assertion that Seleucus found Candragupta well prepared to withstand the Macedonian invasion. This clearly shows that Mill either had not read the classical sources in detail or that he did not want to use them. For Megasthenes relates that the Indians 'do not tolerate useless and undisciplined multitudes, and consequently observe good order'.[99] Mill rather embroidered on an old prejudice towards Indian military discipline which can be retraced to the writings of François Bernier, the French ambassador at the court of the Mughal Emperors in the seventeenth century.[100] To conclude, Mill's discussion was not a full-fledged study, but rather a crude selection of anecdotes to prove his theory about the state of civilisation in India. Ultimately Alexander and Candragupta are not really important in Mill's story—the idea of Alexander as the harbinger of Western civilisation was incorporated into the ideological discourse of British rule in India only later.

However, the growing intolerance did not hinder the accumulation of knowledge on India. Quite the contrary: Indology made huge strides forward during the political reforms of Thomas Macaulay and Lord Bentinck in the 1830s.[101] Enough researchers retained a sympathetic view of India's past, and, as Killingley remarks, feelings of aversion could be perfectly combined with an avid interest in Indian languages.[102] The discovery of the hitherto unknown Buddhist past of India was perhaps one of the greatest intellectual achievements of that period.[103] Meticulous analyses of Sanskrit texts and sources from Burma and Ceylon gradually revealed that Buddhism was founded on a historical person, and indeed originated from India. Archaeological sites such as Sānchi, Sārnāth, and Bodh Gaya came to be recognised as Buddhist holy places.[104] In 1837 the Pāli chronicle *Mahāvaṃsa* was edited

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[98] Mill (1820) II.184, 208–9. Cf. Scharfe (1971) 216–17 and Epplett (2007) 222–3, who believe that Candragupta became at least nominally a vassal of Seleucus.

[99] Str. 15.1.53 (= Megasth. *FGrHist* 715 F 32).

[100] For Bernier, the lack of discipline in the Mughal armies held true for all Asian armies in antiquity: 'I am no longer incredulous, or even astonished, when I read of the exploits of the ten thousand Greeks, or of the achievements of the fifty thousand Macedonians under Alexander, though opposed to six or seven hundred thousand men …' Bernier (1891) 55.

[101] Kejariwal (1988) 164–9.

[102] Killingley (2007) 138.

[103] The first scholars who systematically started to study the Buddhist history of India were the British civil servant Brian Houghton Hodgson and the French savant Eugène Burnouf. See Kejariwal (1988) 194–7.

[104] The excavations of Alexander Cunningham, perhaps the greatest Indologist after Prinsep, were of great importance here. See Kejariwal (1988) 200ff.

and translated by George Turnour, who helped James Prinsep deciphering strange inscriptions on rocks and pillars scattered over northern India.[105] The decipherment proved to be the most important landmark in nineteenth century oriental studies: the inscriptions turned out to be edicts of the Buddhist emperor Aśoka, written in Brāhmī script. Up to this day the edicts of Candragupta's grandson are the single most important source for the Maurya Empire, and even for ancient India in general.

The scholar-administrator Montstuart Elphinstone wrote the first comprehensive history of India which benefited from these new discoveries. Elphinstone can be seen in the tradition of Warren Hastings and William Jones: he combined an erudite understanding with a romantic, sympathetic attitude towards the country he devoted his life to. He felt uneasy about Mill's *History* with its 'cynical, sarcastical tone', and this was one of the reasons why he published his own history of Hindu and Islamic India in 1841. Yet Elphinstone was above all a modest man, and his cautious approach deprived him of the intensity needed to compete with the *History* of Mill.[106] On the subject of British India Elphinstone was not able to replace Mill, but his writings on ancient and medieval India testify to the huge progress Indology had made in his time. In his chapters on the Mauryas we can recognise the impact of Prinsep's decipherment of the edicts of Aśoka. This led Elphinstone to emphasise the importance of Aśoka, whom he sees as the ruler of a highly civilised Pan-Indian empire. Candragupta, on the other hand, plays only a secondary role as a trailblazer of Aśoka's later greatness. In Elphinstone's account Candragupta was not the mighty king of a vast empire, but a ruler beset by problems who only kept his throne due to the intrigues of Cāṇakya: 'The Hindu accounts represent Chandragupta as all but overwhelmed by foreign invasion, and indebted for his preservation to the arts of his minister more than to the force of his kingdom.' Citing the edition of the *Mudrārākṣasa* by Horace H. Wilson, who in turn referred to the researches of Wilford, Elphinstone stuck to the idea that the Macedonian invasion played a key role in the early stages of Candragupta's rule.[107]

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[105] When Prinsep deciphered the first edicts he read the name 'Devanampiya Piyadasi', but he was not able to identify this ruler. George Turnour found the key of the solution in the Buddhist chronicle *Dīpavaṃsa*, which links Piyadasi to emperor Aśoka. Kejariwal (1988) 207–8.

[106] Philips (1961b) 221–4.

[107] Elphinstone (1843) 400–2.

2.1.2 From 1857 to 1948

1857 was a turning point in the history of British India. In that year the great Indian Rebellion broke out, called by the British 'the Great Mutiny' and by many Indians 'the First War of Independence'. The revolt was violently crushed by the British, after which the *East India Company* was disbanded and the British government imposed direct rule on a large part of India. The acts of brutality and violence perpetrated by both sides strengthened racial prejudices and enmity. For many British the events proved that James Mill was right in his scornful evaluation of Indian civilisation. Many late nineteenth century works on Indian history were thus profoundly influenced by what had happened in 1857, and continued Mill's historiographical tradition rather than Elphinstone's.[108]

Between the 1870s and the early 1900s, British imperialism reached its zenith—Queen Victoria was crowned Empress of India and the Indian Civil Service was at the height of its power.[109] At this time we also perceive shifts in the ideological foundations of the empire, for direct rule entailed a pressing need for legitimation. First, the legacy of classical antiquity became a fundamental cornerstone of rule. Vasunia, using insights of Derrida and Bhabha, argues that the Graeco-Roman past met the Europeans' *demand for narrative*, an overarching story which had to explain the colonial presence in India.[110] However, Vasunia's focus on poststructuralist theory perhaps obscures what is most important here: the demand for legitimation and internal cohesion of the empire. Since the British elite was raised with the Graeco-Roman classics, it was a logical course to mine classical antiquity for examples which proved the superiority of what was perceived as the Western civilisation—after all a long-lasting humanist and Enlightenment tradition.[111]

[108] Philips (1961b) 225. See for example J. T. Wheeler's statement that the Mutiny was 'a revelation of Asiatic nature' which proved the unreadiness of India for any type of representative government. Stokes (1961) 396. For a fascinating account of the 1857 uprising, see Dalrymple (2006).

[109] Peers (2006) 74–5.

[110] Vasunia (2013) 27–8. Vasunia remarks, however, that classical antiquity was not solely used for hegemonic and authoritarian reasons, since Indian freedom fighters also quoted from Greek and Latin sources: 'The Greeks and Romans allowed all those involved with colonial India to find their own way in an age of empire.' For instance, Mohandās Gāndhī wrote his Hind Swarāj in the manner of a Platonic dialogue. See also Vasunia (2003) 93–5 for the influence of Classics on the Indian Civil Service. Other works on Graeco-Roman antiquity and British imperialism are, for instance, Goff (2005); Bradley (2010); Hagerman (2013).

[111] See for instance Briant (2012) 513–21, 559–66. Also Schein (2008).

Alexander the Great, the first 'Westerner' to invade India, was thus seen by many British as a precursor of their own imperial ambitions.[112] However, there was no absolute consensus about Alexander's exemplary role. On the one hand, many still perceived Alexander as sketched by Montesquieu in his *Esprit des lois*: a ruler with a clear plan and long vision, who strived to unlock trade routes between East and West in order to enhance his empire's unity.[113] Vasunia argued, conversely, that others were more inclined to turn to the Roman Empire for guidance, since Alexander would have lacked a long-term strategic plan and an effective colonial administration.[114] Yet whatever view one may have had about Alexander's goals and personality, his invasion of India was clearly an inspiring event for the administrators, historians, geographers, and soldiers of British India. At the end of the nineteenth century, Alexander was increasingly regarded as a 'prototype of a grand colonial hero', a discoverer who for the first time in history had opened up Asia for Western progress and civilisation.[115] In the period when the European colonial undertaking was reaching its climax, this aspect of Alexander was particularly relevant. The foundation of Crown Rule and consequent ideological issues thus resulted in a growing fascination for Alexander in the historiography of ancient India.

