

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumenē* and Beyond

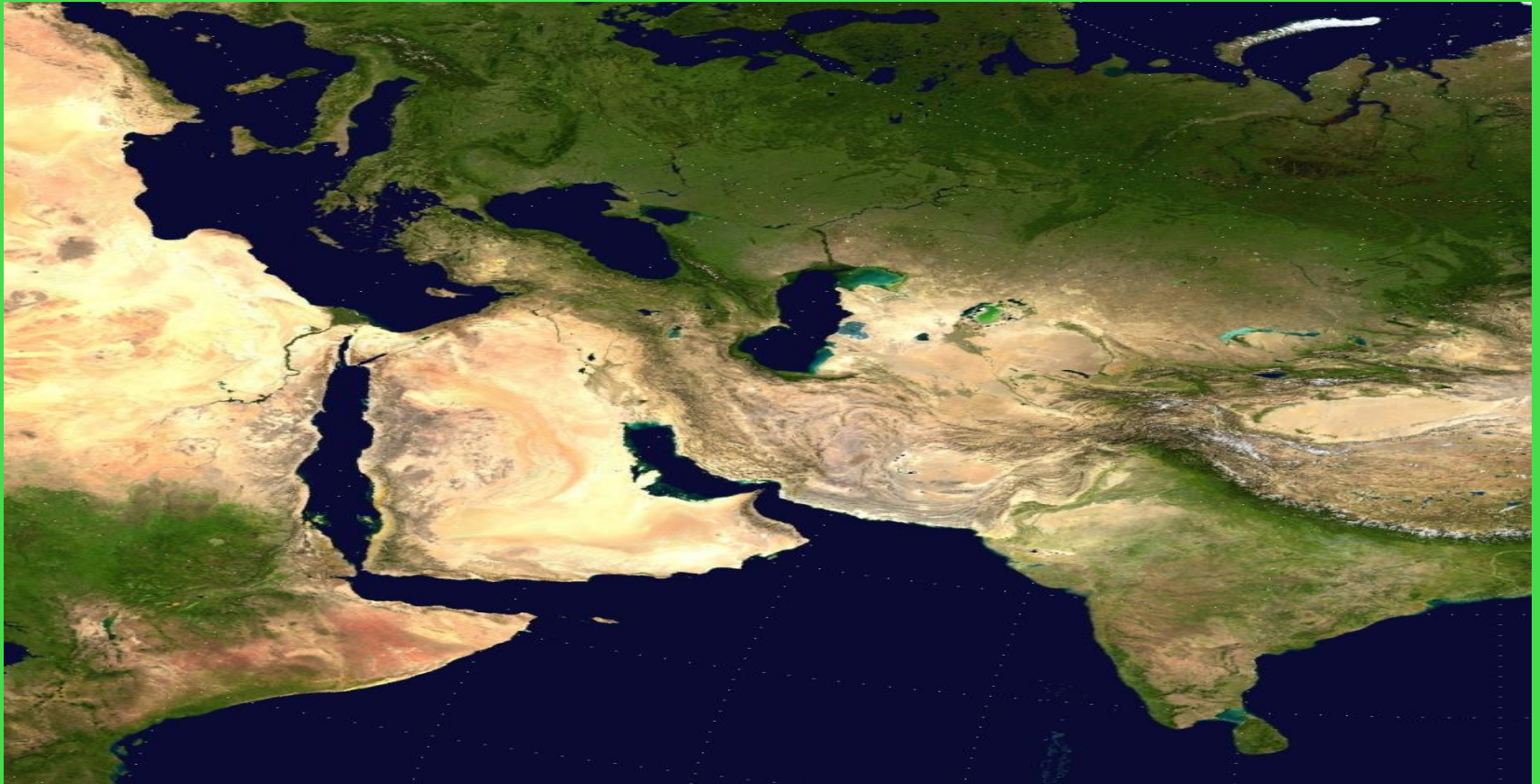
Lecture 2 - India in the early Greek Imagination

