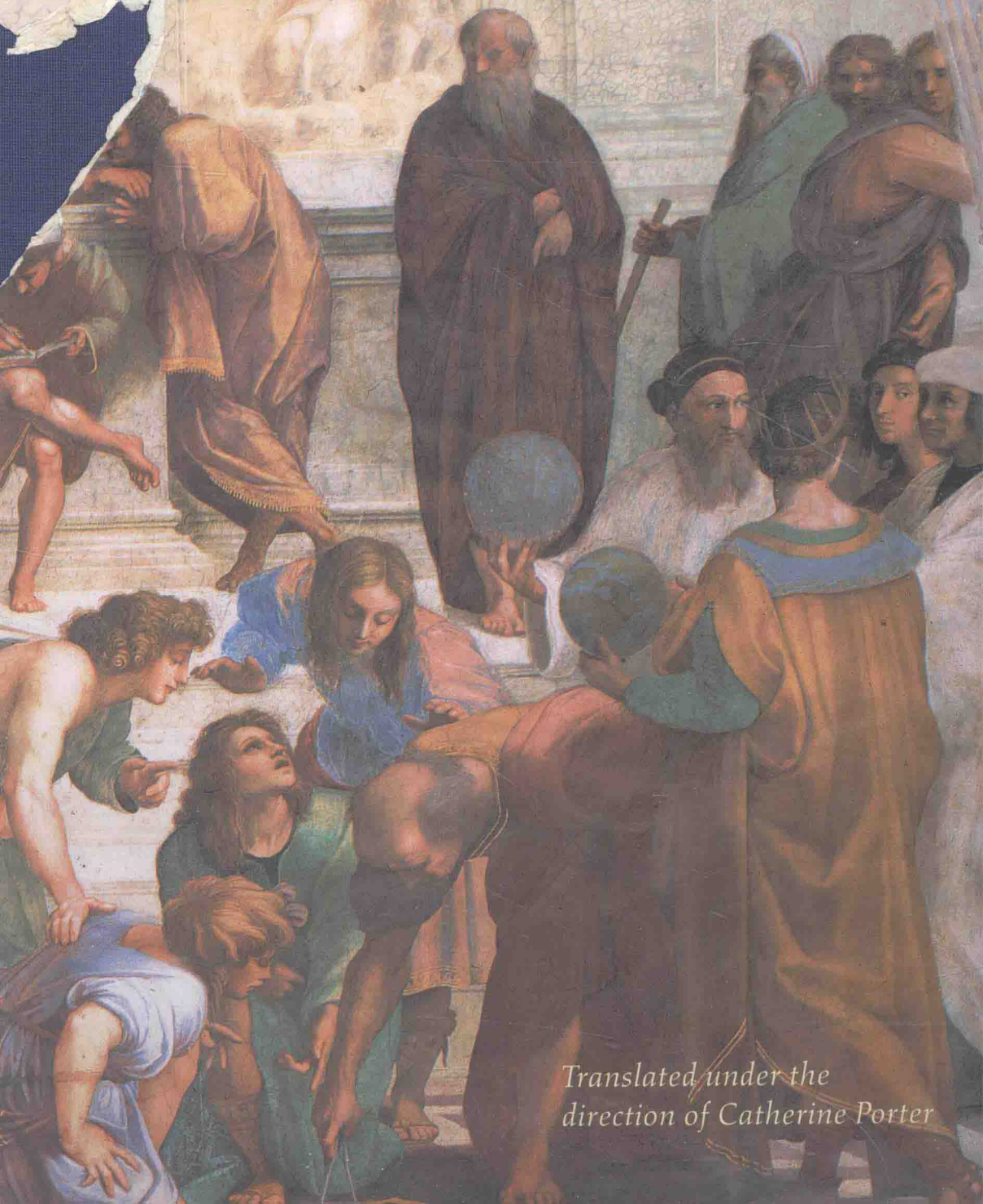


GREEK THOUGHT

A Guide to Classical Knowledge

JACOB BRUNSCHWIG & GEOFFREY E. R. LLOYD · EDITORS



*Translated under the
direction of Catherine Porter*

GREEK THOUGHT

A Guide to Classical Knowledge

Edited by Jacques Brunschwig and Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd
with the collaboration of Pierre Pellegrin

