

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Michael Rostovtzeff and Elias Bickerman in context

J. G. Manning

The following volume publishes, in the main, the results of a lecture given by Pierre Briant and a series of responses to that lecture. The event was the fourth annual Michael I. Rostovtzeff Lecture hosted by the Department of Classics at Yale University and took place on 10 November 2011. A colloquium, which included responses and a general discussion of the lecture, was held the next day. The occasion of the lecture honored the doyen of Achaemenid studies, a man who has done more than anyone else in the last half century to establish a clear picture of the Achaemenid Empire, its organization, and the contours of its connections with the Hellenistic states that succeeded it.

It became clear almost immediately that the two days of discussion produced much of value and that a small volume would be useful to others. I was delighted that most of the people who spoke agreed to contribute. Two participants in the colloquium, Eckart Frahm and Jelle Stoop, were not able to offer formal papers for the volume, but nonetheless contributed much to the discussion, and their contributions are noted here. Two scholars who were not present at the event, Amélie Kuhrt and Albert Baumgarten, have very kindly stepped in to add valuable content and context.

Two giants of 20th century historiography are treated in this volume, Michael Rostovtzeff (1870–1952) and Elias Bickerman (1897–1981). Bickerman studied under Rostovtzeff, and the two had much in common, although they were a generation apart and their careers took quite different trajectories. Both scholars were deeply affected by war and exile, both rejected theory— for them the “evidence” itself was always front and center, and both viewed the Hellenistic period favorably while using it as a means by which to reflect on the social ills of 20th European civilization. Both considered their work to be relevant to the modern world, and both read their own experiences back into their interpretations of the ancient world. So for example, Rostovtzeff’s well known statist views of Ptolemaic Egypt, which was echoed perfectly in Bickerman’s review of Rostovtzeff’s major work (1941b) that is reproduced here as Chapter 3. Bickerman’s Jewish identity, as is emphasized throughout this volume, was a decisive factor in his historical writing. For Rostovtzeff, his Russian identity remained a vital driving force to the end of his life. Both retained profound and yet ultimately conflicted attachments to German schol-

arship. The careers of Bickerman and Rostovtzeff would intersect one last time, and somewhat poignantly, as Baumgarten relates in his contribution, at a memorial service held for Rostovtzeff in 1952 organized by the Friends of the St Sergius Academy at which Bickerman was one of three principal speakers.

Rostovtzeff was much the more famous of the two, becoming the Sterling Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology at Yale in 1925. Although his monumental *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (1941b) is still his most important work, his views on Hellenistic culture are clearest in his discussion of the material excavated at Dura Europus. He served as President of the American Historical Association in 1935, something only one other ancient historian before him had done, the Egyptologist James Henry Breasted (1865–1935), who had served in 1928.¹ His work is still widely read by ancient historians, especially those who concentrate on the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire, even though his interpretive framework, so strongly influenced by his own life experiences, has been increasingly challenged. While there has been good work on his life by Marinus Wes (1990) and others, Rostovtzeff's career has still not received a comprehensive study.²

Bickerman is still read today, mainly in Jewish history circles, and Albert Baumgarten's magisterial biography (2010a) has introduced a new generation to his work. His *Institutions des Séleucides* (1938) remains a classic and is well worth consulting. What makes for fascinating reading in what follows below are the connections and the parallels in these two scholars' lives, and also their great differences in approach and in attitude toward the material evidence.

Pierre Briant begins the volume with a treatment of Bickerman's concept of Hellenization, certainly a key theme in all of Bickerman's work. It is also a subject in which Briant himself has made very important contributions over the last thirty-five years. Briant has summarized his views in three recent and noteworthy pieces (Briant 2005; *ibid.* 2009; *ibid.* 2012).

In his 2009 study, Briant traces the history of the study of the Hellenistic transformation of the Near East during the first millennium BC beginning not with the work of Droysen, who many scholars have understood as the creator of Hellenistic studies, but deeper in time to the scholarship written in the 17th and 18th century, to Abbé Mably, Charles Rollin and Montesquieu, among others, and to the theme of supposed decline, decadence and despotism of the Persian empire. These ideas are traced in greater detail in his book that appeared in 2012, and which will soon appear in English translation under the imprint of Harvard University Press. Briant thoroughly analyzes the literature of the Enlightenment on Alexander the Great and has shown Droysen's indebtedness to this 18th century heritage (even without acknowledging the extent of this debt).