A second shift was the rapid increase in popularity of misguided scientific racial theories. The conviction of belonging to a superior culture and race, rooted in the 'highest of civilisations' in the ancient world, turned out to be an important facet of the European upper-class ideology of the nineteenth century.[116] In a context of blurred boundaries between ideology, ethnography, and administration, the British Raj (a common term for British rule in India after 1858) became an 'empire of documentation', wishing to classify the peoples of India in strict ethnographical and religious categories.[117] An important landmark in colonial ethnography was Herbert H. Risley's *People of India*, published in 1908. Its data were largely derived from Risley's report of the 1901 census as well as earlier ethnographic surveys he coordinated in the second half of the 1880s. Using the method of anthropometry, Risley de-

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[112] See for instance Wheeler (1900) 420, who explicitly saw the British as successors of Alexander. For a detailed study of the reception of Alexander in the period of British India, see Vasunia (2013) 33–115; Hagerman (2009). Similarly, colonising France after 1870 saw Alexander as a precursor of French rule in North Africa: Briant (1979). The imperialistic appropriation of Alexander can be traced back to the eighteenth century: Briant (2012).

[113] Briant (2003) 80; (2012) 345–85.

[114] Vasunia (2013) 35.

[115] Briant (1979) 286.

[116] An interesting essay on the Greeks in Victorian racial theory is Challis (2010).

[117] Peers (2006) 76.

veloped a racial classification of the people of India: 'Dravidians' being the most primitive, 'Indo-Aryans' the most advanced. According to Risley, the Indo-Aryan upper castes were, in their race and religion, close to the Europeans, yet they lacked a 'Latin genius' to attain true superiority.[118] The British Empire, as heir to the Roman Empire, clearly did not lack it. 'Ex Occidente Imperium', Risley states, 'The genius of Empire in India has come to her from the West; and can be maintained only by constant infusions of fresh blood from the same source.'[119]

These two ideological tendencies, the reverence for classical antiquity and the belief in scientific racism, are clearly reflected in the historical works of the so-called administrator-historians of that period. These historians pondered on the divergence between the stagnancy of Indian society and the high development of European civilisation. Sanskrit studies and comparative religious investigations like those of the great German orientalist Max Müller had shown that Europe and India shared a common Aryan origin, so how could this divergence be explained?[120] For James T. Wheeler the answer was clear: the 'old Roman sentiment of devotion to the common weal, which is to be found amongst all Aryan nations, had succumbed under Brahmanical oppression.'[121] Wheeler similarly contrasts the genius of Graeco-Roman civilisation to Indian society when discussing the conquests of Alexander and the rise of Candragupta. For Wheeler, Alexander was a hero and demi-god, a 'statesman of the true Aryan type'; his phalanx 'an embodiment of union and strength; a development of that political cohesion amongst Europeans, which Asiatics can never understand'.[122] Candragupta, on the other hand, he saw as an insolent adventurer who only gained the throne of Magadha through sheer luck. Wheeler used the accounts of Plutarch and Justin to confront the two characters:

> Sandrokottos stated that Alexander could easily conquer the kingdom on the Ganges; but at the same time the Indian exile had so exasperated the great Macedonian by his impertinence, that he only saved his life by a speedy retreat from the Punjab. This impertinence probably consisted in exaggerated notions of his own importance, and a pertinacious assertion of his own claims to the throne of Agrammes, which would be irritating to a conqueror who respected no claim but that of the sword. After Alexander left the Punjab, Sandrokottos experienced

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[118] Risley (1915) 245.

[119] Risley (1915) 53.

[120] Stokes (1961) 392–3.

[121] Quoted in Stokes (1961) 395.

[122] Wheeler (1874) 153.

a strange run of good fortune. By the aid of banditti he captured the city of Pataliputra …[123]

Here Wheeler shows himself to be unaware of von Gutschmidt's correction, and uses the anecdote to fabricate an ideologically charged narrative. A few pages later he is equally scornful about Candragupta's rule. He would have been an 'irresponsible and all-powerful despot, bearing a closer resemblance to a Tartar monarch', and his palace at Pāṭaliputra 'more of a Tartar than an Aryan type'.[124] It is revealing that Wheeler consistently stuck to Greek names like Sandrokottos and Agrammes instead of using the Indian original forms. This has to do with his admiration for 'western accuracy' and his utter disregard of Indian sources: he does not use the latter at all in his narrative, only remarking at the end of his book that they may be 'cast aside as worthless'.[125] So Cāṇakya is mentioned nowhere, while Alexander gets more attention than even Candragupta himself.

For all this haughty rhetoric, India did not submit passively to the rule of the Civil Service. By the late nineteenth century an Indian middle class had come into being, and in 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded—the beginning of an evolution which would end in 1947 when India declared its independence. Intellectuals from the new middle class were often passionately interested in Indian history, which they would gradually begin to claim as their own. This audience provoked a renewed interest in histories which dealt sympathetically with the Indian ancient past. New editions of Elphinstone's work appeared, but new archaeological, numismatic, and linguistic discoveries had rendered it completely out of date. In 1904, at the start of a slow transition towards Indian self-government, the retired civil servant Vincent A. Smith published his *Early History of India*, by some considered the first general and authoritative history of early India in English.[126] Due to its success, new editions appeared in 1908 and 1914.

Smith's narrative is, in a way, a curious confluence of the two main currents in British historiography on India. In general, Smith deals rather sympathetically with India's ancient past. This is especially clear in his discussion of the early Maurya Empire. He ranks Candragupta 'among the greatest and most successful kings known to history', describes his treaty with Seleucus as a 'humiliating peace' for the latter, admiringly calls his palace a place of

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[123] Wheeler, (1874) 176.

[124] Wheeler (1874) 181, 184.

[125] Wheeler (1874) 488. Throughout the nineteenth century, Graeco-Roman sources on India were generally regarded as usable and valuable troves of knowledge on contemporary India, also because many British saw Hindu society as essentially stagnant and unchanging. See Hagerman (2009) 354ff.

[126] Philips (1961b) 227–8.

'splendour and magnificence', and lauds the high degree of civilisation of Candragupta's India. Most important for our discussion, Smith rejects the idea that all good things in ancient India originated in Hellenism and denies that Alexander's conquest had any influence on the foundation of the Maurya Empire.[127] He would not have agreed at all with Risley's concept of 'Ex Occidente Imperium':

> The Maurya empire was not, as some writers fancy that it was, in any way the result of Alexander's splendid but transitory raid. The nineteen months which he spent in India were consumed in devastating warfare, and his death rendered fruitless all his grand constructive plans. Chandragupta did not need Alexander's example to teach him what empire meant.[128]

Nevertheless, reading the *Early History of India* reveals that Smith himself remained firmly anchored in the classical tradition. Smith was, in the words of Basham, 'a hero-worshipper' who admired strong and capable rulers like Candragupta, Aśoka, and Samudra Gupta, but above all Alexander: 66 pages out of 472 were devoted to the Macedonian's Indian expedition.[129] Smith's lengthy discussion of the Maurya state—in fact, the most lengthy up to that date—proves his sympathy and admiration for the Indian dynasty, but at the same time the bulk of his information is derived from the fragments of Megasthenes, whose information he uncritically transforms to a fanciful narrative. Indian sources are mainly restricted to the footnotes. Only the *Arthaśāstra*, which was discovered in 1904, received a separate discussion in the later editions of the *Early History*.

Basham remarks that Smith had a strange and rather ambiguous fascination with absolute power. His admiration for powerful Indian rulers like Candragupta is but one side of the coin: he also displayed a kind of horror of what he saw as 'Oriental Despotism', 'which seems to imply a special brand of despotism, less efficient, if not more oppressive, than the despotism of the West'.[130] We can feel Smith's ambiguity when he writes that Candragupta's court was maintained with 'barbaric and luxurious ostentation'—a slight reminder of the 'Tartar palace' in Wheeler's narrative.[131] Similarly, Smith lauds the high degree of efficiency the Maurya army had attained, but adds

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[127] Basham (1961) 269.

[128] Smith (1914) 145.

[129] Basham (1961) 269–70.

[130] Basham (1961) 270.