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Catherine Porter



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GREEK THOUGHT



TRANSLATORS' NOTE

An informal group of translators based in Ithaca, New York, we agreed in the fall of 1996 to translate the portions of *Greek Thought* originally written in French and Italian. Working largely in bilingual pairs, we met regularly to share problems and search for solutions. A broad group of willing collaborators made our task much easier. We wish to express our gratitude first and foremost to Jacques Brunschwig and Geoffrey Lloyd, coeditors of the original French edition, for their generous assistance and support. We also offer thanks to all the authors who graciously read our drafts, answered questions, and made invaluable corrections and suggestions as needed. Other specialists and consultants helped us at many points along the way: thanks in particular to Charles Brittain, Terence Irwin, Mark Landon, Philip Lewis, Culver Mowers, Pietro Pucci, Hunter Rawlings, Geoffrey Rusten, and Daniel Turkeltaub for their collaboration. The unfailingly helpful staff allowed us to use the excellent collection housed in Cornell's Olin Library with maximum efficiency, and the Department of Classics at Cornell University kindly shared its own well-stocked library. Finally, we are indebted to Jennifer Snodgrass and the editorial staff at Harvard University Press for overseeing this complex project with exceptional patience and professional acumen.

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INTRODUCTION: ON HOME GROUND IN A DISTANT LAND

ALPHA, BETA, AND THE REST, all the way to omega: most of us, on first acquaintance with the Greek alphabet, have toyed with writing our own names with its characters, so close and yet so remote from our own. Their attraction for us is unequaled. Roman inscriptions are lofty and admirable: their letters decorate the pediments of our civic buildings as well as commercial signs. At the extremes of the graphic spectrum, Egyptian hieroglyphics look down upon us from the pinnacle of their forty centuries; Chinese ideograms fascinate us by their symbolism and by the complicated enigma of their design. The Greek alphabet, halfway between the strange and the familiar, is at the perfect distance from our own—of which it is a remote ancestor. It is unfamiliar enough to let us know we have left home. Yet it welcomes us with signals clear enough to avoid complete illegibility. Better than a new dissertation on the eternal modernity of ancient Greece, or one more warning against the myths that nourish such dissertations, the paradoxical kinship of the alphabets offers a limited but illuminating metaphor for the complex relation that ties our present to a past that is also ours, and that continues to inhabit our present, visibly or invisibly.

What we have just said about the Greek alphabet could be repeated, even more justifiably, about everything that has been written with those letters. Despite severe losses, the Greek alphabet has transmitted to us countless texts: poems, myths, histories, tragedies, comedies, political and legal discourses, formal speeches, dialogues, treatises on philosophy, cosmology, medicine, mathematics, zoology, and botany; through direct action, indirect influence, polemical reaction, rereading, and reinterpretation, these texts inaugurated and have nourished the whole tradition of Western thought. Here again, the feelings of familiarity and distance are interwoven. We are on home ground in a distant land; we are traveling without leaving our own room. All our thinking, in one way or another, passes through reflection on the Greeks.

The key to the unparalleled originality of the Greeks may be that their culture, by definition, did not have the Greeks behind it. Of course it did not spring up out of nothing, any more than their alphabet did (its basic elements were borrowed from the Phoenicians); we need not regret that today's historians and scholars, with increasing conviction, are replacing the celebrated "Greek miracle" with unmiraculous Greeks. But however important the

Greeks' debt to preceding civilizations, they quickly made their borrowings their own and turned them against their creditors, who represented in their eyes either a civilization turned upside down (the prestigious and astonishing Egypt) or the opposite of civilization (the despotic and barbaric Mesopotamia). Like all those who have followed, the Greeks reflected on the Greeks; but their reflections were like no one else's, simply because they themselves were the Greeks. Their thinking, like God's thinking according to Aristotle, was thinking about thinking.

