1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

> The campaign in the northeast of Persia turned into a hard guerrilla war of almost three years. We chased Darius towards Bactria, but missed taking him by hours. He was dying when we found him. He asked for water. He drank and died. The Great King Darius had been betrayed by his own commanders. Fully honouring his corpse, Alexander hunted down these commanders into unknown lands, crossing even beyond the River Oxus into Sogdia. We fought them as far as the unknown steppes of Scythia, where only legendary heroes had once trod. The surveyors told us we were now on the borders of where Europe and Asia meet. In fact, we were totally lost. Here, Alexander founded his 10th Alexandria, and settled it with veterans, their women, and any who would dare the frontier life …[1]

Narrated by Anthony Hopkins in the role of an aging Ptolemy, we are visually guided to the remote lands of Central Asia in a stunning panoramic wide shot of Alexander the Great and his men on horseback riding across a mountainous steppe landscape in Oliver Stone's 2004 epic Hollywood blockbuster *Alexander*. In the scene that follows, Colin Farrell as a bleached blonde Alexander with an Irish accent enters into marriage with the 'barbarian' face-veiled Roxane, an exotic and quiet Baktrian princess played by the Afro-Latin American actress Rosario Dawson. His grand vow breaks her silence: "through our union, Greeks and barbarians are reconciled in peace."[2] The angelic blondeness of the filmic rendering of Alexander, depicted in marked contrast with the wild ferociousness of Roxane whom he tames in their wedding night in a later scene, consciously plays into Plutarch's influential treatise *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*

1 Stone 2004.

2 Stone 2004. Roxane was the daughter of Oxyartes, a nobleman of Baktria who had served Bessos, the Persian satrap of Baktria who killed the last Achaemenid king, Darius III, and subsequently proclaimed himself King of Kings, successor to the Achaemenid empire – something Alexander could not allow. Bessos was killed by Alexander in 329 BCE. For the history of Alexander's campaigns into Baktria, see Holt 1989. In popular culture, Alexander's marriage to Roxane is often seen as the ultimate symbol of his desire to unite Greeks and barbarians, a noble portrayal advanced in Plutarch's moral biography, *Life of Alexander* (Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 47.4, but cf. Plut. *Mor. De Alex. fort.* 388d, in which it is his marriage to Stateira (the daughter of Darius), not to Roxane, which is described as a "union of two races", "τῶν γενῶν ἀνάμιξις").

in his work *Moralia,* written in the first century CE. In this text, the young king is portrayed as a noble philosophic conqueror driven by his 'dream' – to use the famous phrase by W. W. Tarn – of 'uniting mankind in a brotherhood' of Greeks and barbarians by bringing the gift of civilization to the savage East.[3] Although Stone, consulted by the British Classicist Robin Lane Fox, received a flood of critical reviews on the historical accuracy of the movie, the Hollywood version of history vividly illustrates the typical image of Central Asia in the Western mind: a remote frontier zone 'where Europe and Asia meet' and a borderland region between the civilized *oikoumene* and the barbarian world where one could get 'totally lost'.[4]

In many ways, Stone's epic motion picture of Alexander the Great bears close relations with cultural views still pertinent in academic literature, albeit overdramatized. In the onscreen narrative, as Alexander advances eastwards from Macedon, the exoticism of the world gradually increases. Significantly, the cinematic point where West and East meet, where Europe ends and Asia begins, and where the viewer is lured into the great unknown of the East, arrives much sooner than Alexander and his men reach Central Asia. Already upon entering the lavish blue Ishtar gates at Babylon, we seem to find ourselves in the ambiguous inbetween borderland, framed by the overindulgent *mise en scène* of exotic animals, fire-spitting people, colourful costumes, and grand architecture overgrown with lush flora. In parallel with Alexander's conquering pace eastwards, the fault line between Europe and Asia visually stretches along as the film narrative develops. Something similar is discernible in scholarly treatments of post-Alexandrian Asia in the Hellenistic period (323–31 BCE), a time characterized by and named after a phenomenon referred to as Hellenism or Hellenization: the spread and adoption of Greek culture in the East after Alexander the Great, resulting in eclectic amalgamations of 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultures. As in the filmic rendition, the geographical crossroads of 'where Europe and Asia meet', together with its implied expectations of cultural mixture, is an imagined (common)place, a topos that scholars have differentially attributed to various parts of Asia in the Hellenistic period. The divide between the world spheres, the borderland midway East and West, is conceived to be thus abstract yet so pervasive that as an absent presence, it can be claimed to be anywhere: "there is no place on earth where East and West, cardinal directions, do not meet."[5]

