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**Milinda Hoo, *Eurasian Localisms. Towards a translocal approach to Hellenism and inbetweenness in central Eurasia, third to first centuries BCE*, Stuttgart, Steiner Verlag, 2022, 338 pp. [978-3-515-13315-9].**

*Eurasian Localisms*, the first monograph by Milinda Hoo recently published within the prestigious Oriens et Occidens series, is a valuable and highly sophisticated contribution to the debate around a topic, that of so-called Hellenism in the East, which despite the continuous influx of new evidence, especially from archaeology, continues to suffer from some structural methodological shortcomings. They prove, to tell the truth, to be so structural to have actually become part and parcel of the mental frameworks of much of scholarly literature, to the point of not even being addressed, as they are taken for granted. From Mesopotamia to Central Asia (the core areas of the case studies surveyed in the volume), sites such as Ai Khanum, Seleukeia, Babylon or Old Nisa are routinely interpreted, and consequently presented, as places and spaces (physical and social) located in between (and or at the crossroads of) two, or more, worlds. The recurring metaphor here is that of the melting pot of cultures, the result of a more or less successful, more or less peaceful, fusion of East and West resulting from Alexander's expedition into Achaemenid territory. Divided into eight chapters paired with a rigorous methodological introduction and a concise but effectively comprehensive conclusion, *Eurasian Localisms* sets out to critically investigate the parameters by which the academic literature over the past one hundred and fifty years at least has understood the concept of cultural liminality in the context of the so-called Hellenistic East in the last three centuries of the pre-Christian era. In particular, the focus of the essay is on the various ways in which the analytical category of Hellenism has been used in order to understand, and then narrate, historically the material culture of sites, such as those previously mentioned, whose architectural and visual cultures, to name but two striking cases, have challenged the interpretative skills of generations of historians and archaeologists. The centerpiece of the introduction, devoted to setting the stage of the discussion to be unfolded in the rest of the book is, as anticipated, the concept of liminality, for which Central Asia during the Hellenistic period, the author argues, represents an ideal case study (despite the fact that a source such as the Persepolis Archive provides more than one clue to argue that the situation was arguably not so different in the previous decades, if not centuries).

Said in betweenness, as is explained in the remainder of the section (pp. 21-33), can be understood both from a geographical and a chronological point of view, Central Asia being situated, ideally and physically, along established disciplinary boundaries, which make its study not only particularly complex, but also especially prone to misunderstandings, preconceptions, and therefore misrepresentations. The second chapter (pp. 38-70), also methodologically oriented, focuses on the concept of Hellenism itself, charting its intellectual history from its beginnings in the wake of Droysen seminal *History* (pp. 39-42) through the era of the colonial empires of the late 1800s and the years between the two world wars. As the discussion unfolds, Hoo deftly highlights how the cultural context in which scholars moved proved decisive in shaping the interpretive categories with which they approached the available sources. The same is true, in some cases (pp. 51-56 about the decolonization years) in an adversarial

function, for the last fifty years, as well exemplified by the case of the figure of Alexander, who became a murderous tyrant after having long been celebrated as the standard bearer of Western progress in the East. Needless to say, pride of place is reserved in these pages to the contributions of pivotal (post-colonial) cultural critics such as Fanon, Bhabha and, of course, Said.

Such a jarring inconsistency in the evaluation of perhaps the most iconic figure of the Hellenistic era signals in the clearest way the problematic (paradoxical, in the author's parlance) nature of a concept, that of Hellenism, which throughout its history has generated "a powerful series of connotations" in turn proclivous to intertwine with "modern expectations and explanations of Greek culture and cultural inbetweenness" (p. 271). The five case studies (Ai Khanum in Afghanistan, Takht-i Sangin in Tajikistan, Seleukeia at the Tigris and Babylon in Iraq, and Nisa partica in Turkmenistan) that make up the bulk of the volume aim to demonstrate the paradoxical nature of Hellenism thanks to a rigorous examination of the excavation reports and subsequent historical and historiographical interpretations that have accumulated over the decades from the interpretation of the material culture brought to light. This section, it should be noted, has the nontrivial merit of making accessible in a clear and informative style, without ever detracting from analytical soundness, a massive scientific literature that is often not easy to oversee and assess, and in which disentangling oneself is particularly complex precisely because of the, sometimes antithetical, diversity of scholarly opinions.