[131] Smith (1914) 122.

casually 'as measured by an Oriental standard'.[132] In the later chapters of the book, Smith reveals himself almost outright imperialistic when discussing the political chaos after the death of King Harṣa in AD 647. In a climate where British rule in India was increasingly challenged, the tradition of Mill retained its relevance:

> The three following chapters … may perhaps serve to give the reader a notion of what India always has been when released from the control of a supreme authority, and what she would be again, if the hand of the benevolent despotism which now holds her in its iron grasp should be withdrawn.[133]

Four years after the publication of the third edition of *The Early History* (1914), the 'iron grasp' of British imperial rule was losing its hold. The Great War had reduced Europe to ruins and driven its nations to the point of bankruptcy. Since India had contributed enormously to the war effort of the British Empire, the Indian National Congress demanded concessions. In this period Mohandās Gāndhī became the leader of the freedom movement, striving for *swaraj* or self-rule, while the British government anxiously tried to reinforce its rule in the subcontinent. In the intellectual domain, British historiography in the later decades of the Raj likewise tried to hold on to old certainties which were, in reality, becoming more and more redundant. While the independence movement gained momentum, British historians adhered more explicitly than ever to the concept of *Ex Occidente Imperium*, arguing that Alexander the Great was the main cause behind the foundation of the Maurya Empire. In this period we also see a growing popularity of the Plutarchian idea of the 'brotherhood of men' as the ultimate goal of Alexander.[134] Maybe this idea consciously or unconsciously reminded the authors of their own dreams and doubts about the destiny of the waning British Empire.[135]

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[132] Smith (1914) 124.

[133] Smith (1914) 358.

[134] This idea was explicitly expounded for the first time by Tarn (1933), but traces of it go back to the works of Droysen, one of the most famous nineteenth century scholars of Alexander, and even to Montesquieu: Vasunia (2013) 101; Briant (2012) 350–4. See Badian (1958) for an early criticism of Tarn. For an overview of the debate, see Seibert (1990) 187–92; Bosworth (1998) 1–5.

[135] Indeed Tarn, in his classic monograph on the Greeks in Bactria and India, saw a similarity between antiquity and the situation in the 1930s: 'The most important fact in the history of the Greek East is that something not very unlike the modern struggle between nationalism and co-operation was fought out two thousand years ago under the shadow of the Hindu Kush': Tarn (1951) 412; also Vasunia (2013) 35: 'What could Alexander's theories of fusion contribute to debates about the assimilation of natives to British ideas and values?'

Shortly after the war, the first volume of the *Cambridge History of India* was published. This first volume, edited by the Sanskritist Edward J. Rapson, is in a way a stranger in the whole work: it describes India in a sympathetic way, whereas the other volumes are, in the tradition of Mill, often contemptuous. According to Philips, the first volume, unlike the others, 'withstands the impact of the Act of Independence of 1947'.[136] Yet despite this general benign attitude, some parts of the volume clearly mirror prevalent views on the relationship between West and East. The fifteenth chapter, written by Edwyn R. Bevan, deals with the invasion of Alexander. Bevan evokes the invasion as a kind of climax in the history of India, beautifully narrating it through the eyes of Indian rājas who in terror witnessed the advance of the Macedonian army:

> In 334 BC and the following years the struggle between Persia and the Yavanas took a turn which must have made talk even in the palaces and bazaars of the Punjab. The Indian princes learnt that a Yavana king had arisen in the utmost West strong enough to drive the Great King from his throne.[137]

Throughout the narrative, the reader gets the impression that this was no mere raid, but rather a clash of civilisations. Alexander and his soldiers—the latter came in fact from many different cultures and regions—Bevan consistently denotes as 'Europeans', while his Indian opponents are 'the natives'. At the same time he emphatically denies that resistance to Alexander had something to do with nationalism. Porus did not fight for India, he remarks, but only for his own kingdom.[138] Of course Bevan is right in his analysis—nationalism and concepts of a unified India did not exist in the fourth century BC—but his strong emphasis has to be understood in the context of rising Indian nationalism in the 1920s. Other parts clearly show that the British Raj was manifestly in Bevan's mind when he was describing Alexander's campaign:

> The tough highlander of the Balkans or of Crete climbed and skirmished with bow and javelin in 327 BC where the Scottish highlander was to climb and skirmish with rifle and bayonet two thousand two hundred years later.[139]

[136] Philips (1961b) 229.

[137] Bevan (1922) 346–7.

[138] Bevan (1922) 360.

[139] Bevan (1922) 352.

Bevan dwells long on the military exploits of the Macedonians and the bru-
tality of the war, but essentially he sees Alexander as an idealist, 'an Emperor
of the World beneath whom all mankind was to be leveled and made one'.
Had Alexander lived longer, Bevan thinks that an intricate fusion between
the Indian and Greek civilisations could have happened, for the East is in his
view not impervious at all to the 'rationalistic culture of ancient Greece and
modern Europe'.[140] Although Alexander's dream came to nothing, Bevan
still sees Alexander's invasion as a landmark in the history of India, for his
conquests would have made the rise of Candragupta possible:

> The European invasion of India was an event of too great magnitude
> not to have far-reaching consequences … it swept away internal barri-
> ers which prevented the unification of the lands concerned. The con-
> federacies of free tribes, which had maintained their proud isolation
> from other political systems, were left utterly broken. Smaller princi-
> palities were swallowed up in a realm such as that given by Alexander
> to the Paurava. This, no doubt, made it a simpler matter for the Mau-
> rya king a few years later to take these countries into his great Indian
> empire.[141]

The next chapter of the work, written by George MacDonald, deals with the
Hellenistic kingdoms in Bactria and India after Alexander's death. Macdon-
ald further specifies the impact of Alexander on the early Maurya Empire:
never before was Greek influence so explicitly claimed. MacDonald departs
from Plutarch's alleged meeting between Alexander and Candragupta; when
the latter founded his empire, 'he put into practice some of the lessons which
Alexander's success was calculated to teach'. Without referring to any source,
MacDonald continues that Candragupta 'certainly seems to have adopted
western methods in the training and discipline of his local levies'. This last
statement betrays traces of old ideas about Western military superiority. And
just like Wilford more than 100 years before, he considers the possibility of
Greeks fighting for Candragupta in the struggle against the Nandas. Later,
when discussing the war between Seleucus and Candragupta, MacDonald
has to acknowledge that the peace settlement was favourable to the Indian
king, but he cannot bring himself to ascribe defeat to Seleucus. Like Mill,
MacDonald alleges that the threat from Antigonus was the reason why India
fell to Candragupta.[142]

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[140] Bevan (1922) 359, 384.

[141] Bevan (1922) 385. See also Bevan (1902) 295–7 for an even stronger statement about
Alexander's influence on the early Maurya Empire.

[142] MacDonald (1922) 429–32.

The chapter dealing with Candragupta himself, written by Frederick W. Thomas, is less Eurocentric. In his short discussion of Candragupta's early years, Thomas uses classical sources but also the *Purāṇas*, the Pāli chronicles and especially the *Mudrārākṣasa*. Cāṇakya is a protagonist in his narrative and using von Gutschmidt's emendation he combines Justin and the Indian sources to relate the overthrow of the Nandas. Thomas is far less apologetic towards Seleucus than MacDonald, and he nuances the political impact of Alexander's invasion. At the same time he believes that it provided the right conditions for Candragupta's coup. Again using the *Yavanas* of the *Mudrārākṣasa*, he maintains the idea that Greeks aided Candragupta, and even considers an intervention of Alexander's commander Eudamus.[143]

The 1940s saw British India entering its final stage. In 1942, when the Second World War was raging, the INC launched the *Quit India* campaign, which was violently crushed by the British authorities. Mohandas Gāndhī, Jawāharlāl Nehrū, Vallabhbhāī Patel, and other leaders of the independence movement were all imprisoned. It had become clear, however, that India could not remain British in the long run, and preparations for leaving the colony began. Two years after the end of the war, the Raj ceased to exist, and India and Pakistan became independent republics.

In this very period, two important classicists, William W. Tarn and Charles A. Robinson, praised Alexander's campaigns in Asia to the skies. Their works are a climax in the modern hero-worship of Alexander, whose campaigns they perceive as 'the meeting of East and West in World Government and Brotherhood'. And again it is the West which introduces empire in India:

> Whatever Asia did or did not get from him, she *felt* him as she has 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 … he affected Indian history for centuries; for Candragupta saw him and deduced the possibility of realizing 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.[144]

Plutarch remains the key source behind this statement. Robinson, too, maintained that Candragupta conceived the idea of a united nation after seeing Alexander, and in his view Alexander even inspired the unification of China

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[143] Thomas (1922) 467–73.

[144] Tarn (1948) 142–3. Badian (1971) 45 connected Tarn's Alexander to 'enlightened Victorian imperialism' and the British 'civilising mission'. See also Vasunia (2013) 99ff.

under the Han dynasty.[145] Risley's imperialistic idea paradoxically reached its apogee when from the Red Fort in Delhi, Jawāharlāl Nehrū declared Indian independence.