CLAH6007

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Geographic Distances

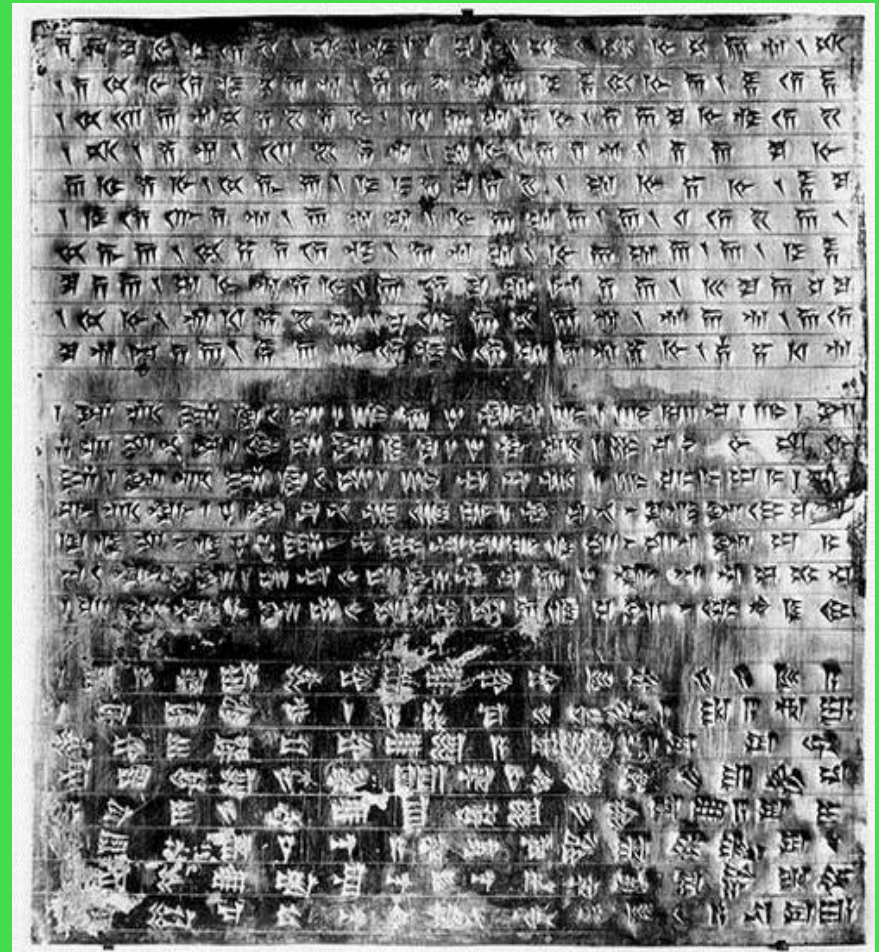
- Vast cultural and geographic gap between Greek and Indian worlds.
- Just short of 5,000 km between Athens and New Delhi.



Achaemenid Persia and India

“Darius the Great King... son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian... This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, then into Aethiopia: from Sind, then into Sardis...” — Inscription from Persepolis (c. 518-13 BC) DPh 1-7: Kent, *Old Persian*.

- Sind a direct loanword from the contemporary Sanskrit name for the river Indus – *Sindhu*.
- Also reference to Gandhara – *Gadara* in old Persian.



DPh (Photo Chicago Oriental Institute)

The Persian Empire at the Time of Darius

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Image from Chicago Oriental Institute - The Apadana complex Persepolis - East Stairway

Scylax of Caryanda

- **Scylax of Caryanda** the first historical Greek figure reported to have had contact with India.
- Employed by Darius I (522-486 BC) to explore the sea route down the Indus up to the Suez (northern Red Sea) – probably at some point between 519-513 BC.

“Darius, desiring to know where this Indus empties into the sea, sent ships manned by Scylax, a man of Caryanda, and others whose word he trusted; these set out from the city of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country [northeast Afghanistan], and sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise until they came to the sea; and voyaging over the sea west, they came in the thirtieth month to that place from which the Egyptian king sent the above-mentioned Phoenicians to sail around Libya. **After this circumnavigation, Darius subjugated the Indians and made use of this sea.** Thus it was discovered that Asia, except the parts toward the rising sun, was in other respects like Libya.” – **Herodotus *Histories* 4.44.1-3.**

Fact Finding Mission?

- Ethnographic as well as topographic study?