The Greeks' culture of self-awareness predated the Socratic "Know thyself." Very early, their mythology, newly codified by Homer and Hesiod, gave rise to its own critics (Xenophanes, Heraclitus) and its own interpreters, allegorists or not. The Milesian cosmologies carried on a dialogue; each was intended to resolve a difficulty posed by its predecessor. The intimidating Parmenidean challenge, which threatened to smother physics, elicited almost immediate responses by Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and the Atomists. Socrates, disappointed by the physics of his forerunners, kept his distance from things and turned toward discourse. Plato transposed the ancient myths; he interpreted Socrates, constructing the conditions that made Socrates possible and that would have made his condemnation impossible. Aristotle criticized Plato, as he criticized most of his predecessors, even while he strove to retain what deserved preservation. Epicureans and Stoics, from their own moment in history, mustered enough distance to seek their own masters in a remote past before Plato and Aristotle, in Democritus and Heraclitus. Plato's heritage was diffused and dispersed in a gamut that ranged from skepticism to Neoplatonic metaphysics. Commentary, the critique of texts and the accumulation of glosses, which began astonishingly early, flourished at the beginning of the common era.

But even more striking than the critical turns taken by Greek culture in its successive stages is the work that each of its artisans performed on himself. It would have seemed impossible for Greek scientists, historians, or philosophers to do their work without knowing, or at least without wondering, under what conditions (intellectual as well as moral and political) it was possible to do science, history, or philosophy. To judge by their works, it is clear that the same thing was true for sculptors, architects, musicians, and dramatic poets: their style is manifestly not the result of rote practice or of an empirical tradition based on natural ability. Even shoemaking was taught; even cooks claimed to be conscious auxiliaries of philosophy. Every activity, every perception, every direct relation to an object raised seemingly simple questions that are as disconcerting as those addressed by Socrates to his interlocutors—questions that interpose distance and require the mind to adjust its relation to everything it encounters: "What is it all about?" "What are you really looking for?" "What exactly do you mean?" "How do you know what you have just said?"

If the work we are presenting under the title *Greek Thought* has one central ambition, it is to call attention to this fundamental reflexivity that seems to us characteristic of Greek thought, and which gives it even today a formative value and a capacity to challenge. In this book we do not address "Greek science," or "Greek philosophy," or "Greek civilization." Excellent works, both introductory and comprehensive, exist on these subjects, works with which we do not propose to compete. We have not sought to explicate, or even to summarize, the whole of what the Greeks knew, or thought they knew; nor do we tally up what they did not know, the gaps in their knowledge. Similarly, we have not wanted either to repeat or to summarize histories of Greek philosophy; and nothing will be found here that touches directly on Greek art, Greek literature, or Greek religion. Instead we have sought to step back from the products to the processes that gave rise to them, from works to actions, from objects to methods. Of foremost interest to us is the typically Hellenic aptitude for raising questions that are at once "second order"—since they occupy a secondary position in relation to questions that bear immediately on the world, the beings that populate it, the events that take place in it, the activities that transform it—and "first order" or "primary," because they must logically be raised first, and solved in one way or another. The term "Socratic fallacy" has sometimes been used to designate the idea that one could not say whether a given individual was courageous or not, so long as one was unable to say universally what courage is. Fallacy or not, Greek thought finds in this quest for lucidity its most radical task. Classical knowledge, in the sense in which we are using the term, is not the knowledge indicated by expressions like "knowing that Socrates was condemned to death" or "knowing that the diagonal of a square is incommensurable with its side." It represents, rather, the knowledge denoted in expressions such as "knowing what one is saying," "knowing what one is doing," "knowing what one wants."

