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If it had not been for Ctesias’ talent for paradoxography, very little, if any, of his *Indika* would have survived. Transmission of this work, and indeed of all of Ctesias’ writings (notably his main achievement, the *Persika*), is still very fragmentary indeed, but at least there is enough material at hand to make some sense of the nature of his work. The *Persika* has fared well recently, with a new English translation of the *testimonia* and the fragments by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and James Robson in 2010.¹ and another one by Jan Stronk, also from 2010.² Those looking for an English translation of the *Indika*, the first full monograph on India, however, were ill-served for a long time. Of course readers of French could resort to the translations of Janick Auberger from 1991³ and of Dominique Lenfant from 2004,⁴ but a modern translation in English had not been produced since 1881, when John Watson McCrindle published his.⁵ Moreover, Andrew Nichols’ new translation is both accessible and affordable, which makes up for the lack of inclusion of the Greek text, which is one of the main advantages of Lenfant’s Budé volume. Added to the fragments of the *Indika* are translations on the scanty remains of Ctesias’ *Periodos* and other loose fragments.

Nichols’ introduction (pp. 11-46) deals with the history of the text, Ctesias’ life, his works, his sources, and the influence of the *Indika*, the latter being a fine advertisement of an author so often maligned. The introduction is rounded off with a short section on Ctesias’ minor works, and ample endnotes. What follows is the translation of the fragments, or rather the *testimonia*, as nothing remains of Ctesias’ own words. The translation (pp. 47-91) is followed by the commentary (pp. 93-172). A bibliography and two indices (an index locorum and a general index) complete the book.

The translation as a whole thus consists of translations of the individual *testimonia*, which are sensibly numbered following volume IIIC of Jacoby’s *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* from 1958. The translation is primarily based on the Greek text of Lenfant, but where necessary Jacoby’s text is used, i.e. where Lenfant quotes less than Jacoby. Of the fifty fragments the core consists of a large (13 page) extract from Photius’ *Library*, which is
an epitome of the most interesting (that is, the most fantastic) facts from the Indika. As Ctesias’ original text was a single book monograph, it is certainly possible that Photius included most of the information it contained, although of course one can never know how much was left out precisely. The many other quotations and testimonia, collected primarily from Aelian’s De natura animalium, Pliny’s Natural History, Aristotle’s De natura animalium, and the Mirabilia of Antigonus of Carystus, are largely repetitions of the data provided by Photius, with some interesting additions and variant interpretations.

‘Reading’ the Indika thus comes down to reading summaries by others. Of Ctesias’ style very little can be said based on the testimonies, which often start with “Ctesias says” or “Ctesias claims”. It is therefore the contents of the work that matter, and that make Nichols’ translation an interesting read. Ctesias’ observations, which are hardly proper autoptic observations at all, focus on the wonders of India, which in fact refers more to the region of modern Pakistan than to India itself, and certainly not to the subcontinental part of India, which was unknown to the Greeks and Persians at the time. That Ctesias mainly transmits what he has heard, not what he has seen, is not so strange, as it is certain that he never visited India itself, being confined by his duties as a medical doctor to the Persian king in the late fifth and early fourth century BCE. It was at Artaxerxes’ court after all that he was able to meet visitors from further east and to hear these travellers’ wondrous stories. In Ctesias’ findings those interested in the fantastic (both today and in antiquity) can enjoy descriptions of the martichora or manticore, a wondrous and incredible hybrid beast, that was fabled to fire venomous darts from its scorpion-like tail, a deadly animal with the body of a lion and the head of a man. In fact the martichora was probably a tiger, but Ctesias, not unlike Herodotus, did not feel the need — or did not have the opportunity — to verify these stories through personal experience. Other unlikely stories are passed on, for instance, about the unicorn, according to Ctesias a species of horned, monstrous wild ass (in fact a rhinoceros or an antelope?), and about gold-guarding griffins, again reminiscent of Herodotus. Similar wondrous creatures include the Pygmies, who wear their long hair and beards as clothes (and have penises reaching their ankles), the Cynocephaloi, people with dog-heads who can only bark, although they do understand the Indian language, the Macrobioi (those who live extremely long), and the Sciapodes, a tribe of people with extremely large feet, which they can use as parasols when they lie on their backs. It is mainly flora and fauna that we find in the indirect remnants of the Indika, natural wonders that fit in perfectly with the paradoxographical tradition. Occasionally, as Nichols points out, Ctesias’ background as a physician surfaces, for example, when he shows special interest in a particular Indian poison, or in the absence of headaches among the Indians.