To conclude, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century British interpretations of Candragupta's rise to power are closely connected to the history of British Raj. The many sensational discoveries in the field of Indology in this period greatly changed the narratives, but shifts in the nature of British rule had an impact just as profound. The relatively benign rule of Warren Hastings allowed for a sympathetic study of Indian sources, initiated by Sir William Jones. The early orientalists, in their fascination for the opening world of Sanskrit literature, heavily relied on the Sanskrit *Purāṇas* and *Mudrārākṣasa* for reconstructing Candragupta's story. The Greeks also played an important part in their narratives, but they generally refrained from ideological interpretations or choosing a side between West and East. This tradition was later continued by Elphinstone. On the other hand, the contemptuous attitude of Mill asserted Western superiority. In this tradition, a negative image of Candragupta persisted: for Mill, the Indian king was essentially an oriental despot. In the second half of the nineteenth century scientific racism only reinforced British disdain. Wheeler saw him as a 'Tartar monarch', as opposed to the 'Aryan' Alexander. In Smith's *Early History* the racial interpretation disappeared, but the fixation on despotism remained.

In general, the works which express contempt rely more heavily on Western classical sources. In some cases the Indian sources are not used at all. As the nineteenth century progressed, the focus on classical sources and Western protagonists even increased. Cāṇakya is no match for Alexander, whose conquests in India attracted more attention as British imperialism reached its climax. Indian history was incorporated in the overarching narrative of the empire, in which classical antiquity was a main ideological cornerstone. Alexander's invasion, essentially a chronological anchor for the early orientalists, had now become a pivotal point in the history of Indian civilisation. Plutarch's fragment was the key source to claim that Alexander introduced the idea of empire in the subcontinent, and the British Empire was destined to be the last link in a chain stretching back to the moment when the Macedonian conqueror crossed the Hindu Kush.

2.2 Indian Nationalist Narratives

As English education spread through nineteenth century India, so did Western political concepts and ideas. By the end of the century a national consciousness was growing among the Indian middle and upper classes. Howev-

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[145] Robinson (1949) 173, 197.

er, Indian intellectuals of that period were raised with British handbooks. The history of their country was thus profoundly influenced by British bias and prejudices, mainly because of the influence of the derogatory tradition of Mill. The need arose to claim India's history for their own, and to vindicate it from British contempt and belittlement. Indian nationalist historiography gained an important impetus during the freedom struggle of the early twentieth century, an impetus which was carried beyond the declaration of independence in 1947. Clearly defining Indian nationalist historiography is no easy task, since the term comprises many different approaches, tendencies, and ideologies. As Majumdar argues, the term can be used as an umbrella term for counter-narratives against British assumptions about Indian history. The resentment which many Indians felt often led to partiality, a lack of perspective and detachment, and sometimes to extravagantly biased claims, yet the term does not need to imply that the authors were only concerned about the glorification of India's past. In Majumdar's words, 'a nationalist historian is not, therefore, necessarily a propagandist or a charlatan'.[146]

Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that there was often an intimate connection between historiography and nationalistic politics. Not only were most Indian historians of the early twentieth century involved in the independence movement, revisionist narratives were themselves 'an act of cultural resistance to British rule'. The ancient past had an important role to play: it was perceived as a glorious period in Indian history and a perfect counterweight to the British yoke of the present.[147] Especially the Maurya Empire was of great importance to the unfolding national consciousness and the ideology of the independence movement. The Mauryas succeeded in uniting most of the Indian subcontinent in one large political entity, the only indigenous empire to do so in all Indian history. While British historians and administrators generally stressed the fragmentary character of India and its lack of a national spirit—according to Winston Churchill, India had no more claim to being considered a country than the equator—Indian nationalists referred to Maurya India to prove that political unity had already existed in the past and that it could be achieved once more. Further, the Maurya rulers patronised the great indigenous religions of India (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain), thus proving the fundamental cultural unity of the country.[148] Especially Aśoka held a great attraction, since his creed of non-violence, public welfare, and religious tolerance reflected the ideals of freedom fighters like Gāndhī and Nehrū. It is, consequently, no surprise that Aśoka's *dharmacakra* ('the wheel of law') was chosen as the central symbol for the Indian flag and his lion capital as the official emblem of the Indian republic.

[146] Majumdar (1961) 416–17.

[147] Majumdar (1961) 417; Thapar (2002) 16–17; Schwarz (1997) 2; Mairs (2006) 21.

[148] Fussman (1982) 621.

Of course there was also an avid interest in Candragupta, who was not only the founder of the empire but also a liberator from foreign rule.[149] Generally unknown at that time, the nationalistic interpretation of Candragupta had an unexpected forerunner: in the 1780 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, a French encyclopedia about European commerce in the East, Denis Diderot put Candragupta ('le libérateur de sa patrie') on the stage as the real hero instead of Alexander.[150] The discovery of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* in 1904 only heightened the significance of the early Maurya period for the burgeoning nationalist movement. Now India had its own Machiavelli, a political genius who could prove that the ancient Indians were more than otherworldly spiritualists.[151]

Yet despite the growing popularity of counter-narratives, the Indian intelligentsia remained to a large extent anchored in a European framework. Guha argued that European ideas about progress, rationalism, and evolution had a profound impact on Indian nationalist thought: 'Indian historians often borrowed Western patterns wholesale, even occasionally concurring that modern Indian civilization was immature and that its progress was inextricably linked to its increasing Westernization.'[152] In what follows I will discuss some Indian nationalist interpretations of Alexander and the rise of Candragupta which reveal this essential tension between Indian revisionism and endurance of European patterns.[153]

One of the most important Indian historical works of the early twentieth century is *The Political History of Ancient India* by Hemacandra Raychaudhuri, first published in 1923. It had a huge impact, going through six editions and largely replacing Smith's *Early History* as a textbook in colleges and universities.[154] Because of its cautious and restrained approach and its nuanced and in-depth discussions, the *Political History* does not deserve the unilateral designation of 'nationalist historiography'. The work contains but few value judgements, yet occasionally nationalist feelings can be discerned. For Ray-

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[149] For a comprehensive list of popular works about Candragupta between 1901 and 1947, see Vasunia (2013) 112 n. 120.

[150] Raynal (1780) I.484–5. While published by Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, the chapter in question is almost certainly written by Diderot. See Briant (2012) 383–5, who also remarks that an earlier positive evaluation of Candragupta was written by abbé Roubaud in 1770.

[151] See for instance Nehru (2010) 141ff, 123–4 and especially the quotation of A. S. P. Ayyar in Vasunia (2013) 96.

[152] Discussed in Schwarz (1997) 2–4.

[153] For nationalist narratives on Alexander other than those discussed below, see Karttunen (1997) 23, e.g. the idea that Porus defeated Alexander and not the other way around. Also Vasunia (2013) 91ff, 112–15.

[154] Majumdar (1961) 284.

chaudhuri, Alexander's Indian campaign was essentially a foreign invasion, an existential threat to Indian civilisation as the Muslim conquests were to Christian Europe: 'The question whether India was, or was not, to be Hellenized awaited decision.'[155] Raychaudhuri emphasises, sometimes admiringly, the staunch resistance of the Indians who were a different opponent from the 'effete troops of Persia'.[156] Although Alexander crushed all opposition, eventually all his conquests in the subcontinent were 'reversed' by Candragupta. Raychaudhuri uses Plutarch to argue that both men had met and he retains the incorrect reading 'Alexandrum' in his discussion of Justin's account. Interestingly, he interprets the idea that Candragupta had to flee from Alexander as a proof of the tyrannical character of the Macedonian king—a far cry from James T. Wheeler! Although Candragupta is clearly the protagonist in Raychaudhuri's discussion, the statesman Cāṇakya gets credit as well for the establishment of the Maurya Empire. In contrast to later authors, however, Raychaudhuri keeps Greek and Indian sources fairly separate. Cāṇakya is not mentioned in Candragupta's dealings with the Macedonians, but is only credited with the overthrow of the Nandas. Candragupta is the only connection between the two traditions: according to Raychaudhuri, Candragupta saw both Alexander and the Nanda king as tyrants whom he had to get rid of.[157]

To conclude, Raychaudhuri's Candragupta is a great man who liberated India from tyranny and foreign domination. Yet despite this wholly different perspective, Raychaudhuri worked within the same framework as the British historians before him. Alexander's campaign may have been valued differently; it remained a pivotal point which made a united Indian empire possible:

> Alexander's invasion produced one indirect result. It helped the cause of Indian unity by destroying the power of the petty states of northwest India … If Ugrasena-Mahapadma[158] was the precursor of Chandragupta Maurya in the east, Alexander was the forerunner of that emperor in the north-west.[159]

As the years progressed, tensions between rulers and ruled increased. The cry for freedom from foreign rule manifestly entered Indian historical writing on Candragupta. In this context, Raychaudhuri's restraint made way for a

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[155] Raychaudhuri (1923) 137.