This dimension of Greek thought, which takes as its objects not only first-order knowledge, but also life, language, production, and action, strikes us as essential and characteristic, and it is to this dimension that we draw the reader's attention. We look at the Greeks looking at themselves. We evoke not history as they made it and experienced it, but the stories they told themselves about it; not their poetry, but their poetics; not their music, but their harmonics; not their speeches, but their rhetoric. We present their theories about the origin, meaning, and functions of religion. We say nothing about their language itself, but we do offer some of their reflections on the origin, elements, and forms of language. Their political institutions are mentioned, of course, but in the framework of the ideas and theories used to conceptualize and justify those institutions. We recall the principal doctrines of individual philosophers and scientists, or of philosophic and scientific schools, to show what philosophical activity, the development of a theory, the public presentation of a doctrine, meant to those individuals and groups.

This book is subdivided into five parts. The first might seem to grant too important a place to philosophy, to the detriment of science: in accordance with contemporary parlance, people we call scientists know things, whereas one must no doubt be a philosopher, and even a sort of philosopher that may be on the verge of extinction, to think that philosophy is a form of knowing. But this division between science and philosophy does not correspond at all to the conceptual frameworks of antiquity; at most it puts in an appearance, with many qualifications, in the Hellenistic era, when specialized knowledge begins to acquire a certain autonomy, though philosophy still claims the right to provide the specialists with their principles and to pass judgment on their methods. Plato clearly subordinates mathematics to dialectics; but the vocabulary in which he expresses that subordination, far from leaving mathematics in its customary category as a science, instead contests that categorization. As for Aristotle, although he was more inclined to see the individual sciences as models according to which the criteria of scientific thought could be elaborated, he grants physics only the status of a "second philosophy." The emergence of philosophy as we have described it is also the emergence of knowledge, and of thought in general. Several articles in this first group ("Images of the World," "Myth and Knowledge") describe the popular and mythic background against which the figure of the philosopher stands out, different in so many ways from his modern counterparts. Other articles ("The Question of Being," "Epistemology," "Ethics") offer a first broad staking out of the principal fields in which philosophy emerged. Thus right at the start, the critical approach of the work as a whole is sketched out: trying to avoid both the traps of historicism and those of *philosophia perennis*, we seek to put our object in a perspective that inevitably refers to a modern point of observation. In this enterprise we are concerned with measuring the legacy that Greek thought has bequeathed to its posterity, the use that posterity has made of it, and the continuities and discontinuities that this complex relation has engendered between inheritance and heirs—and it is not the least of the paradoxes that, in the inheritance itself, the heirs have found, among other things, the possibility of becoming themselves untrammelled producers of knowledge.

The second part is devoted in particular to politics: does not the "invention" of politics, along with that of philosophy and mathematics, belong most indisputably to ancient Greece? Here again, invention is not parthenogenesis. Although the Egyptians and the Babylonians had mathematics, Greek mathematics is characterized by a specific way of proceeding by articulated definitions and proofs. Similarly, institutions and practices of power, as well as reflections on forms of government, on the relations between governors and the governed, and on the nature of the political order, existed outside Greece; but Greece is distinguished by the formation and organization of the city-state, the practice of public debate, the procedures of collective decision-making, the writing and publication of laws, and, in political analysis, a style of justifica-

tion and argument that resembles (whatever causal sequence we might wish to privilege) the discourse that emerged in the fields of philosophy and science. From this invention of politics, we examine not so much the historical birth of the city-states and the development of their institutions as rather the reflection on those events and the theoretical and practical justification of those institutions; the definition of the various roles among which political action and thought were distributed; the confrontation, sometimes quite openly conflictual (Simone Weil said that the Greeks did not possess the self-satisfied hypocrisy of the Romans) but sometimes harmonious, between the practices of civic life and the ideology in which they are cloaked ("Inventing Politics," "Utopia and the Critique of Politics"); and the debates between reflection and participation in public affairs, which pose the perennial question of the sage's commitment to or detachment from his own city-state ("The Sage and Politics").