The historical question in these works was to what extent Alexander transformed the Middle East, especially with respect to commerce. Much of this

1 For a superb biography of Breasted, see Abt (2011).

2 There have been several studies on various aspects of Rostovtzeff's career in recent years. See Marcone (1999), Kreucher (2005), Andreau and Berelowitch (2008). See also the important contributions by Bowersock (1986), and Shaw (1992).

pre-Droysen thinking, Briant rightly emphasizes, occurred in the context of the rise of mercantile states in Europe, colonialism, and a framework that we now term “Oriental Despotism.” The debate about the impact of Alexander, of course, has continued, and Briant is right in concluding that “posing the problem in its fullest extent requires its examination from the wider perspective of the transition from the Achaemenid empire to the Hellenistic kingdoms,” and breaking “the predetermined, even overdetermined, periodization centered on the year 334, and approach the history of Alexander as part of a historical period that had its own dynamic, one that encompasses the entire half of the fourth century in an area spanning from the Indus to the Balkans” (Briant 2009: 188). In his work, Briant has brilliantly shown the value of studying the historiography of the field because it provides both the context of historical analysis and the presuppositions and the ideas that animated scholarship in a particular age.

Just as many writers of the 17th and 18th century (and well beyond) viewed Alexander’s campaigns in the East in the context of contemporary European concerns with trade and in the light of the perceived “immobility” and political stagnation of the Near East, so too what emerges from Briant’s valuable discussion in Chapter 2 is a detailed understanding of how life events, and particularly the struggle for a permanent academic position, profoundly shaped Bickerman’s scholarship. He saw current affairs after World War II and the influence of European civilization in the Near East and in Africa as a way to illuminate the Hellenistic world and the role of Greek culture in the East after Alexander’s campaigns, in his view the original “European” expansion into the Near East.

We publish as Chapter 3 an important but now mostly forgotten review by Bickerman of Rostovtzeff’s most important and still widely read work *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, Oxford, 1941. Briant had signaled the existence of this review in earlier work (2005) and it was the impetus for his Yale lecture. Amélie Kuhrt has translated the review from the original French, and we are very much in her debt for offering it here. The review demonstrates how much Bickerman agreed with Rostovtzeff’s views on the political and social history of the Near East and Egypt after Alexander even while the men diverged in their opinions about Hellenistic culture.

Matthew Stolper offers a more personal take on the scholarship of Bickerman in Chapter 4, beginning with his problems of emigration to the States. Here his contemporary, the Austrian émigré and Assyriologist Leo Oppenheim offers some parallels to Bickerman’s predicament. In a letter addressed by Toni Stolper to Oppenheim, still without a permanent position himself, there is a plea to provide some advice for another Austrian, the Egyptologist and Nubian scholar Ernest Josef Zyhlarz (1890–1964), who was dismissed from his academic post in Hamburg by British authorities after the war for suspected Nazi sympathies (which he denied). The letter provides some important context for just how precarious the situation was for scholars seeking refuge in the States. A second note, from Bickerman to Matt Stolper, is a request to obtain a copy of Stolper’s dissertation on the Murashû archive. Bickerman was interested in the Jewish names in the archive and what this could say about Jewish assimilation in the Achaemenid Empire.

In Chapter 5, John Collins places Bickerman in the context of Jewish historical scholarship. Emphasizing Bickerman's contribution to the study of Hellenistic Judaism, *The God of the Maccabees* published in 1937, is surely his most important and enduring work. Collins outlines the reception of Bickerman's thesis of the Maccabean revolt, namely that the Hellenizers in Jerusalem in fact were behind the abandonment of their ancestral laws. The historical understanding of the revolt, to be certain, has had a complex reception history, to say nothing of the extensive literature it has generated. Bickerman's views remain an important part of the ongoing analysis of the revolt, its causes and consequences. Collins highlights an important contrast between Rostovtzeff and Bickerman, namely that the latter hardly considered economic factors in his work. The drumbeat of war in Germany, and the existential threat to the Jews, is clear in Bickerman's analysis as both Collins and Baumgarten remind us. Yet Bickerman was conflicted, torn between his Jewish beliefs, the political tensions of the 1930s, and his own cosmopolitan worldview, one that had surely been reinforced by his work on Hellenistic history.