[156] Raychaudhuri (1923) 135.

[157] Raychaudhuri (1923) 137–40.

[158] The first Nanda king. See n. 64.

[159] Raychaudhuri (1923) 136.

more explicit nationalistic appropriation of the ancient past. In 1935, Purushottam L. Bhargava wrote one of the first studies solely centred on Candragupta, although the work is rather a eulogy than a critical historical investigation. Here, Candragupta is nothing less than a true hero, 'one of the most lustrous stars in the firmament of monarchy'.[160] He felt the need to elevate him above great rulers of other cultures, like Napoleon, Alexander, and Akbar. For Bhargava there were three factors behind the foundation of the Maurya Empire: the previous conquests of Magadha, the unpopularity of the Nandas and the invasion of Alexander, and finally the genius of Candragupta. Instead of underlining the first reason, which is far more structural than the other two, Bhargava sticks to his hero-worshipping and asserts that Candragupta's genius was the main cause of the rise of the 'glorious Maurya Empire'.[161] Above all, he was the liberator of India:

> Chandragupta, moreover, was, in a real sense, one of those few men who have changed the destinies of nations. But for him, India, with her numerous warring rulers, would have surely fallen a prey to the ambition of the successors of Alexander. He was solely responsible for the redemption of India.[162]

In the early 1940s, during the last decade of the British Raj, Rādhakumud Mookerji further elaborated on Bhargava's ideas. Mookerji was a historian with strong nationalistic convictions. Earlier he had written *The Fundamental Unity of India*, in which he stressed the ideal of an all-Indian empire to justify the nationalists' present demands.[163] In *Chandragupta Maurya and his Times* he sketched a story which must have been highly inspiring for the independence movement.

> He is the first Indian king who extended his rule over an extended India, an India greater than even British India … Earlier in his career, he was again the first Indian leader who had to confront the distressing consequences of a European and foreign invasion of his country, the conditions of national depression and disorganization to which it was exposed, and then to achieve the unique distinction of recovering his country's freedom from the yoke of Greek rule.[164]

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[160] Bhargava (1935) 101.

[161] Bhargava (1935) 24–5.

[162] Bhargava (1935) 100.

[163] Majumdar (1961) 422. Also Basham (1961) 284.

[164] Mookerji (1966) 2.

While Mookerji used fewer hyperboles than Bhargava to extol Candragupta's career, his elaborate combination of Indian and Western sources created a far more solid narrative about the achievements of the first Maurya. In his discussion, Candragupta had to overcome two main problems which India faced in the 320s BC: the Macedonian invasion (known from Western sources) and the tyranny of the low-caste Nanda king (known from Indian sources). While Raychaudhuri discussed them more or less separately, Mookerji ingeniously weaved them together through the character of Cāṇakya. The chain of events is set in motion by the meeting of the young Candragupta and Cāṇakya, who was fleeing Pāṭaliputra after his conflict with the Nanda king. Cāṇakya took him to Taxila in the Punjab to educate him, and at this point Mookerji links up the story to the Western sources. In Taxila, Candragupta would have witnessed 'the spectacle of foreign invasion of his fatherland'.[165] Mookerji discusses the resistance of the Indian petty states in detail, and ascribes their defeat to their disunity and lack of strong leadership. Now it was up to Cāṇakya and Candragupta to 'fall back upon the remnants of that opposition, to fan into flame its dying embers, and to reorganize the military resources of the country in men and material for purposes of another national endeavour to strike a blow for its freedom.'[166] Mookerji uses the *Arthaśāstra* to illustrate Cāṇakya's aversion to foreign domination: his teachings would have been the inspiration behind the struggle for freedom and his Machiavellian tactics the way to achieve it.[167] We know from the Western sources that Alexander's governors Nicanor and Philip were murdered when Alexander was still campaigning, the former by the Indian tribe of the Assacenians and the latter by his own mercenaries.[168] Mookerji, however, sees these first signs of unrest as parts of a master plan headed by Cāṇakya and Candragupta:

> The Greek withdrawal from India was not an automatic process. It was forced by a revolution, a war of independence declared by Chandragupta as its leader. The assassinations of the Greek governors are not to be looked upon as mere accidents or isolated events. They were the preliminary incidents of a planned scheme of attack against Greek rule.[169]

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[165] Mookerji (1966) 21.

[166] Mookerji (1966) 22.

[167] Mookerji (1966) 21.

[168] Arr. *Anab.* 5.20.7, 6.27.2. For Nicanor and Philip, see Heckel (2006) 177, 212–13.

[169] Mookerji (1966) 31. Cāṇakya's legendary talent for intrigue was thus applied to the conflict with Alexander's forces—an idea uncorroborated by the sources yet one with a

Mookerji further dramatises the event by making Philip the embodiment of foreign imperialism:

> The murder of a Greek official of commanding position like Philip, in whom Greek rule was embodied and represented at its best, was really a fatal blow struck at that rule. He was the pillar of Greek imperialism in India.[170]

After his discussion of Candragupta's war against the Macedonians, Mookerji returns to the Indian sources to relate the uprooting of the Nandas. Since the *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* and the *Pariśiṣṭaparvan* claim that Candragupta and Cāṇakya conquered Magadha by starting from the frontiers and then gradually advancing to the centre, Mookerji believed that they first secured the Punjab from the Macedonians and then continued to confront the Nandas.[171] Again the genius of Cāṇakya ensured victory, after which the rule of Candragupta could begin.[172]

To conclude, in Mookerji's story we can see reflections of the struggles of his own time. It is of course not wholly unsupported by the sources: the author rests heavily on Justin, who indeed states that Candragupta was responsible for the liberation of India. However, a word like *libertas* is very attractive in times of nationalism and resistance against imperialism, and it is clear that Mookerji interpreted it in a modern patriotic sense.[173] At the same time, the Indian sources pose a challenge for the patriotic version of the story, since they do not mention a freedom struggle against a foreign invader at all. Mookerji felt the need to bridge this huge gap between Western and Indian

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long afterlife. According to Pal (2002) 30, Cāṇakya was even involved in the poisoning of Alexander himself.

[170] Mookerji (1966) 30.

[171] There has been a lot of discussion about the sequence of events in Candragupta's early reign. Like Mookerji, Schwarz (1970) 280 and Matelli (1984) 65–66 believe that the Punjab was 'liberated' before Candragupta gained the throne of Magadha. However, a close reading of Justin's fragment shows that it happened the other way around. For a detailed discussion, see Trautmann (1971) 59–60; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 289–90; Wheatley (2014) 513. Their arguments are reinforced by the findings of Bosworth (1996), who argues that Megasthenes visited Candragupta's court in Pāṭaliputra in the period 320–318 BC. Megasthenes relates that Porus, ruling large parts of the Punjab, was in that period mightier than Candragupta. The latter thus conquered the Punjab after Porus' death in c. 318 BC, while he was already king in Pāṭaliputra. Bosworth's view is, in my opinion unconvincingly, contested by Primo (2009) 54–5.

[172] Mookerji (1966) 33–6.

[173] See page 124.

sources, and Cāṇakya was the solution. It was he who brought Candragupta to the frontier regions, and it was he who inspired Candragupta to start his war of independence.

The relevance of the exploits of Candragupta and Cāṇakya for the Indian freedom struggle is best illustrated by one of the very founding texts of modern India. *The Discovery of India* was written in 1944 by Jawāharlāl Nehrū, the future prime minister, during his imprisonment for his involvement in the *Quit India* campaign. With only very few resources at his command, Nehrū succeeded in writing a fascinating overview of Indian history. Yet *The Discovery of India* is not simply a work of historical scholarship, but rather a unique blend of memoir, political commentary, philosophical ponderings, and historical narrative.[174] For Nehrū, the past was only relevant insofar as it bore relation to the present, and his story had to open a new window for India to the future. He wanted India to rediscover itself and to renew the vitality it once had by showing 'an underlying sense of continuity, of an unbroken chain which joins modern India to the far distant period of six or seven thousand years ago when the Indus Valley civilization probably began'.[175] Simultaneously, Nehrū acknowledges the immense diversity of the subcontinent and its capacity to welcome foreign influences and blend them to create something new. Nehrū's writings were at the same time a personal discovery of India, for despite being Indian he felt that he could never fully grasp its complex history and culture.