The third part, "The Pursuit of Knowledge," starts out by offering overviews of the institutional and conceptual frameworks for the extraordinary explosion of desire for knowledge, a desire that Aristotle views as naturally implanted in the heart of all people. Then follows a series of articles on the various branches of knowledge (including some that look to us like pseudoscience today). We have organized them alphabetically rather than adopting the classification—or rather one of the various classifications—that prevailed among Greek thinkers themselves: the theoreticians' agenda, that is to say the ordered set of questions to which any respectable doctrine was obliged to offer answers, from the formation of the world to the origin of humanity, human culture, and institutions, was fixed in its broad outlines at a very early date, and for several centuries manifested an astonishing degree of stability. Yet that agenda was enriched, diversified, and modified in multiple ways, and the classifications proposed rarely failed to become controversial. Certain disciplines, such as logic, did not come into their own until well after the early period of Greek thought; others, like medicine or harmonics, were quickly pervaded by debates on the extent to which they should be attached to or cut off from the common trunk of general philosophical and scientific theories. All things considered, we judged it preferable to fall back on the naïve security of alphabetical order.

In the final parts readers will find a series of articles on the major Greek philosophers and scholars, as well as on the principal schools and lasting currents of thought. Among so many glorious and singular individuals, the choice was necessarily a difficult one. Our selection is certainly more restrained than that of Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and Opinions of Illustrious Philosophers*; but it goes further forward in time, and it makes room for scientists and historians as well as for philosophers. Anticipating our own second thoughts, some may find that we have been unjust toward certain figures such as Xenophanes, Sophists other than Protagoras, the Cyrenaics or the

Megarians, Eudoxus of Cnidus, Theophrastus, or Philo of Alexandria. Still, we had to make choices, and any selection reflects judgments that can always be contested. Most of the thinkers or scholars to whom it was not possible to devote a separate section are mentioned, along with their works, within one article or another, and can be traced through the index. The bibliographies and cross-references also help make up for the inevitable disadvantages of choice and dispersal.

Finally, a word about the choice of contributors. As general editors responsible for the overall project and its implementation, the two of us who sign this Introduction are pleased and proud that our association can modestly symbolize the alliance between two major centers of research on the history of ancient thought, Cambridge and Paris; we are even more pleased and proud to have worked all our professional lives, each in our own way, in the conviction that the differences between the Anglo-Saxon and Latin worlds in traditions, methods, and instruments of analysis and research in no way prevent contact, exchange, productive discussion, and the production of a common work. This book bears witness to that shared conviction.

The authors to whom we turned, British or American, Italian or French, have all contributed to the considerable progress that has been made, over the last several decades, in the knowledge and understanding of the intellectual world of ancient Greece. They all have their own personalities, which we have not asked them to suppress; their freedom of opinion and judgment has been intentionally respected. As we have said, the gaze of the moderns looking upon the Greeks looking upon themselves remains obviously, and deliberately, our own gaze, and it measures distances, proximities, gaps, and debts from this standpoint. But this gaze of ours can never be entirely unified: contemporary scholars, sometimes because of the particular fields in which they work, sometimes because of the diversity of their overall approaches, do not all necessarily interpret or appreciate our relation to Greek thought in the same way. No one is in a position to dictate that all these scholars subscribe to the latest trend, or conform to the next-to-latest fashion; if we somehow had such power, we would surely have refrained from using it.