The ambiguity and indeterminacy of West-Eastern 'Eur-Asian' inbetweenness have important ramifications for historical and archaeological understandings of material and visual culture within those settings and regions that have been attributed an in-between status. These inbetween places, as explained by cultural theorist Rob Shields, "are not necessarily on geographical peripheries but, first and foremost, they have been placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative

3 Plut. *Mor. De Alex. fort.* 328c–329d, 330d; Tarn 1933; cf. Badian 1958a.
4 Incidentally, Lane Fox negotiated a role in the movie as front man in Alexander's cavalry.
5 Tharoor 2015 (April 28).

to each other. They all carry the image and stigma of their marginality which becomes indistinguishable from any basic empirical identity they might once have had."[6] Through their positional identification as marginal places, they become transgressive spaces between juxtaposed, emplaced domains, partially visible and semi-connected to both, but deprived from being (recognized as) distinct and meaningful on their own.[7] As a result, material and visual culture in such inbetween locations is often etically perceived as ambiguously 'ex-centric', being *in place* and distinctly *out of place* at the same time.[8]

Theorizing cultural inbetweenness is the subject of this book, set in the wider framework of the Hellenization debate on how Hellenism in Asia in the first three centuries BCE is to be understood. Following the sociologist Bernhard Giesen, I refer to inbetweenness as "a fundamental and indissoluble given of classification and interpretation", thus using the term as a neutral denominator for unclassifiable remainders that fall in between perceived opposites.[9] Inbetweenness comes in various shapes, forms, and spaces, and can therefore be conceptualized in different ways and with different aims. Liminality, for instance, is one way to model inbetweenness; intersectionality is another.[10] This study focuses on the model of Hellenism, a prominent concept often used in combination with the model of hybridity, to approach and make meaning of eclectic material culture across Asia in the Hellenistic period. The Hellenistic period and the use of the word 'Hellenistic' in this study, will refer to the general time frame of the first three centuries BCE, thus including Parthian domination across Asia, in order to avoid a periodization delimited by culturally biased historical events.[11] Hellenistic Asia, then,

6 Shields 1991, 3. See also Green 2005, 1–40. NB: Shields seems to use a definition of 'space' according to Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and De Certeau (1984, 117–118), in which space refers to produced or 'practiced place', hence his phrase of 'cultural systems of space'. My understanding of space in relation to place, however, differs and even contrasts with this definition. Following more common usages in anthropological and archaeological literature (e. g. Ingold 1993, 155–156; Tilley 1997 [1994], 14–17; Bradley 2000), I view space as connected to the abstract and the undifferentiated (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; 1979), although I agree with Lefebvre and De Certeau that space, too, is a construct which is often produced according to human conditions. Christopher Tilley (1997 [1994], 16) states that space "provides a situational context for places, but derives its meanings from particular places". Place, therefore, is more connected to the distinct social construction of space, i. e. how people make space meaningful by endowing it with value, through experiences in it and aspirations of it: "place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (Tuan 1979, 387). Space and place are closely intertwined, as this chapter aims to set out.

7 Boon 1999, 198–210.

8 Hutcheon 1988, 60 defines the ex-centric as "the off-center: ineluctably identified with the center it desires but is denied."

9 Giesen 2017 [2012], 16.

10 For liminality, see Van Gennep 1909; Turner 1967; 1969; for intersectionality, see Crenshaw 1989; Collins and Bilge 2016.

11 I am aware that the word 'Hellenistic' in itself carries an inherent bias through its etymological anchorage in Hellas – Greece. I believe, however, that avoiding the term altogether will not only be highly impractical, but may cause undesired temporal disorientation. Therefore, from here onward, the word Hellenistic written without parentheses will be used solely for the purpose of temporal

is here defined as the vast landmass stretching from Asia Minor to Central Asia, which is referred to in this study as (central) Eurasia, a socio-geographical portmanteau used in socio-anthropological literature to describe the perception of the region as neither European nor Asian, but both and inbetween.[12] In order to better understand scholarly views on culture contact and eclectic material culture in Hellenistic Asia (culture that falls in between our etic categories of analysis), this study critically questions and deconstructs different explanations of Hellenism across Asia, to tease out problematic points of interpretation and make their positioning explicit. It will show that Hellenism, something which the literature tends to simplify as 'Greek influence', even if in multiple forms, is far from a universal given. Rather, it seems that it is a differential and positional scholarly construct, created by both distinct research histories as well as pretheoretical commitments through which each Hellenism in Asia lives up to particular modern expectations.