Nehrū's time in jail offered him an opportunity to survey the crisis India went through, a crisis which had to be overcome if India was ever to be vital again. While horrendous famines were wrecking the countryside, the British tried to retain their grasp over the country by advocating a kind of international partnership between Britain and its colonies, an idea of co-operation in which Tarn recognised Alexander's so-called 'brotherhood of nations'.[176] Nehrū, however, unmasked this internationalism as an extension of narrow British nationalism and imperialism. The kind of Indian nationalism he argued for would be embedded in a true internationalism of equal partnership and co-operation. In this respect, Nehrū rejected the notion that European civilisation originated in ancient Greece, a notion used by many British to stress the fundamental difference between Orient and Occident. Instead he emphasised the similarities and the many commercial and cultural contacts between ancient Greece, Persia, and India.[177] So Nehrū, in contrast to many

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[174] Nehru (2010) xviii.

[175] Nehru (2010) 67.

[176] Tarn (1951) 412.

[177] Nehru (2010) 154–61.

British and Indian nationalist historians alike, refused to think in concepts of black and white and of a fundamental opposition between East and West.

His account of Candragupta's rise to power is therefore not as complacent or bombastic as Bhargava's or Mookerji's; nevertheless, he retains the nationalistic view of Candragupta as a liberator from foreign rule. Further, he combines Indian and Western sources in the same way as Mookerji did. In his narrative, Cāṇakya played a key role in both the freedom struggle against Alexander and the uprooting of the Nandas:

> Chandragupta and Chanakya watched and prepared themselves; they hatched great and ambitious schemes and waited for the opportunity to realize them. Soon news came of Alexander's death at Babylon in 323 BC, and immediately Chandragupta and Chanakya raised the old and ever-new cry of nationalism and roused the people against the foreign invader. The Greek garrison was driven away and Taxila captured. The appeal to nationalism had brought allies to Chandragupta and he marched with them across north India to Pataliputra. Within two years of Alexander's death, he was in possession of that city and kingdom and the Maurya Empire had been established.[178]

Another fragment shows Nehrū's broad vision on Indian history by emphasizing that the Maurya Empire was the consequence of a long process of state formation in the Ganges plains—a far more structural understanding of history than the focus on big men and cataclysmic events. Yet immediately after this statement, Nehrū returns to the classic British view of Alexander as a pivotal personage who influenced Candragupta to establish his own empire:

> Various processes had long been going on to bring about racial fusion and to amalgamate the petty states and small kingdoms and republics; the old urge to build up a united centralized state had been working, and out of all this emerged a powerful and highly developed empire. Alexander's invasion of the north-west gave the final push to this development … Chandragupta met Alexander himself; he heard of his conquests and glory and was fired by ambition to emulate him.[179]

In contrast to the other writers discussed above, Nehrū was writing for a larger audience. Although Candragupta had already entered popular historical conscience,[180] his account further broadened the popularity of the first

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[178] Nehru (2010) 123–4.

[179] Nehru (2010) 123.

[180] In 1911, Dwijendralāl Rāy wrote a play about the story of Candragupta and Cāṇakya, loosely based on the *Purāṇas*, the *Mudrārākṣasa*, and the Greek accounts. Due to

Maurya. A statue of the young Candragupta, 'dreaming of the India he was to create', adorns the courtyard of the parliament of independent India and up to this day the story remains inspiring for Indians of different generations. In the 1980s, *The Discovery of India* was turned into a tv-show, *Bharat Ek Khoj*, and in 2011 another tv-series, *Candragupta Maurya*, retold the story along the very same lines, albeit with a lot of added fictitious elements. These shows make clear that in the Indian national conscience, Cāṇakya plays perhaps an even more important role than Candragupta himself. While British historians often emphasised the dreamy, mystic, and otherworldly inclination of Indian culture, Cāṇakya and the *Arthaśāstra* proved the political and military acumen of the ancient Indians. Hence, the diplomatic quarter in New Delhi, created in the 1950s, is called *Chanakyapuri* ('the city of Cāṇakya') and in the present climate of rapid economic growth, the *Arthaśāstra* is a major inspiration for business plans and marketing strategies.[181]

The Indian nationalist historians of the early twentieth century thus created a wholly new narrative on the early Maurya Empire. The British focus on Alexander was shifted to Candragupta, who was increasingly hailed as a patriotic liberator from foreign domination.[182] At the same time, the nationalist writers renewed the interest in the Indian sources, hence their fascination for the figure of Cāṇakya. However, a closer reading of these new narratives reveals more similarities to the British accounts than first expected. In a sense, the Indian historians wrote in the framework designed by the British: a framework relying on Justin and Plutarch which centralised the story around the figure of Alexander. At first sight, this remark sounds somewhat strange: many Indian historians just attempted to minimise Alexander's impact on the history of India, as Vasunia rightly remarked.[183] However, the new focus on Candragupta as a freedom fighter against Alexander paradoxically reinforced the pivotal role of the Macedonian. Only a Western challenge could have incited the patriotic flame and subsequent unification. Risley's *Ex Occidente Imperium* lived on in a different guise.

its success, the play went through several editions and was translated into many languages. The play was, not coincidentally, written in Bengal, the cradle of Indian nationalism. See Vasunia (2013) 112–13.

[181] See for instance Chamola (2007), who seeks solutions for contemporary economic problems in the *Arthaśāstra*.

[182] For an example of the patriotic view on Candragupta after Indian independence, see Narain (1965) 161ff.

[183] Vasunia (2013) 91.

3. The Origins of the Maurya Empire

Since the late eighteenth century, historians and orientalists have been trying to write orderly narratives on the history of the Mauryas, yet we have seen that the gap between Western and Indian sources remained a major obstacle. Efforts to bridge the gap rather betrayed the authors' political and social background than solved the riddle. The desire to fit Candragupta in the history of Alexander was felt most ardently, since this had repercussions for the ideological debates of the authors' own times. However, the connection between the two stems only from two sources: Plutarch and Justin. Especially Plutarch's alleged meeting between the two fired the imagination of many.[184]

Until recently, scholars have been trying to further clarify the relation between Candragupta and Alexander. Matelli, reiterating some of the arguments of Prakash, argued that Candragupta can be equated to Meroes (= Maurya), who negotiated for Alexander with Porus after the latter's defeat at the Hydaspes.[185] However, the connection is etymologically strained.[186] Furthermore, Meroes is described as an old friend of Porus', while Candragupta must have been quite young at the time.[187] A second attempt tried to identify Candragupta as Sisikottus or Sisocostus, one of Alexander's commanders at Aornus.[188] Sisikottus would correspond to Sanskrit Śaśigupta and would mean 'moon-protected', just like the name Candragupta (śaśi = candra = 'moon').[189] Again there is the age problem: Arrian's Sisikottos had 'long ago deserted from the Indians' and had served under the Persian satrap Bessus in Bactra, where he then met Alexander. A seemingly experienced commander with a Persian background does not seem to correspond at all to the Candragupta of our sources. Karttunen, too, dismissed this identification as too far-fetched.

[184] As shown in chapter two, the meeting was more often than not taken for granted. In the last decades, more critical voices were raised. See Trautmann (1971) 64; Karttunen (1997) 258; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 284.

[185] Arr. *Anab.* 5.18.7–8; Prakash (1962) 132–3; Matelli (1984) 64. The name Maurya may have found its way to the West in the form of Μωριεῖς, found in Hesychius' lexicon as the name 'of the kings of the Indians'. See Karttunen (1997) 259.

[186] Karttunen (1997) 259–60; Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel (2011) 282.

[187] Especially the Indian sources emphasise his youthfulness (*Mahāvaṃsa* 5.21: 'a glorious youth'); Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 62.9: μειράκιον; Stein (1929) 367.

[188] Arr. *Anab.* 4.30.4, 5.20.7 (Sisicottus); Curt. 8.11.25 (Sisocostus).

[189] A thesis first expounded by H. C. Seth in 1937 and recently defended by Seldeslachts (2002) 76; (2007) 134, who argued that a medieval Jain commentary (which I could not obtain) mentions the name Sasigutta as another name of Candragupta. In any case there remains a huge gap between Arrian's Sisicottus and a medieval Jain monk's Sasigutta. I therefore support the critical stance of Karttunen (1997) 258.

