CHAPTER SEVEN

IN EASTERN IRAN: THE TIME OF THE GREEK KINGDOMS
(c. 250–50 B.C.)

The political and geographical horizon

In the middle of the third century the north-eastern provinces of Iran, thinking themselves neglected by the Seleucid kings, who were more and more absorbed by Mediterranean affairs, seceded under the leadership of their Hellenic satraps: Andragoras in Parthene, Diodotus in Bactria. As early as 239/238 the former succumbed to an invasion by nomad Parni, who, adopting the name of their new country, founded the Parthian monarchy, and within a century were to reunite under their hegemony the lands of the Iranian plateau. To the east, however, Diodotus survived and assumed the royal diadem, founding the kingdom conventionally designated as “Greco-Bactrian”. Some time between 230 and 227 Seleucus II launched an expedition against the new eastern kingdoms, both in his eyes equally rebellious; although Diodotus’ son and successor had made common cause with the Parthians, Seleucus gained some initial success, but was soon recalled to the west by an Attalid attack in Asia Minor. Diodotus II was eventually killed, possibly in an outburst of Greek patriotism, and was replaced by Euthydemus, who was born in Magnesia-on-the-Maeander (or perhaps only his forbears originated from there). His long reign secured the consolidation of the kingdom. In 208 he had to face a new Seleucid attempt at reconquest: Antiochus III, more successful than his father, succeeded in blockading Euthydemus in Bactra;

but after two years of indecisive operations the Magnesian induced Antiochus to come to terms, by arguing that "considerable hordes of nomads were approaching, and this was not only a grave danger to both of them, but if they consented to admit them, the country would certainly relapse into barbarism". Antiochus recognized Euthydemus' royal title, against a formal submission; and this last Seleucid failure ushered in for Eastern Iran five hundred years of political independence. This was maintained through diverse vicissitudes; and down to the Sasanians, apart from some temporary encroachments by the Parthians, no conqueror from the Iranian plateau was to venture on any move to end it.

From the point of view of historical records, this breach with the West had the direst consequences. Thenceforth Central Asia escapes notice almost entirely in the accounts which continued after a fashion to throw light on the periphery of the classical world. The Parthian History of Apollodorus of Artemita (lost, but used by Strabo) and the Philippic History of Trogus Pompeus (perhaps likewise derived from Apollodorus' work) treat the Greco-Bactrian kingdom as an appendage of the Parthian Empire, an appendage which is almost entirely ignored in the dry résumé of Trogus which Justin has preserved for us. The gap has to be filled by numismatics, and, for a greater diversity of social groups, by archaeology—more actively pursued for these epochs in Central Asia than in Iran, but subject to all the risks of over-elaborate interpretation to which a lack of written material gives rise.  

The secession of Central Asia meant that regions which had known the early spread of Zoroastrianism were now politically cut off from their western brethren. When in the beginning of the second century Demetrius I, son of Euthydemus, followed by other dynasts emerging from Greek Bactria, penetrated south of the Hindukush and recovered the satrapies which Seleucus had surrendered, the Greco-Bactrians re-united, to their own advantage, virtually all the "Aryan lands" celebrated in the Young Avesta. To the west, Margiana and Aria appear to have been held by

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2 Polybius XI.39.5. For these events cf. above, pp. 28, 30.
3 In general, archaeological references will here be given to primary publications; but, as many Soviet books and journals are not easily accessible to Western readers, references to translations and review articles are made as often as possible. Names of sites published by Soviet excavators are kept in their Russian transcription. Plans of most sites in present-day Afghanistan (and of some individual monuments) can be found in W. Ball, Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Paris 1982.
4 HZ I 274-6; for the identification of countries south of the Hindukush add Gnoli, ZTH, 23-57. About the Raŋhā (the last name in the list of Vd.1),