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**YANG JUPING ET AL. (EDS.),
FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE YELLOW RIVER:
HELLENISTIC CIVILISATION AND THE SILK ROAD,
6 VOLS., BEIJING: ZHONGHUA BOOK COMPANY 2024,
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Hellenism in the East has gained much attention within classical studies in recent decades. Yet this book series, edited by an enthusiastic team led by Professor Yang Juping of Nankai University, marks the most ambitious undertaking on this topic to date. This is demonstrated not only by its scale – bringing together more than 40 contributors from related fields and comprising 3,300 pages and 1,500 high-quality illustrations – but also by its expanded geographical scope. Moving beyond the regions historically reached by Alexander's campaigns, it casts its gaze upon the remote Middle Kingdom of China, offering a comprehensive survey of Hellenistic-derived cultural phenomena across the entire Silk Road from the 4th century BCE to the 7th century CE.

To manage such a vast subject, the series is thoughtfully structured. It contains a general introduction, four subject-based volumes, and a volume of collected papers, each prefaced by a concise introductory essay by the chief editor. Except for the last volume, they also conclude with a detailed list of illustrations, a well-translated Chinese-English glossary of terms, and a wide-ranging bibliography. Thus, the whole series moves from presenting a wealth of well-categorised historical information to engaging readers in ongoing scholarly conversations.

The opening volume, *From Alexander to Zhang Qian*, examines the rise of Alexander's empire from 334 to 323 BCE and its subsequent fragmentation into independent kingdoms across the Mediterranean, West Asia, and Central Asia. Notably, in addition to presenting this fundamental layout of the Hellenistic

world, it devotes ample space to commercial phenomena – both within these realms and in the faraway Chinese empires of Qin and Han – thereby highlighting the emerging connections between Western and Eastern civilisations through expanding trade networks.

The next three volumes, titled *From Alexander to Samarkand*, *From Macedonia to Sogdiana*, and *From Apollo to the Buddha*, explore carefully selected themes that vividly illustrate the large-scale eastward transmission of Hellenism: cities, coinage, and visual art. These themes are examined through a wide range of textual sources, from the renowned *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* to numerous lesser-known inscriptions in Greek, Gāndhārī, Chinese, and Iranian languages, alongside abundant material evidence such as coins, sculptures, pottery, and other artefacts. Fresh archaeological discoveries from recently excavated sites, including the fortress of Kampyr Tepe in southern Uzbekistan and the Buddhist monastic complex at Mes Aynak in eastern Afghanistan, are seamlessly woven into the broader historical narrative and illustrated with well-chosen photographs. The first thing to emerge from these discussions is the tremendous role played by the Greeks in reshaping their eastern territories. The second volume, for instance, examines cities possibly founded by the Greeks and highlights their later transformation into key hubs of the Silk Road. The monetary system they introduced, analysed in the third volume, greatly facilitated commercial exchange across these cities and beyond.

However, what stands out more prominently in these discussions is not a simple one-way transmission of Greek elements, but a dynamic process of cultural interaction in which local communities developed foreign models to create new forms. A direct example can be found in post-Hellenistic Central Asian coinage, better understood only in the past two decades: issued by Yuezhi/Kushan or Hunnic rulers of steppe origin, these coins draw on Greco-Roman standards yet replace classical motifs with power images indicating their own nomadic conventions and religious affiliations. The fourth volume is particularly noteworthy in this regard. After a fascinating, in-depth review of the development of Hellenistic art, it reveals how the Greek – and, equally importantly, Roman – visual legacy was localised and integrated in the legendary land of Gandhāra in present-day north-western Pakistan and neighbouring Central Asian regions, giving rise to distinctive and splendid schools of Buddhist art. This incorporation is evident, as is traditionally well-known, in a variety of motifs, from decorative elements such as Acanthus to more figurative images like Atlas and *putti*. It is also reflected in techniques, for example the use of stucco for modelling marble-like statues. As the related chapter comments (p. 194), ‘this indicates that the artists of Greater Gandhāra had transformed Western classical traditions into their own forms, which are imbued with vitality and largely independent of classical art.’

A fifth volume, *From Greece to China*, extends this analysis to a crucial new area: the reception of, and responses to, Western-derived inspirations in Han-Tang China. It notes that references to the Greeks and their descendants are rare and mostly legendary in Chinese historical sources, suggesting a lack of direct, consistent contact between the Hellenistic kingdoms and Chinese dynasties. However, it synthesises substantial visual evidence to argue for a different, yet illuminating, form of connection: numerous classical motifs, transmitted via Central Asia, were readily adopted and creatively adapted by the ancient Chinese to suit their own aesthetic preferences and cultural traditions. Evidence of this can be found in Xinjiang, in the famous Miran murals and in textiles from Loulan and Khotan, as well as in the heartland of Han-Chinese cultural regions, such as the Buddhist sculptures of the Yungang Grottoes and the Heracles-like guardian figurines from Tang-period tombs. In this way, the volume fulfils its primary purpose of demonstrating that Hellenistic cultural legacies were both encountered and deeply integrated into Chinese civilisation through the networks of the Silk Road.

Finally, the sixth volume, *The Legacy of Hellenistic Civilisation along the Silk Road*, gathers 27 research papers from two conferences held in 2016 and 2018 during the series' preparation. These papers are primarily contributed by leading academics from China and six other countries, with expertise spanning classical studies, history, art history, numismatics, and archaeology. They reflect the current state of scholarly debate and interdisciplinary collaboration, showcasing the study of the Hellenistic world as a vibrant international field of inquiry. In the volume, these papers are organised thematically and correspond to the titles of the preceding volumes. For interested readers, they provide an excellent resource for deeper engagement with specific historical concepts, objects, and archaeological sites introduced earlier in the series, such as the evolving definition of the 'Silk Road' itself and the influential coin types of Alexander and his successors, particularly those issued in Central Asia and northwest India.

This book series reflects the growing interest and fresh perspectives that Chinese academia has brought to classical studies in recent years. The editorial team challenges the traditional boundaries that typically separate the Hellenistic period (often considered to end with the rise of Rome in 146 BCE) from the establishment and flourishing of the Silk Road (commonly dated to the aftermath of Zhang Qian's mission in 128 BCE). Rather than portraying Hellenistic civilisation and its legacy as an invariable force that dominated certain parts of ancient Asia for a fixed period, they propose a more sophisticated model in which it was actively reshaped by and absorbed into local cultures, enabling its long-term presence and long-distance transmission along the Silk Road. In doing so, they unprecedentedly bridge two fields that are often treated as chronologically distinct, expanding the horizons of Hellenistic history.

Of course, no project of this scale can be entirely free from minor weaknesses. While topics concerning science, technology, and literature are indeed intertwined with discussions of currency, religions, and material production, one might expect, if space allows, more focused coverage of these indispensable components of Hellenism. Furthermore, the inclusion of many original English papers in the last volume might at first seem inconsistent with the predominantly Chinese text, though it in fact reflects the editors' consideration for non-Chinese readers and those Chinese scholars who might need to read the original English papers. Nevertheless, the series makes a tremendous effort to compile up-to-date information across multiple disciplines and, as it stands, remains an invaluable, nearly encyclopaedic reference work for both researchers and non-specialists. For the large Chinese readership in particular, it helps demystify the obscure terminology of Mediterranean studies and significantly broadens their view of the ancient world. An English translation is expected in the near future, which would undoubtedly benefit international readers and further enhance the impact of the original insights presented in this work.