I therefore fully agree with Schwarz that the connection between Alexander and Candragupta should not be taken at face value but rather seen as a literary trope. Schwarz argued that the true goal of Candragupta's endeavours was the throne of Magadha in the Ganges plains, not the liberation of the north-west during the invasion of Alexander.[190] Despite the writings of Megasthenes, Magadha remained more or less *terra incognita* for the classical authors. That's why they understandably embedded Candragupta in a more familiar setting in order to better understand the faraway developments in India, a region which was in all respects strongly tied to Alexander in the mentality of the Hellenistic world. When broadly surveying the available evidence, however, we cannot but conclude that Alexander's invasion in India was ephemeral—the Greek sources make clear that he did not penetrate deep into the subcontinent and that his stay did not last for more than a few years. [191] The utter silence of the Indian sources points to the same conclusion.[192]

Apart from the methodological inconsistencies of the above-cited narratives, there are other reasons to be critical of a strong emphasis on Alexander's role. For history, with all its subtle and complex patterns, is often at risk of being reduced to a story of 'Big Men' and *histoire événementielle*. Although overt ideological bias more or less disappeared in the scholarly works of the last decades, many of them still revolved around the acts of Alexander, Candragupta, Seleucus, and (to a lesser extent) Cāṇakya. Admittedly, most of these also pointed to a continuity between the earlier dynasties of Magadha and the Maurya Empire, but a discussion of Alexander's invasion often eclipsed a systematic overview of deeper, structural reasons behind the emer-

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[190] Schwarz (1970) 276–77.

[191] This does not mean that the invasion was in all respects unimportant; my argument is limited to the political developments in India at that time. The Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms of the second and first centuries BC were irrefutably an important consequence of Alexander's conquests. After Alexander, cultural contacts between India and the Hellenistic world intensified. The West became more interested in India and knowledge about each other grew. Yet for a more cautionary note on Alexander's invasion as a landmark for intercultural contacts, see Parker (2008) 58–60.

[192] Kartunnen (1997) 39 argues that the silence of the Indian sources about Alexander is no argument, since these sources are not contemporary and not interested in the north-west or in history at all. Here I tend to disagree: Indian sources, despite their legendary character, show a specific interest in history. It is true that texts like the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* regard the Punjab with disapproval, yet in other texts the north-western city Taxila, where Candragupta was educated by Cāṇakya, is a centre of orthodoxy and learning. The *Mahābhārata*, the great epic of India, would have been first told in Taxila; furthermore, it is in this city that Pāṇini would have composed his famous Sanskrit grammar. See Keay (2004) 60–1; Schwarz (1970) 278.

gence of the Maurya state.[193] In what follows I examine some key factors which can help us understand the rise of empire in Ancient India. Before continuing, however, it is necessary to ask ourselves what 'empire' actually means. It is not in the scope of this paper to give a full definition of empire, if that were even possible.[194] My discussion will revolve around two interpretations: first, empire as a centralised political entity and second, empire as an administrative and economic reality.[195]

The political definition of empire is the oldest and most instinctive approach. In 1718, the French linguist Gabriel Gérard defined empire as 'a vast state composed of many peoples' as opposed to kingdoms, which are smaller and more uniform.[196] In this respect the Maurya state seems to have been a true empire as opposed to the Nanda kingdom, since the former encompassed under the reign of Aśoka a large part of the Indian subcontinent, southern Afghanistan included.[197] However, the concept of empire as a polity incorporating multiple states and peoples became only popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century—we should therefore refrain from elevating it to the central defining element of ancient empires, where the distinction between 'empire' and 'kingdom' was not necessarily made.[198] Despite his vast possessions, Aśoka called himself in his edicts only *rājan-,* 'king', and likewise the play *Mudrārākṣasa* consequently refers to Candragupta as *rājan-*.[199] Further, the king lists of the *Purāṇas* do not imply a radical political change

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[193] See for instance Kulke and Rothermund (1986) 56–61; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 92–3 and especially Stone (2002) 169; Seldeslachts (2007) 134. More cautious about Alexander's impact is Keay (2004) 62–84. A good overview of the developments which led to the Maurya state is Thapar (2002) 154–60, 174ff, yet with a strong focus on economic factors. Telling but less representative examples of modern research are Bhagat (1990) 188–9 and Boesche (2003) 9–13, who uncritically adopt the old Indian nationalist view of the Maurya Empire as the result of a patriotic uprising against Alexander. An echo of colonial ideas can be found in Scharfe (1971) 216–17, Epplett (2007) 222–3, and Seldeslachts (2002) 77, who insinuated that Candragupta was a vassal of the Seleucids, just as Poros had been Alexander's.

[194] See Morrison (2001) for the difficulties in defining empires. Older, but still relevant, is Gilissen (1973).

[195] For empire as an administrative reality, see Millar and Frye (1981) 10. Thapar (2002) 154–60 also stresses the economic preconditions of empire. See also the discussion in Parker (2003) 205.

[196] Duverger (1980) 8. Cf. the definition of Gilissen (1973) 762, 793: 'l'empire en tant que grande puissance est un état souverain, s'étendant durant un certain temps sur un vaste territoire, habité par de multiples groupes socio-politiques placés sous l'autorité d'un même gouvernant ayant une politique tendant à l'hégémonie.'

[197] Gilissen (1973) 803.

[198] Morrison (2001) 2–3.

[199] Fussman (1980) 384–9.

when the Mauryas came to power—they point at continuity rather than discontinuity with the previous dynasties. The idea that the Maurya Empire was the very first empire and a complete novelty in the history of India is therefore an invention of later ages, due to the focus on Alexander's invasion, the retroactive application of modern concepts of empire, and the fragmentary character of our sources. This does not mean that the Mauryas were unimportant: they indeed succeeded for the first time in Indian history to bring both the Indus and Ganges plains under one rule. This important feat should, however, be seen as the consequence of a long evolution of state formation in the Indian subcontinent, and not as a unique and sudden accomplishment by some great men.

The ideal of a sole ruler of the entire earth already existed germinally in early Vedic times.[200] Yet a tangible evolution towards political centralisation began when the Aryan tribes started to penetrate the Gangetic plains around 1000 BC. Gradually, tribal organisation dissolved and made way for small territorial kingdoms, called *janapadas* ('foothold of a tribe'). Between the seventh and the fifth centuries BC, a second phase of urbanisation (the first phase being the earlier Indus civilisation) swept through northern India, while the many small kingdoms evolved into sixteen major ones, called *mahājananapadas* ('giant foothold of a tribe'). By the sixth century a more or less uniform material culture characterised both the Ganges and Indus plains, and this century also witnessed the coalescence of the sixteen *mahājananapadas* in four mighty, competing kingdoms. In the course of the fifth and fourth century BC, the kingdom of Magadha managed to eclipse the three others and assert itself as the unchallenged ruler of the Gangetic plains. The power of Magadha only grew when the Nanda dynasty usurped the throne around 360 BC. The sources point to a great deal of continuity between the Nandas and the Mauryas, to the degree that the Brahmanical sources conjectured kinship between both. The king lists of the *Purāṇas* call the first Nanda king *Ekacchattra*, 'he who brings the whole earth under one umbrella'.[201] In later ages, their enormous wealth became proverbial and according to Diodorus, Plutarch, and Curtius, the Nanda kings had a huge army of more than 200,000 men.[202] If we retain Gérard's definition of empire, this vast scaling-up implies that Magadha was already an empire before Candragupta came

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[200] See for instance the hymn for the king in the *Ṛg Veda* 10.173–4. According to most scholars, the *Ṛg Veda* dates from ca. 1500 BC.

[201] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.24.