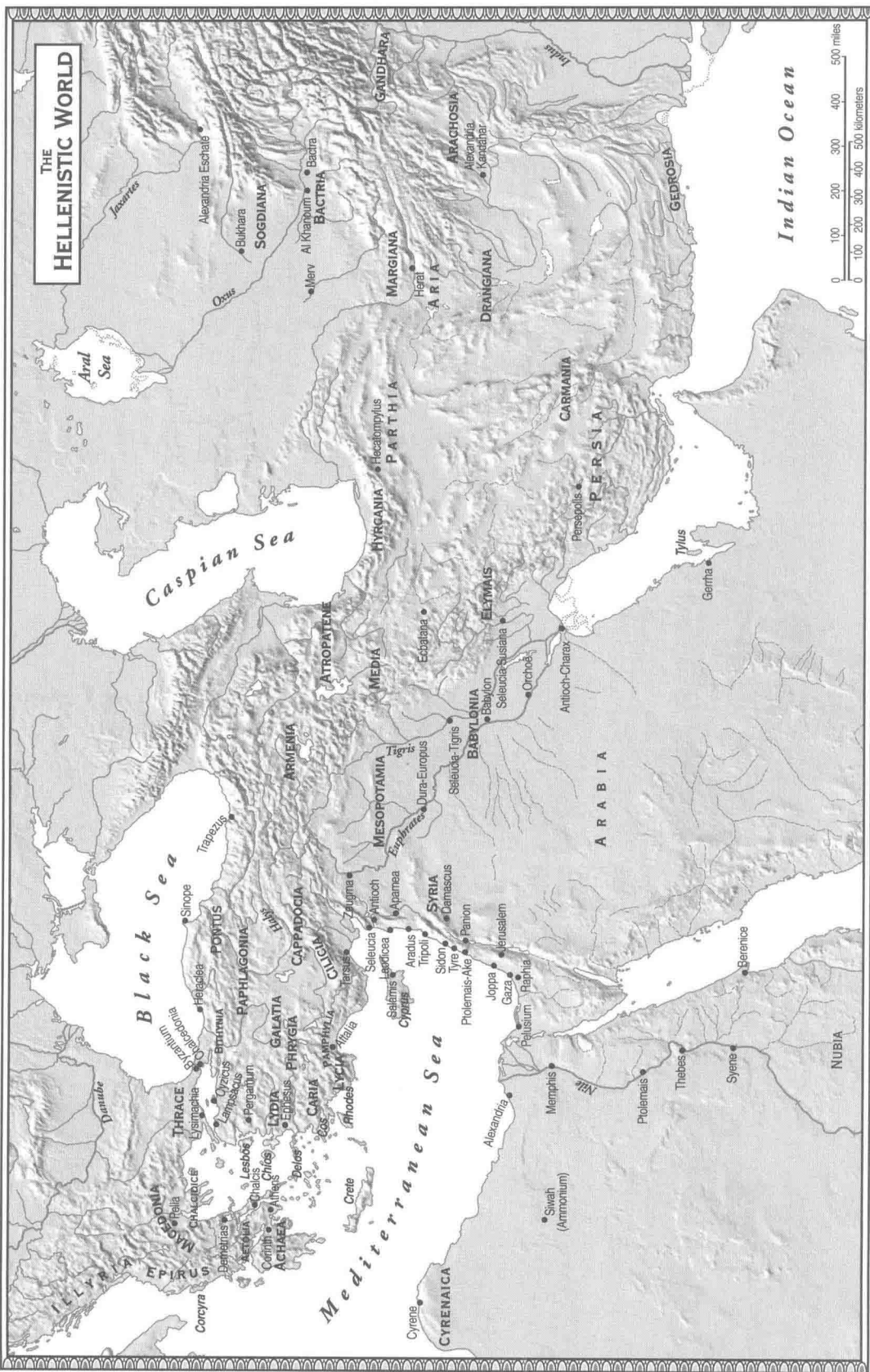
We thank our collaborators for agreeing to write their articles in a style that is not always the one they are accustomed to. We know how wrenching it is, for academics conscious of their scholarly responsibilities, to give up footnotes and erudite references. But we deliberately chose to call upon authors for whom that renunciation would be painful, rather than those whose habits would not have been particularly disturbed.

Finally, we want to thank all those without whom the long and difficult enterprise represented by this volume would have run aground on one or another of the countless reefs that threatened it. Louis Audibert, the literary director at Flammarion, had the initial idea; he followed its realization from

beginning to end with incomparable vigilance and care. Pierre Pellegrin played a very effective role in the revision process; he provided the liaison and the coordination that our geographic distance from each other, and from many of our authors, made particularly necessary. And we do not want to fail to thank the technical team at Flammarion, which supported us as much by its high expectations as by the help it offered us toward meeting them.

JACQUES BRUNSCHWIG, GEOFFREY E. R. LLOYD
Translated by Catherine Porter and Dominique Jouhaud

THE HELLENISTIC WORLD



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