While this study is relevant to Hellenistic Asia as a whole, a large part of this study is devoted to Central Asia, defined here as roughly the five former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, along with parts of north-eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.[13] Central Asia is a case particularly fit for an investigation into perceptions of inbetweenness. As exemplified in Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, Central Asia embodies a remote region far away from our Western frame of mind and, as such, is often reduced to specific catchphrases to make matters understandable and relatable. This is not only the case in popular culture but also in academic spheres where common descriptions of the region emphasize its inbetween status and location 'at the crossroads of the ancient world', 'where East meets West', 'a cultural melting pot', or 'a fusion of Greek and Eastern cultures'.[14] Although such phrases often serve to introduce the region, this study will demonstrate that interpretations of inbetweenness not only stimulate misleading analyses of hybridity, but also

attribution, as neutral reference to roughly the first three centuries BCE. The phrase Hellenistic Asia thus signifies Asia in the Hellenistic period, detached from cultural, political, or ideological meanings, unless indicated otherwise.

12 E. g. Goody 1996. For a brief overview, see Hann 2003; 2016. The term Asia as used in this book originates from ancient Greek geographers, and corresponds to the common designation in conventional histories of the Hellenistic world, e. g. Walbank 1981, 176–177, map 4. Because of its biased origin, the term is considered as an ideologically laden, Eurocentric concept (Christian 1998, 3–4; Hann 2016, 1–2). Therefore, I often use the terms Eurasia and central Eurasia instead. The term Eurasia is based on the geographical scope of the tectonic Eurasian plate which stretches from the Atlantic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east, covering the traditional continents of Europe and Asia (Cunliffe 2015, 4–8). The term *central Eurasia* therefore refers to the area central to this tectonic plate, i. e. from Anatolia to Central Asia (e. g. Beckwith 2009; Cunliffe 2015, 9 (map 1.3). I tend to use 'Asia' when discussing ancient history, while the term '(central) Eurasia' will be read more often in historiographical contexts. However, these two contexts can overlap sometimes.

13 This definition is based on a wider archaeological consensus of the region; see e. g. Grenet 2014.

14 See e. g. Errington et al. 1992; Hiebert and Cambon 2011; Aruz and Valtz Fino 2012; Simpson 2012; Lerner 2015.

strengthen monolithic, essentialist, and ethnocentric ideas about what is (and can be) considered as 'Western' and what is not – and is therefore labelled as 'Eastern'. While Central Asia takes centre stage, it will become clear that these issues of inbetweenness pertinent to the interpretive discourse about this region have significant resonance for Hellenistic Asia as a whole. Before continuing to the methodology and outline of the study, the remainder of this section further introduces and problematizes inbetweenness, considering the special case of Central Asia and its attributed position in the interstices of world-places and time-worlds. This will be used as a springboard for the wider Hellenization debate that this study engages with, set out in Chapter 2.

1.2 Hellenistic Central Asia: a case for inbetweenness

1.2.1 Geographical inbetweenness

Hellenistic Central Asia occupies a privileged position when it comes to inbetweenness. To date, one of the most persistent keywords to describe this macro-region is that of a crossroads. In a 2015 current affairs article in *The Diplomat*, Akhilesh Pillalamarri even argued for replacing and redefining Central Asia with the term 'Asia's crossroads', as this region's history and culture were "shaped more than anything by being a nexus of overland 'roads and routes' between other regions".[15] Paradoxically, its prevalent status in mainstream media and academia as 'between other regions' marks and frames Central Asia as both central and peripheral, inside and outside distinct realms. Located in the borderlands of, and at the nexus between the 'world's greatest civilizations' of ancient Persia, India, China, and the Mediterranean, Central Asia is assigned to reside amidst East and West yet to remain marginal to both – a pivotal gateway in between, but nothing distinct of its own. Throughout modern historical writings on the region's ancient past, the perpetual peripherality of Central Asia has been sustained and endorsed by a discourse of centrality, as this section will explore.