[202] Diod. 17.93; Plut. *Alex.* 62.2; Curt. 9.2. Maybe rumours of this vast army were one of the reasons why Alexander's soldiers refused to go on at the Hyphasis: Arr. *Anab.* 25.5. The military might of the Nandas is reflected in the Buddhist name of Mahāpadma, the first Nanda king: 'Ugrasena', meaning '(leader of a) formidable army'.

to power. Therefore, the coming of empire in India cannot simply be fixed to one precise moment. The Maurya state was the apex of a long evolution of state formation which had started more than five centuries earlier. Cultural unification and the growing power of Magadha between the sixth and fourth centuries BC were essential factors behind the foundation of a centralised political entity in northern India.[203]

The political definition of empire is, however, not sufficient to understand the rise of the Mauryas. Apart from asking ourselves what an empire is, we should also consider *how it works*.[204] An efficient bureaucracy is a *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of an empire—the huge Nanda army, for instance, presupposes an administration which could systematically levy taxes. Unfortunately, the details of ancient Indian administration are scarcely known. Many authors have been tempted to mine the *Arthaśāstra* for information, yet its theoretical character and later date of composition render it impractical to use.[205] We can therefore only assume that the dynasties before the Mauryas had a certain level of administration at their disposal. These developments were probably connected to the introduction of coinage and standardised weights in Magadha, which points at a gradual rationalisation of economic and fiscal matters.[206]

Here it is important to note that political developments in northern India did not happen in a vacuum or in total isolation from other parts of the world. Although state-formation was an indigenous process in the Gangetic plains, some of the *tools* to exercise control over land and people may have arrived through contacts with the Achaemenid Empire. Is it a coincidence that the meteoric rise of Magadha coincided with the establishment of Persian supremacy in the Middle East and Darius' occupation of parts of the Punjab?[207] Nevertheless, hard evidence for Persian influence is lacking for the earlier dynasties of Magadha.[208] Only the advent of the Mauryas gives us more information on the 'hardware of empire' in India, thanks to the fragments of Megasthenes and the edicts of Aśoka. This does not need to imply that the Mauryan administration was a wholly new invention—in my opinion, its foundations are to be sought in the earlier dynasties of Magadha and their contacts with the Achaemenid Empire. In any case, the question of

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[203] For the evolution of state formation in northern India, see Kulke and Rothermund (1986) 49–59; Keay (2004) 37ff. For the uniformity in material culture from the sixth century BC, see Allchin and Allchin (1982) 319; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 92.

[204] Gilissen (1973) 874–5; Morrison (2001) 4. Also Fussman (1982) 622.

[205] Fussman (1982) 623–5.

[206] Kulke and Rothermund (1986) 53.

[207] For an overview of Persian presence in north-western India, see Vogelsang (1990).

[208] Kulke and Rothermund (1986) 55–7.

Achaemenid influence is a very complex one. We should not assume that a uniform Persian-style administration was transferred to the whole of India.[209] As Fusmann has shown, centralisation in the Mauryan Empire shouldn't be exaggerated: especially the border regions enjoyed a large degree of autonomy and many different forms of administration coexisted in the Empire.[210] Remnants of an Achaemenid bureaucracy are tangible in the north-western provinces, where Aśoka's edicts were erected by local officials in Kharoṣṭhī. This script was derived from the Aramaic alphabet, used in the administration of the Achaemenid Empire, which shows that the roots of local administration in the north-western provinces can be traced back to Darius' conquest of the region in the late sixth century BC.[211]

In the heartland of the Mauryas, the Gangetic plains, hard evidence of Persian influence is lacking. The script of Aśoka's edicts in this region is Brāhmī. While some scholars have linked Brāhmī to a Semitic prototype, others argued for an indigenous development; the question has not yet been resolved.[212] In any case the administration in the Ganges valley and central India was much different from the one in the north-west: it was essentially Magadhan, using the dialect of Pāṭaliputra.[213] More information can be gleaned from the fragments of Megasthenes, who probably visited Magadha under Candragupta around 320–318 BC, when the latter had not occupied the Indus valley yet.[214] Megasthenes' sketch of the Mauryan administration reminds us of the Achaemenid imperial system: royal magistrates controlled irrigation works, supervised taxation, regulated economic life and built roads with milestones. The Maurya government appears to have been especially concerned about the collection of taxes. It is tempting to compare Megasthenes' information to the *Arthaśāstra*, which deals elaborately with taxation and related problems. Northern India in the fourth century BC was essentially an agrarian economy and the state depended on the surplus it generated—something which only changed in modern times. Yet the methodical collection of taxes was probably first organised by the Nanda dynasty, which is mirrored by their proverbial wealth and greed in later texts.[215]

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[209] Persian influence was heavily emphasised by Vincent Smith: Smith (1914) 145.

[210] Fussman (1982). See also Vogelsang (1990) for similar ideas about administration in north-western India.

[211] Fussman (1982) 635ff; Salomon (1996) 378–9.

[212] Vogelsang (1990) 95; Salomon (1996) 378ff. Expectedly, the Semitic theory is more popular in the West, while South Asian scholars prefer an indigenous origin.

[213] Fussman (1982) 634–5.

[214] Traditionally, Megasthenes' diplomatic visit is dated to 304/303 BC, but Bosworth argued in an influential article that it took place more than ten years earlier. See note 170.

[215] Thapar (2002) 156, 185ff.

If taxation was one pillar of Mauryan rule, communication was a second one. Megasthenes mentions the existence of a royal road from west to east, starting from the capital Pāṭaliputra.[216] This royal road seems to have had an Achaemenid inspiration: controlling a vast empire entailed the need of an efficient communication network, as the Persian example had shown.[217] On the other hand, we should be careful when using Megasthenes' fragments, since his own background and familiarity with the Persian system undoubtedly influenced how he perceived the conditions in Magadha.[218]

Nevertheless, we can conclude that by the time of Candragupta an efficient bureaucracy, Persian-influenced or not, existed in Magadha, and that local forms of administration in the frontier regions were left intact when the power of the Mauryas spread. Since Megasthenes visited Candragupta in the beginning of his reign, we can further assume that the administration he described was not a complete novelty. Instead, Candragupta probably took over the existing bureaucracy of Magadha, and he and his successors would have further developed it as the Maurya state became bigger and more complex. The hardware which made the existence of the Maurya Empire possible was no single and sudden invention of one man, but the result of a long evolution and cross-cultural contacts.

4. Conclusion

This paper dealt with the coming of the first pan-Indian empire, an important moment in Indian history yet largely forgotten until it resurfaced in the late eighteenth century. Maurya India is a fascinating subject in its own right, but it also reveals a great deal about the importance of antiquity for the modern world and about how history in general is created. The extremely fragmentary character of the sources entails the need to weave them together in a larger narrative, yet the specific circumstances of Candragupta's rediscovery—the period of British rule in India—resulted in many different attitudes and responses. Most of these have, however, one thing in common: the late fourth century BC is regarded as a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent. To a large extent this is true: the Maurya Empire did indeed mark an important phase in the history of state formation in India,

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[216] Str. 15.1.11, 15.1.50–2; Arr. *Ind.* 3.4 (= Megasth. *FGrHist* 715 FF 6c, 31)

[217] Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 96. A royal road connected Persis to the Indus valley in Achaemenid times. See Vogelsang (1985) 84–5. Also Duverger (1980) 9.

[218] According to Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) 97, Megasthenes saw Maurya India 'as a worthy counterpart to the Achaemenid Empire studied by Herodotus', and his work a 'legitimation of Seleucus non-conquest, describing an apparently well-organised empire of formidable power'. See also D. W. Roller's commentary on F 31 and F 32 of Megasthenes: Roller (2014).

and the experiments of its rulers with imperial ideology and administration cast a long shadow even after its demise.

Nevertheless, the focus of modern authors on the late fourth century BC was also influenced by other factors. Sir William Jones' equation of Sandrokottos with Candragupta gave Indology its first anchor point; in fact, the chronology of ancient Indian history as a whole rests on this single discovery. This already gave a disproportionate weight to Candragupta, while the Nandas, those earlier experimenters with imperial practices, were doomed to remain in the margins of history. But what really tipped the balance in favour of Candragupta was not his chronological importance, but his connection with Alexander the Great. The latter's invasion of India had important ideological implications for the British colonial project and could therefore not easily be ignored. In a period when even the Krishna cult was perceived as a corruption of Christian beliefs, many British scholars did not consider it a coincidence that Candragupta established his empire after Alexander had passed through north-western India. Indian nationalist historians unconsciously took over this paradigm in a different form when stating that Alexander caused a patriotic surge in India. The late fourth century BC thus became a battlefield upon which contemporary battles were fought. The stakes were high: the story of Alexander and Candragupta held the key to the identity and legitimation which British and Indians so desperately needed. Although nowadays the ideological antithesis has more or less disappeared in the academic world (despite some surprising exceptions),[219] one does not have to probe deep into the Internet to find harsh debates between proponents of Alexander's superiority and staunch believers in the invincibility of Cāṇakya and Candragupta.

The British colonial project created a demand for legitimacy and cohesion, a demand shared by the Indian independence movement. In legitimising and ideological narratives, 'Big Men' and ready-made examples thrive. Alexander and Candragupta more than met this demand, and the narratives created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shape attitudes up to this day. Yet the connection between the two rulers tells us actually more about the nature of the British Empire than about the Maurya Empire—only by embedding it in a larger process of state formation can the first pan-Indian empire be truly appreciated. In one sense *Ex Occidente Imperium* does hold

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[219] See note 192.

true: the Maurya Empire is, in a way, the pinnacle of an evolution which started when Aryan tribes from the Punjab migrated east and started to build a brave new world on the fertile soil of the Gangetic plains.

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