This tension within Bickerman was never fully resolved. Marc Domingo Gygax's contribution in Chapter 6 examines the multiple identities of Bickerman born of his peripatetic life. The tensions and contradictions between Bickerman's personal life and his scholarship come into full view in Domingo Gygax' analysis. There was much for him to negotiate between his Russian upbringing, a German education, the influence of his master Rostovtzeff and his Jewish identity. Bickerman tried hard to hide, and even to expunge, much of his own personal experience in the interest of what he thought was historical "objectivity." Ultimately there was something unusual about the man and the scholar, for he was an "historian of the Jews" who wrote from a classical perspective, yet never learned Hebrew (Grafton 2010).

Baumgarten has done more than any scholar in bringing all of these contradictions and experiences together in his masterful biography of Bickerman. In his contribution, he brings the volume to a close by bringing together Rostovtzeff and Bickerman, the interaction of past and present, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War and how both historians understood the concept of "Hellenization" and the role of "colonial elites" in this process. Baumgarten adds much to both men's scholarly and personal lives. Of special value is the inclusion of little known archival records that document Rostovtzeff's early life, provided here as Appendix A and B.

At the core of Baumgarten's chapter is the reception of Bickerman's main ideas. He and Rostovtzeff differed in their description of Hellenization in the main because, as Baumgarten reminds us, Bickerman's lengthy career exposed him to more evidence and even more social change. More fundamentally perhaps, as all of the authors in this volume stress, the two men's life experiences in America, forged in the crucible of European war, profoundly shaped their scholarship. Rostovtzeff, who had reached the heights of American academia, saw the culture of the Hellenistic world as a unified whole. In contrast Bickerman, who never really settled down and never reconciled to a single identity, viewed Hellenistic culture as fragmented. The work of these two great men, with their distinct voices, is read today not only

because many of their ideas were good ones but also because both scholars were so passionately engaged in the modern world as well. Always, then, with one foot in the ancient world and the other in the modern in a tradition that in many ways indeed goes back to Mommsen. That is an important reminder that the very best tradition of ancient history writing has always been engaged with the modern world as well.

Inevitably there is repetition and some overlap in coverage of the authors. I have decided to leave these in place to retain some of the spontaneity of the colloquium and to preserve the sense of the interaction and agreements between participants during these two memorable days at Yale. In the various spellings of Bickerman's name noted by Domingo Gygax below (and by Ma 2000:394–95) I have collapsed them into a single entry in the Bibliography as Bi(c)kerman(n).

JG Manning
Guilford CT, June 2014

CHAPTER 2

MICHAEL ROSTOVITZ, ELIAS J. BICKERMAN AND THE 'HELLENIZATION OF ASIA'

From Alexander the Great to World War II

Pierre Briant

My paper will make a connection between two of the greatest historians of the ancient world, and particularly of the Hellenistic world, Michael Rostovtzeff and Elias Bickerman.¹ I have a long-standing interest in each of these scholars. As I explained in my inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in March 2000 (Briant 2000a:32–34) and again in May of the same year at a colloquium dedicated to Rostovtzeff,² the work of Rostovtzeff has had great influence on my own conceptions of continuities and ruptures between the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods. It was while I was preparing those talks that I first encountered the review-article that Bickerman published in the journal *Renaissance* 1944–45 on the magisterial work of Rostovtzeff (1941b), and a few years later I included it in a discussion of the idea of Hellenization.³ In October 2010, when I received the invitation to deliver the fourth Rostovtzeff Lecture at Yale, I immediately suggested presenting my thoughts on the relationships between the two scholars, particularly because Rostovtzeff had published an article that also treated the theme of Hellenization in the same journal, *Renaissance*, in 1943. At this time I also became acquainted with the monograph of Albert Baumgarten (2010a). Baumgarten has gathered and treated biographical information on the relationships between Rostovtzeff and Bickerman (2010a:18–171) with precision, and with all the more skill and value in view of the fact that Bickerman had required his literary executor, Morton Smith, to destroy all his personal papers. I will refer the reader to this work repeatedly.⁴ I thank Albert Baumgarten