The paradoxes arising from the review of the case studies reviewed in the volume are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 (pp. 205-228), and can be summarized as follows. The case of Ai Khanum, for example, demonstrates how the concept of Hellenism has been interpreted at the same time in a specifically ethnic way (being Greek in Central Asia) and in a peculiarly supra- (or inter-) ethnic dimension (acting according to customs traditionally identified as marks of Greekness: this is what emerges from the assessment of the material culture unearthed at Takht-i Sangin). Hellenism, the study of the Oxus temple suggests, would seem to express itself through a distinctively Greek visual and liturgical vocabulary, yet the historiographical discussion devoted to Hellenistic Babylon brings to the surface the –odd– conclusion that this is not always the case. Again: the Nisa finds, especially the rytha and the coroplastic, have been assessed through the prism of philhellenism (pp. 145-154). The latter, Hoo astutely points out, inherently implies a positioning of its practitioners outside the Greek cultural horizon; and this despite the fact that these people, as philhellenes, are assumed to define their own actions and positionality in the world precisely in relation to Greek culture itself. Even a concept such as hybridity, which is favored in the scholarly literature in cases such as Seleukeia or Takht- i Sangin in an attempt to smooth overly exclusivist interpretations (as in the case of Ai Khanum) does not escape the paradox of reproducing the very representation of culture as a static and self-defined containers (boxes) that it actually set out to overcome. Finally - and perhaps most symptomatic - the paradox of locality (pp. 196-202) presents Hellenism as a proxy, at the same time, of the continuity of an (unchanging: Babylon is the case par excellence) cultural tradition and of the most distinct innovation (Ai Khanum and Seleukeia). What to do at this point? The author's answer to the questions raised in the *pars destruens* of the essay is evident from its own subtitle: *a translocal approach to Hellenism and inbetweenness in central Eurasia, third to first centuries BCE*. In Chapter 9 (pp. 229-270), in fact, Hoo moves on to illustrate, with remarkable clarity and effectiveness, the methodological and conceptual toolkit characteristic of globalization literature. The latter, the discussion shows, has gradually made its way into scholarly

discourse on antiquity (again a sign of the *Zeitgeis*), but rarely in a conscious and critically rigorous way.

Far from standing simply as a new synonym for Hellenism (or worse, Hellenization), the concept of globalization understood as a process, the author argues, offers an elegant and hermeneutically fruitful way out of the paradoxes of Hellenism. In particular, a translocal analysis of the material culture examined in the volume proves capable, as shown in the brilliant thought experiment that closes the chapter (244-270), of drawing attention to the consequences, in people's daily lives as well as on the broader temporal scenario of empires, of the mobility and connectivity which, it is reiterated throughout the essay, ought to be taken as perhaps the defining feature of the Hellenistic era across Eurasia. To put it in Hoo's very own words, then (p. 273) "globalization and translocalism are thus useful as heuristic tools to study, think about, and understand material changes, transformations, and continuations as social reorganizations of increasing diversity in the face of intensifying interactions across global, regional, and local scales". The overall end result is a much more nuanced and richer picture of the Hellenistic Eurasian world, in which the most diverse social practices and situations, communities and actors, regain center stage, and eventually acquire their own, distinct voice.

*Eurasian Localisms* is a profoundly innovative book of impressive methodological soundness, whose revolutionary potential for antiquarian studies (not only those devoted to the Hellenistic world) seems clear to anyone who reads it. It will therefore be worth highlighting that the emphasis (certainly dictated by the chronological limitations of the research) on the last three centuries BCE should not mask the macroscopic fact, of which historiography is slowly but steadily becoming aware, that the geographic and temporal integration of Eurasia that is the focus of globalization studies in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds (pp. 65-70) was already accomplished (and still unfolding), perhaps on an even larger scale, in Achaemenid times. Milinda Hoo's enthralling monograph, therefore, only highlights the importance of extending the application of the analytical methodologies she so skillfully employed back in time and across the space of Eurasia: not only with the aim of better understanding the prehistory, so to speak, of the world we still call Hellenistic, but perhaps a considerable part of its most characteristic dynamics, as well as (at least until the apogee of the Abbasid caliphate) of its *Fortleben*.

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