From space to place

The characterization of Central Asia as a crossroads between East and West is intimately entangled with the relatively recent invention of the term Silk Roads to refer to the transcontinental network of overland and seaborne trade and exchange routes that linked the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian landmass: China and the Mediterranean.[16] Before the 19th century, the defined region of Central Asia, as well

15 Pillalamarri 2015.

16 These roads were not well-defined roads but "a stretch of shifting, unmarked paths across massive expanses of deserts and mountains" (Hansen 2017, 5). The name of the Silk Roads is also mislead-

as the geographical term did not exist as perceived and depicted on Western maps, although it had been romanticized and exoticized as part of the imagined Orient.[17] Scientific endeavours to put the region on the map such as the influential toponymical definitions of Central Asia by the Prussian explorers and geographers Alexander von Humboldt and Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1843 and 1877, respectively, established Central Asia as a distinct 'place in between'.[18] Drawing on earlier works of his Prussian colleagues, Von Richthofen elaborately described Central Asia as the spatial context for his founding concept of the Silk Roads – a newly invented term – through which the region decidedly entered the European mind as a commercial transit and contact zone between Han China and Roman Europe.[19] His map of the Silk Roads – a visualization based on Chinese and Graeco-Roman textual sources – was essentially a map of Central Asia as he understood it; since the far ends of these routes were not situated within this defined area, the region's position and, in effect, its distinguished significance as a 'place in between' could not be more clear.[20] Von Richthofen's geographical writings did not arise out of mere scholarly curiosity about the region but were part of a wider politically strategic survey of China, guided by German industrial interests in, and efforts to maintain control over China's mineral resources.[21] As an evocative spatiotemporal term, the Silk Roads became an influential referential notion to 'emplace' Central Asia and make geopolitical meaning of its ancient and contemporary history.

Von Richthofen and Von Humboldt were neither the first nor the only ones interested to put Central Asia systematically on the map. In her monumental historiographical work *L'invention de l'Asie centrale*, Svetlana Gorshenina demonstrates that around the same time, Russian scholars such as the historian Nikolay Danilevskiy and the geographer Vladimir Lamanskiy were invested to describe and frame Central Asia as part of an imagined third continent between Europe and Asia: Russian Eurasia.[22] While Prussian and other West-European geographers saw Central Asia as the continental outstretch of

ing: these networks facilitated much more than just trade in silk; in reality, the objects of exchange and transmission along these routes included a variety of trade goods such as paper, spices, metals, and glass, as well as ideas, artistic motifs, religions, and technologies. See instructive discussion in Rezakhani 2010.

17 For an excellent studies on the history of the concept of (and interest in) Central Asia, see Gorshenina 2014a.

18 Von Humboldt 1843; Von Richthofen 1877, 1–8; further discussion in Gorshenina 2014a, 301–358. Von Richthofen's definition of Central Asia was focused on what he called 'the core of the Asian continent' in what we now know as Xinjiang (former Turkestan), with the surrounding areas functioning as peripheral regions within Central Asia.

19 Von Richthofen used both the plural and singular form of the word. Although the term '*Seidenstraße(n)*' is not widely employed in his work as much as preferred other terms, such as '*Verkehr*', '*Verkehrsbeziehungen*', or '*Handelsstraßen*', the notion of the Silk Roads caught on in subsequent publications to refer to the overland trade routes across the Eurasian landmass. See Waugh 2007, 4.

20 Von Richthofen 1877, 500, plate 8.

21 Chin 2013, 196; Wu 2014, 343–344; 2015, 33–66, 148.

22 Gorshenina 2014a, 377–384. Imperial Russia, at that time, already covered an immense landmass that stretched from the East-European plains across Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. On the semantic

Europe to Asia, Russian geographers considered it as the integral core of a separate and distinctly Russian continent. This conceptualization went hand in hand with Russia's perennial expansionist drive since the 16th century and with what has become known as the Great Game in the 19th century – the Russian-British race for political ascendancy in Central Asia.[23] Active in the wake of Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856) against the Ottoman Empire and their British, French, and Sardinian allies, Russian scholars were particularly concerned with restructuring a world where Russia, as opposed to Europe, was at its centre.[24] According to Gorshenina, this concept of Eurasia, visualized as an organic continent, was a clear ideological tool that not only transformed and legitimized an expanding Russian world south and eastwards in terms of geopolitical territory (after all, they merely followed the natural borders of the continent), but also challenged their rivals' Eurocentric imperial and universalistic discourses.[25] While tsarist and later imperial Russia had always been considered as the eastern periphery of Europe, the thesis of a third continent covering both Europe and Asia firmly placed Russia's anticipated Central Asian territory in the geopolitical core of the world and, as such, symbolically claimed Russian supremacy and their right to rule over the these regions. The lexical and cartographical creation of this envisioned Eurasian geography, as though a natural and logical extension of Russia, developed concurrently with its actual materialization on the geopolitical stage. In the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire gradually encroached on and annexed the Turkic khanates in what would become known as Russian Turkestan and later Soviet Central Asia in today's Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The struggle for empire and 'la mission civilisatrice'