“...it is clear that it would be better for the same persons always to be rulers and subjects once for all; but as this is not easy to secure, and as we do **not find anything corresponding to the great difference that Scylax states to exist between kings and subjects in India**, it is clear that for many reasons it is necessary for all to share alike in ruling and being ruled in turn.” – **Aristotle**
***Politics* 1332b21-27.**

Descriptions of the Monstrous

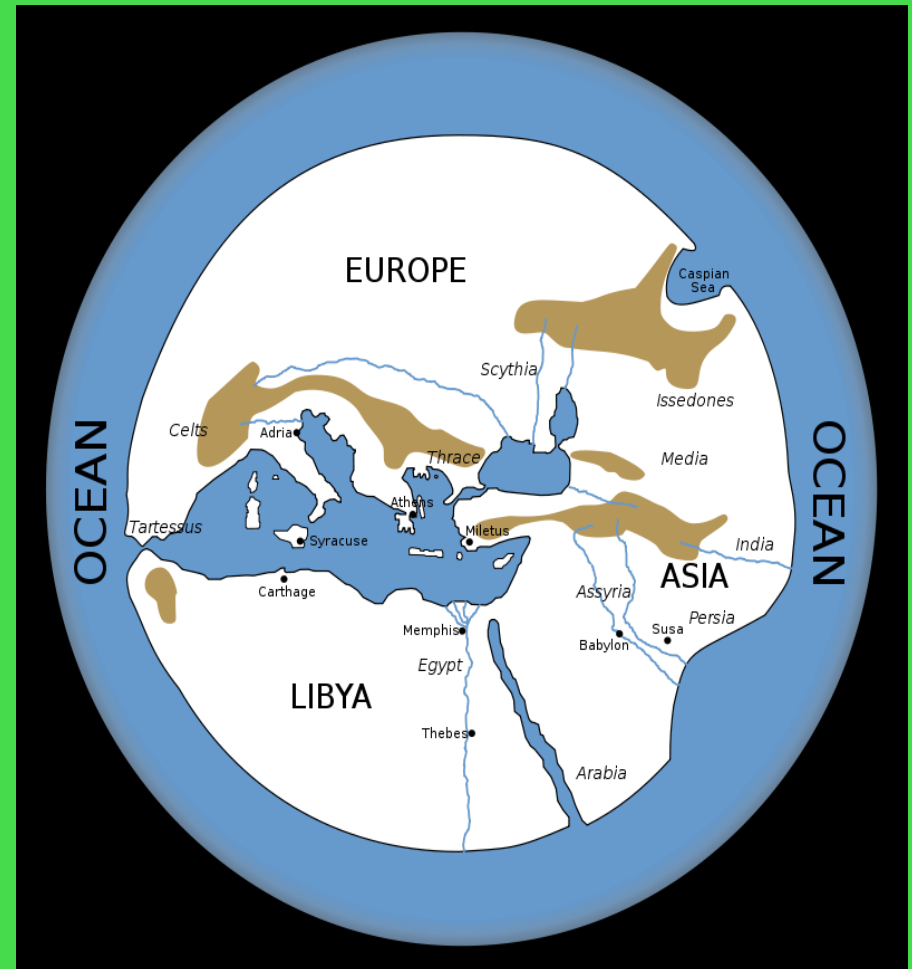
- Most surviving fragments of Scylax mention monstrous creatures.
- Reference to Ektrapeloi (“Freaks”); Makrokephaloi (Big-Heads); Monophthalmoi (Single-Eyes); Otoliknoi (Winnowing Fan-Ears); Skyapods (Shadow-Feet) – **F7a** and **F7b**.
- Common Indo-European root of some of the myths surrounding these creatures? – Makrokephaloi in Hesiod (fr. 153 M-W).
- Scylax’s sources – oral tradition? Sanskrit literature?

“[Indian larchus] And as to the pigmies, he said that they lived underground, and that they lay on the other side of the Ganges and lived in the manner which is related by all. As to men that are shadow-footed or have long heads, and as to the other poetical fancies which the treatise of Scylax recounts about them, he said that they didn’t live anywhere on the earth, and least of all in India.” – **Philostratus** *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 3.70.