- 1 I have added supplementary comments to the text that I read at Yale without altering its overall sense. I have supplied explanatory notes and bibliographic references which allow my remarks to be located in the longer trajectory of writings and reflections concerning Rostovtzeff and Bickerman. I address my warmest thanks to my friend Matthew Stolper for translating the text of the lecture I gave at Yale, as well as the revised versions that I sent to him until this very last one; during this process, I also benefited from his suggestions.
- 2 My presentation at the colloquium of 17–19 May, 2000 was published in Briant (2008) under the title “Michel Rostovtzeff et le passage du monde achéménide au monde hellénistique,” which I cite in preference to a slightly different version published in the proceedings of the colloquium, edited by J. Andreau and W. Berelovitch (2008).
- 3 Briant (2005:9–69, esp. pp. 42–49). See below, Chapter 3.
- 4 Baumgarten (2010a:11–13; 26–27); cf. the appreciation of this work by Grafton (2010). Since

sincerely for information that he has provided since our first contact in the Autumn of 2011, including a fascinating discussion that we had in Paris on 24 May 2012, while he was working with the Archives Louis Robert at the Institut de France. Here, my theme is more specific: to analyze why and how the intersecting ideas of Rostovtzeff and Bickerman on the concept of Hellenization were broadly influenced by the personal and political contexts in which they were developed and stated.

M. Rostovtzeff and E. Bickerman were of Russian origin. Both were born in the Ukraine, about thirty years apart: the first, Rostovtzeff, was born in Zhytomyr in 1870; the other, Bickerman, at Kishinev in 1897. Their destinies were intertwined throughout the greater part of their professional lives. In Russia, to begin with, Bickerman was Rostovtzeff's student at the University of Saint Petersburg shortly before the Revolution of 1917. Then Rostovtzeff left Russia at the end of June 1918, though without giving up hope of returning to his homeland. After spending some time in England and France, he reluctantly decided to make a place for himself in the United States, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Five years later he accepted a professorship at Yale, a post he held until he died in October 1952.⁵

As for Bickerman, he remained in Russia until 1921, when he emigrated to Berlin. He completed his doctorate and his habilitation there, becoming a *Privat-Dozent* in 1929. Twelve years after he arrived in Berlin, in 1933, he emigrated again, this time to France, but only seven years after that, in 1940, Nazi armies occupied Paris. Bickerman reached the United States in July 1942, eventually obtained a professorship at Columbia in 1952, and passed away in 1981 in Tel Aviv and was buried in Jerusalem.

As a result of their many travels and successive exiles, both Rostovtzeff and Bickerman were polyglot savants. Both wrote and spoke with equal ease in Russian, German, French, English and Italian. The major works of both appeared in these various languages. Only Rostovtzeff had a large number of publications in Russian, but Bickerman was also able to introduce the results of Russian and Soviet work in his own publications at a time when these materials were generally ignored in Europe, particularly by Classicists.⁶ Throughout these years, Rostovtzeff and

the book is exclusively devoted to Bickerman in his role as a "Historian of the Jews," it does not cite the article in *Renaissance* 1944–45. Baumgarten has also published an important article on "Hellenism and Judaism" (2010b), where he discusses the influence of contemporary events (World War II) on the ideas of Momigliano and Bickerman with respect to their visions of the Jews of Antiquity confronting Hellenization; he returned to the question of "Hellenization vs. Orientalization" in a forthcoming study ("The Hellenization of the East and the Orientalization of the West: the paradox of Philo of Byblos"), in which he discusses the articles that Rostovtzeff and Bickerman published in *Renaissance* 1943 and 1944–1945, but, as he himself says, from a point of view that is different from mine.

- 5 See Wes (1990); on his arrival in the United States and his stay at Madison, Wisconsin, see the very illuminating study by Bowersock (1986), to which J. G. Manning called my attention.
- 6 See especially Bickerman (1966), where he used reports of Soviet excavations in Central Asia, for which he received congratulations and thanks from B. G. Gafurov (1966:117). Among the other historians of the Hellenistic World, Edouard Will was one of the few to learn Russian in order to be able to read the works of Soviet Archaeologists: cf. his remarks in *Topoi* IV/2 (1994:439).