When one reads the collected testimonies of the Indika as translated here, it is striking how different authors claim different facts based on the same text. It is clear that most of them quote from the same work, but since each author makes his own selection, and gives his own interpretation, the result is an interesting landscape of ‘facts’. According to Aelian, the Cynamolgoi are a tribe of dog-breeders, whereas Pollux’s Onomasticon states that they are dogs themselves, although both claim Ctesias as their source. The curious spring in which nothing
floats but everything sinks is called Side according to Pliny, but Sila according to Antigonus Carystius. Reading these testimonia together thus perfectly shows how the transmission of Ctesias became a game of Chinese whispers. The translation itself is straightforward and perfectly readable, reflecting the matter-of-fact character of the Greek sources. Some Greek words are transliterated instead of translated, which is generally fine (e.g. chous on p. 53, or koytæ on p. 57), but this yields inconsistencies: why are πῆχυς and σπιθαμή translated as ‘cubit’ and ‘span’, while ὄργυια is given as orgyia rather than simply ‘fathom’?

The commentary is informative enough, and usually to the point, clearly elucidating and weighing the solutions offered by recent and past scholarship on Ctesias. It mainly provides background for Ctesias’ more fantastic allegations, with plenty of references to Indian sources (e.g. the Mahābāratha, Rāmāyana, and Arthashāstra), realia, and secondary literature. It also addresses the occasional textual issue. Although little can be said about Ctesias’ style, Nichols points out where Ctesias is evidently trying to cap Herodotus in his exaggerations, in order to produce a more attractive read for his audience.

However, the commentary, despite being clearly written and useful, is unfortunately quite inconvenient to consult. One has to leaf through the book all the time in order to find the start of the fragment one is looking for. Moreover, notes are provided based on lemmata from the English translation, but these are not numbered or marked in the text, so that one has to go back and forth between the translation and the commentary just to locate the note needed. Some kind of additional numbering (both for the translation and the commentary) would have made its use much easier and faster. It would have been a good idea to add a heading to each page telling the reader to which pages of the translation the commentary is referring.

I could not understand some of Nichols’ abbreviations, such as Ebd., which is mentioned as the source of fragment 45β on p. 64. One has to consult Jacoby here, which is also the case for the editions that are quoted from Jacoby, but are not mentioned in Nichols’ bibliography, for instance Lambras’ edition of Aristotle, cited on p. 63. It remains unclear what [L] stands for on e.g. pages 60, 64, 67 and 71, or how we should interpret RV on p. 101 and 106; perhaps RVm in the ‘Abbreviations’ section (p. 173) should be RV. ‘Strat.’ on p. 158 refers to the Strategemata of Polyaenus, which would have been better abbreviated to ‘Polyaen.’ as in LSJ.

Nichols’ text is also not entirely error-free. I noticed some glitches and inconsistencies, such as Tzetzes (sic) on p. 38. Sarianidi on p. 42 (twice) should be Sariandi (spelled correctly in the bibliography). On p. 49 (and again on p. 105) the word plethiron, which is not translated but transcribed, appears to be mistaken for plethron or pelethron. Fragment 65 on page 87 prints Scol. instead of Schol., whereas Choerilius should be Choerilus in the same fragment. In that same fragment, moreover, the Latin Germania should perhaps not have been translated with ‘Germany’ (which primarily pertains to the modern nation), but rather with ‘Germania’. On p. 94 ‘dessert’ should really be ‘desert’. The reference to Strabo on p. 95 should be to 15.1.17, not 15.1.7. On p. 95 ‘draughts’
should be ‘droughts’. On p. 104 ‘hollow’ bamboo is meant, not ‘hallow’; ‘CF.’ should read ‘Cf.’ On p. 119 Nichols refers to Becerra Romero, but on p. 120 erroneously to Becerra Romera. The psittachora of p. 71 has become a psittachora on p. 121. On p. 123, where the Cynocephaloi are discussed, mention of Hesiod’s ‘half-dogs’ in fr. 40A and 44 is relevant, but it would have been more convenient to refer to the standard text and numbering of Merkelbach and West, and not to the outdated Loeb edition of H.G. Evelyn-White from 1914, which is not explicitly cited either. ‘F45dd’ on p. 142 should be ‘F45dô’. Spelling of names, admittedly a bone of contention, is not very consistent: there is little system in the (semi-)Latinized orthography of Clearchos, Mnesimachos, Amphinomus, Zakynthus, Naxos, and Cnidus. ‘Agatharchides’, spelled correctly elsewhere, is given as ‘Agatharcides’ on p. 151. ‘Aristobulous’ (p. 95) is simply wrong.

This is a nice and accessible introduction to the remnants of Ctesias’ Indika, in which the author provides a wider audience with a modern introduction, a clear translation of all the relevant fragments, and an informative commentary, and as such it is a welcome volume. Ctesias, once maligned as an historian for his sensationalism and lack of credibility, still deserves an audience. Those interested in Ctesias’ world of marvels will be pleased that a modern English translation is available again.

Notes:

1. See BMCR 2012.04.27.