- Scepticism expressed about aspects of the accounts of Scylax's voyage:
 - why was Scylax sailing in an easterly direction (the Indus runs in a south-westerly direction)?
 - would it have been possible to assemble a fleet on the Indus prior to any Persian annexation?
 - why was the duration of the journey 30 months?
 - lack of reference to the Persian Gulf (but this may be due to textual transmission).
- Contra:
 - An inscription found during excavation of the Suez canal mentions Darius dug a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea and gave orders for ships to sail from Suez to Persia.
 - Possibly set out from the Ganges not the Indus (Panchenko 1998; 2003)?

Hecataeus of Miletus

- One of the earliest historians to write in prose.
- About 300 fragmentary references survive of Hecataeus' work, of which eight refer to India.
- References to apparent Indian ethnic or cultural groups, which are named the Gandarai, Gandroi, Kaspapyrus, Aegante, Callataie and Opiae.
- A desert is placed just beyond the territory of the Indians – cf. Herodotus 4.40.
- Lack of reference to monstrous races in surviving fragments.



Map based on information from fragments of Hecataeus

Appellations

- India (*India*), the Indians (*Indioi*) and Indus (*Indos*) – probably connection of *Indos* to Persian *Hindu* to the Sanskrit *Sindhu*.
- Conversely the Indian terms for Greek peoples (and much later people more broadly from the Eastern Mediterranean / Western Asia) comes from the Persian term – *Yauna* – this was transmitted into India where we also see it develop into the term *Yona* and *Yavana*.

Hecataeus and Scylax

“Hecataeus of Miletus, in the *Description of Asia* (granting that this book is a genuine work of the historian, since Callimachus ascribes it to Nesiotes; whoever, then, the author may be), has the following: ‘Round the Hyrcanian Sea, as it is called, are high mountains covered with forests, and on the mountains grows the prickly artichoke.’... He also says that the artichoke grows in the region of the Indus river. Scylax, too (or Polemon), writes: ‘Now the country is watered by springs and aqueducts, and on the mountains grow artichokes and other herbaceous plants.’ And in continuation he says: ‘From that point a high mountain range extends on both sides the Indus river, covered with virgin forest and with the prickly artichoke.’” – **Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 2.70b-c.**

Herodotus on India

- Herodotus brings a shift on discourse about India – a mixture of physical and human geography - more ethnographic detail but with less focus on monstrous races (Scylax) and toponyms (Hecataeus) – did Herodotus use these authors as sources?
- Large part of Herodotus description of India (**3.97-106**) comes within his discussion of reorganisation of the Persian Empire by Darius (**3.89-117**).
- Comparatively shorter than descriptions of other regions – reflect of lack of direct autopsy.

“The Indians, who are more numerous than any other nation we know, paid a tribute beyond that of every other people, namely 360 talents of gold-dust.” – (**3.94.2a**).

Gold-Digging Ants

“Other Indians dwell near the town of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic county [NE Afghanistan]... these live like the Bactrians; they are of all Indians the most warlike, and it is they who are sent for the gold...In this sandy desert are ants, not as big as dogs but bigger than foxes... These ants live underground, digging out the sand in the same way as the ants in Greece, to which they are very similar in shape, and the sand which they carry from the holes is full of gold... It is for this sand that the Indians set forth into the desert...Thus and with teams so harnessed the Indians ride [on camels] after the gold, being careful to be engaged in taking it when the heat is greatest; for the ants are then out of sight underground... So when the Indians come to the place with their sacks, they fill these with the sand and drive back as fast as possible; for the ants at once scent them out, the Persians say, and give chase. They say nothing is equal to them for speed, so that unless the Indians have a head-start while the ants were gathering, not one of them would get away. - **Herodotus 3.102-105.**

- See also **Sophocles *Aethiopes* F 29.**



Himalayan Marmot

The Habits of Indian Peoples

- Herodotus' Indography qualitatively different from earlier authors descriptions of marvellous races – cf. Book 2 on Egypt.
- Cannibalism: friends kill the sickly among the nomadic Padaei– the aged are also sacrificed and eaten (**3.99.1-2**).
- Contra “other Indians” who kill no living creature; nor do not sow crops or live in houses; the sickly go into the desert to die. (**3.100**).
- Their skin and semen are black, and in both respects resemble the Ethiopians – (**3.101**).

