CHAPTER SIX

THE INDIAN CAMPAIGNS, 327–325 BC*

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The invasion of India had been maturing for some time with the encouragement of Indian refugees, notably Sisicottus who had served with Alexander throughout the Sogdian revolt. Interested rulers from the Indus valley, notably the prince of Taxila, had also intrigued with the conqueror, hoping to use his army for their own purposes. But no encouragement was needed. As Alexander surely knew from Herodotus, the Indus valley had been acquired for the Persian empire by Darius I, and the inhabitants of the Kabul valley at least had sent cavalry and elephants to the Persian grand army at Gaugamela.1 There was also the factor of emulation. Greek tradition knew of the exploits of the legendary Babylonian queen Semiramis and her conquests in India; and, more pertinent, there was already a legend in vogue that Dionysus had begun his triumphal progress in the eastern lands. Alexander’s staff was ready to find and create evidence for the presence of both Heracles and Dionysus. Most conveniently a small community which surrendered to him in the mountains between the Choes and the Kunar valley was identified as the birthplace of Dionysus. Nearby was a mountain whose local name recalled the Greek meros (Dionysus was reputed to have been concealed in the thigh (mêros gk) of Zeus, and there were abundant growths of ivy and bay trees. That encouraged the presumption that the inhabitants worshipped Dionysus and were descended from the god’s entourage. They were accordingly granted their freedom (under the supervision of Alexander’s satrap) with high commendation of their aristocratic government.2

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1 Arr. 3.8.3,6. See further Badian 1985: 462.

Map 1. The Kabul Valley.