“I hold it then that in every way Cambyses was proved quite insane; or he would never have set himself to ridicule religion and custom. For if it were proposed to all nations to choose which seemed best of all customs, each, after examination, would place its own first; so well is each convinced that its own are by far the best... When Darius was king, he summoned the Greeks who were with him and asked them for what price they would eat their fathers’ dead bodies. They answered that there was no price for which they would do it. Then Darius summoned those Indians who are called Callatiae, who eat their parents, and asked them (the Greeks being present and understanding through interpreters what was said) what would make them willing to burn their fathers at death. The Indians cried aloud, that he should not speak of so horrid an act. So firmly rooted are these beliefs; and it is, I think, rightly said in Pindar's poem that custom is lord of all.
Herodotus 3.38.

The Indians in Xerxes Army

“The Indians wore clothes made from trees [cotton?] and carried reed bows and iron-tipped reed arrows. Such was their equipment; they were appointed to march under the command of Pharnazathres son of Artabates.”
- **Herodotus 7.65.**

Compare:

“The Aethiopians were wrapped in skins of leopards and lions, and carried bows made of palmwood strips, no less than four cubits long, and short arrows pointed not with iron but with a sharpened stone that they use to carve seals; furthermore, they had spears pointed with a gazelle's horn sharpened like a lance, and also studded clubs.” (7.69)

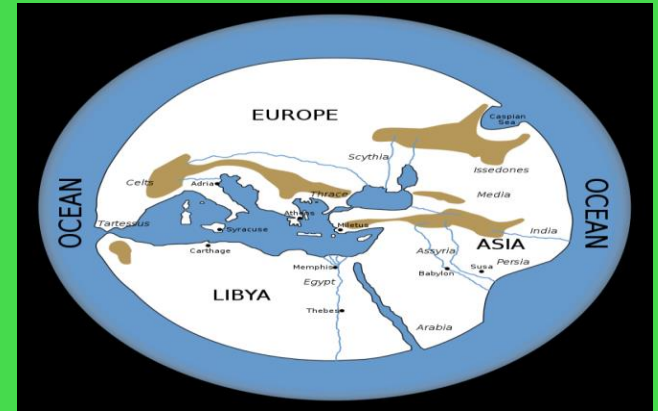
“The Aethiopians above Egypt and the Arabians had Arsames for commander, while the **Aethiopians of the east** (for there were two kinds of them in the army) served with the Indians; they were not different in appearance from the others, only in speech and hair: the Ethiopians from the east are straight-haired... These Aethiopians of Asia were for the most part armed like the Indians; but they wore on their heads the skins of horses' foreheads, stripped from the head with ears and mane; the mane served them for a crest, and they wore the horses' ears stiff and upright; for shields they had bucklers of the skin of cranes.” (7.70).

The Centre and Periphery

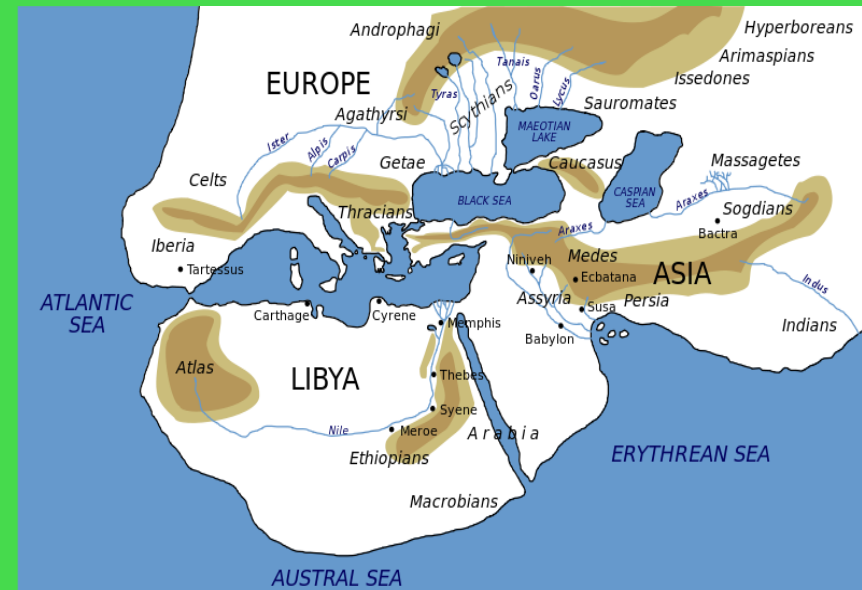
“The most outlying nations of the world have somehow drawn the finest things as their lot, exactly as Greece has drawn the possession of far the best seasons. As I have lately said, India lies at the world's most distant eastern limit; and in India all living creatures four-footed and flying are much bigger than those of other lands, except the horses...” **Herodotus 3.106.**

Herodotus on Earlier Geographers

“And I laugh to see how many have before now drawn maps of the world, not one of them reasonably; for they draw the world as round as if fashioned by compasses, encircled by the river Ocean, and Asia and Europe of a like extent. For myself, I will in a few words indicate the extent of the two, and how each should be drawn... I wonder, then, at those who have mapped out and divided the world into Libya, Asia, and Europe; for the difference between them is great, seeing that in length Europe stretches along both the others together, and it appears to me to be wider beyond all comparison. For Libya shows clearly that it is bounded by the sea, except where it borders on Asia... But it is plain that none have obtained knowledge of Europe's eastern or northern regions, so as to be able say if it is bounded by seas; its length is known to be enough to stretch along both Asia and Libya. **Herodotus 4.36, 42, 45.**



Map based on information from fragments of Hecataeus



Map based on information from Herodotus

India as the End of Asia

“As far as India, Asia is an inhabited land; but thereafter, all to the east is desolation, nor can anyone say what kind of land is there.” – **Herodotus 4.40.2.**

“...for on the eastern side of India all is desolate because of the sand.” – **(3.98.2).**

“Other Indians dwell near the town of Caspatyrus and the Pactyic country, north of the rest of India... for in these parts all is desolate because of the sand.” – **(3.102).**

“These Indians dwell far away from the Persians southwards, and were not subjects of King Darius.” – **(3.101.2).**

“In these parts people live on the river Indus, the Opiai, in a royal fort. As far as that are the Opiai; from there on is a desert, as far as the Indians...” – **Hecataeus *FGrH* F 299.**

“Ctesias says that India is not smaller than the rest of Asia; Onesicritus that it is a third part of the Oikumene.” – **Strabo 15.1.12.**

Ctesias of Cnidus

- A contemporary of Herodotus who was taken to Persia as a prisoner of war (**Diodorus Siculus 2.32.4**) and was employed by Artaxerxes II Memnon (405/4-359/8 BC) as a court physician.
- May have written works entitled *Periodos*, *Indika*, and *On the tributes of Asia*, but these may all be part of his larger work the *Persika*.
- Greater focus in work of Ctesias on natural history – such as descriptions of unusual birds and animals – less ethnographic descriptions and little mention of geography, at least in surviving fragments.
 - “[description of a “tiger”] In each jaw it has three rows of teeth and at the tip of its tail it is armed with stings by which it defends itself in close combat and which it discharges against distant foes, just like an arrow shot by an archer.” – **Pausanias 9.21**. cf. *martichora*.
- Ctesias claims to have personally seen “Indian things” and to have met Indians in the Persian Empire (Photius p. 46 a 11.24-29); although no strong evidence for direct travel to India.

Photius' summary of Ctesias

- **Geography** – it does not rain in India (but hurricanes are frequent), irrigation by the (Indus) river – there is a fountain that fills up with liquid gold – there are very high mountains in India from which precious stones are extracted – sun larger than elsewhere – a river where honey flows.
- **Indian People** – the most numerous people on earth – Indians the most just of men who worship the Sun and Moon – Pygmies in central India – very healthy and live more than 100 years – dog-headed men in the mountains – there is an Indian race without anuses but eat a herb in the evening that makes them vomit and urinate a liquid similar to curd – they make good cheese and wine (based on Ctesias' own experience) – women who have only one baby - eight fingers, big ears and very warlike.

- **Indian Animals** – parrots that can speak with human voice – enormous dogs that can fight against lions – wild asses much bigger than horses – griffins are quadruped birds that are as big as wolfs -
- **Indian Plants** – palm-trees and dates three times bigger than those in Babylon – a tree (*karpion*) that produce a red oil used to make perfume for Kings, Ctesias has smelt it himself.
- **Indian gems** – the *pantrabe* has property of attracting other gems.

Manticore (*martikhora*)

“Ctesias states that he has indeed seen this animal in Persia, after it had been brought as a gift to the king of the Persians – if in fact Ctesias has credibility in matters of this kind... he says that Indian writers agree with him” – F45dβ = ***Aelian Historia animalium* 4.21.**

“ It has a face like a man's, a skin red as cinnabar, and is as large as a lion. It has three rows of teeth, ears and light-blue eyes like those of a man; its tail is like that of a land scorpion, containing a sting more than a cubit long at the end.”
– **Photius summary.**



Manticore, Der Naturen Bloeme manuscript c. 1350, National Library of the Netherlands



William Hastings - c.1466-70

Later Reception of Ctesias

- **Photius** - Ctesias relates these fables as perfect truth, adding that he himself had seen with his own eyes some of the things he describes, and had been informed of the rest by eye-witnesses. He says that he has omitted many far more marvellous things, for fear that those who had not seen them might think that his account was utterly untrustworthy.
- **Lucian *Ver. Hist.* 1.3** – “....I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way, but also because everything in my story is a more or less comical parody of one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables. I would cite them by name, were it not that you yourself will recognise them from your reading. One of them is Ctesias, son of Ctesias of Cnidus, who wrote a great deal about India and its characteristics that he had never seen himself nor heard from anyone else with a reputation for truthfulness...” and – “the severest punishment of all fell to those who told lies while in life and those who had written what was not true, among whom were Ctesias of Cnidus, Herodotus and many more.” (2.31).
- **Aristotle** views Ctesias with suspicion (F45dα; F45kα) but he uses him as his main source for his description of elephants (F45bα).

Mendacious Ctesias?

- May be relating stories which originated in Indian subcontinent – cf. *Henotiktontes* “those who give birth once” and *Enotokoitai* “Long-eared People” (F45 §50)
 - *Mahābhārata* (2.28.44; 6.47.13) - *Karnaprāvarana* “the people who cover themselves with their ears”
 - *Henotiktontes* found in Sanskrit literature as *Ekagarbha*
- More mundane discussion of illnesses and medical cures - (F45 §32, 33, 34).
- Descriptions of the parrot (F45 §8).

India in the Wider Imagination

Aeschylus *The Suppliant Maidens* 284-86: “I have heard about Indian nomads, women who, seating in pillions, ride as if on horses, on camels dwelling near the Aethiopians.”

Sophocles *Antigone* 1038-39: “Go ahead, trade with me and bring as much Sardian silver or Indian gold as you like but a grave for that man you will not be able to buy!”

- A much later account by Eusebius the church historian writing in the forth century AD (*Preparatio Evangelica*) recounts that Aristoxenus the musician (born c.370 BC) claims that Socrates met an Indian in Athens (and that they spoke about Philosophical doctrine).

Democritus of Abdera (5th – 4th C BC) – famous Greek philosopher of atomic theory - “According to Demetrius in his book on *Men of the Same Name* and Antisthenes in his *Successions of Philosophers*, he travelled into Egypt to learn geometry from the priests, and he also went into Persia to visit the Chaldaeans as well as to the Red Sea. Some say that he associated with the Gymnosophists in India and went to Ethiopia.” – **Diogenes Laertius 9.7.35** (third century AD).

Hippocratic Corpus – there is reference to pepper (*peperi*) in a remedy to be found in the treatise *The women's illnesses* (I, 81 volume VIII p.202 lines 15-16) and Indian remedy/drug (II, 158 p.336, lines 4-8).

Key Develop of Ideas on India

- **Remoteness of India**
- **It wealth** (particularly relating to gold, but also gems)
- **Strange or marvellous beings – human or animal**
- **Wisdom / Justice** (develops in more detail post-Alexandria)

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