During this period, ideas about the centrality of Central Asia discursively formed and transformed the region from an empty *space* into a particular *place*, from unknown territory into 'the heart of Asia' – proclaimed as a vital, strategic, and therefore most desired possession. Gorshenina argued that Central Asia's perceived condition of a *terra incognita* clearly referred to its being 'undiscovered' i. e. unpossessed by modern European colonists, emphasizing that this created an uncontested no man's land and, essentially, an ideological charter for imperialist aspirations to lay claim on Central Asia's

and ideological development of overlapping terms for Central Asia used in Russian literature, see Gorshenina 2007.

23 The term 'the Great Game' was popularized by Rudyard Kipling in his 1901 novel *Kim*. For a contemporary history of these events, see Hopkirk 1990; Sergeev 2013.

24 Gorshenina 2011, 99–110.

25 Baud et al. 2003; Gorshenina 2007; 2011, 100–104. Russia always had an ambivalent relation with, and attitude to Asia, especially during the era of Russian Imperialism. See Schimmelpennick van der Oye 2010a; 2010b. For the distinction between space and place, see fn. 6 above.

centrality between East and West.[26] This was not only the case in Russian narratives that legitimized their eastwards expansion; similar ideas were present in West-European, particularly British narratives during the intensification of the Great Game around the turn of the 20th century. Threatened by the rapid spread of Russia's successful conquests in Central Asia, suspected to head towards British territory in India, the British similarly developed a strategic vision to dominate the 'centre of the world' – the heart of the Eurasian continent.[27] In 1904, the British geographer Halford Mackinder published his classic Heartland Theory, proclaiming Central Asia as the 'pivot area'.[28] His aim was not merely scientific, but was distinctly entangled with imperial affairs as to "make a geographical formula into which you could fit any political balance", which explicitly served concerns about the rival mobility of Russian expansion compared to European powers that trailed behind.[29] The domination over this pivotal Asian heartland would be crucial for global hegemony, a grand geopolitical objective that both the Russians and the British vigorously aspired.

The reiterated importance of Central Asia in West-European and Russian narratives of world power often involved a double-faced tendency of, on the one hand, the glorification of the region as the continental centre of the world, and on the other, the marginalization and Orientalization (in the Saidian sense) of Central Asia as a weak and empty inbetween place that needed to be civilized.[30] Such an Orientalist reading of Central Asia was already discernible in Western geographies such as those of Von Humboldt and Von Richthofen, for whom the middle zone embodied a culturally inhospitable region, incapable of reaching full civilization. In their view, Central Asia was not only in between East and West, but also in between the sedentary agricultural and mobile pastoralist worlds, resulting in the presence of nomads through which its society had never been able to develop into a full-grown civilization.[31] Similarly, British and French narratives perceived the Central Asian heartland as a borderland torn

26 Gorshenina 2007, 20; Gorshenina 2011.

27 This suspicion did not rise out of thin air. Russian expansionist monarchs had previously entertained the idea to invade India and drive out the British – particularly under Paul I, Catherine the Great's successor, who schemed with France to march on British India in 1801, just after the failed Russian-British coalition against France in the late 1790s. This hurried and grotesque plan proved unattainable; Napoleon Bonaparte rejected the plan and the sole Cossack army subsequently sent by Paul, though devoted, experienced serious hardships already on the Kazakh steppes. The expedition was cut short midway by news of Paul's assassination in 1801, after which his heir Alexander I ordered an immediate halt to the march. Intelligence of this plan only reached the British in Calcutta years later. See Hopkirk 1990, 26–30.

28 Mackinder 1904, *passim* but esp. 434–436; 1942 [1919], 106. Mackinder considered Central Asia as central in the pivot area of 'Euro-Asia'. See Mackinder's distinct influence in Lattimore 1950.

29 Mackinder 1904, 443.

30 Gorshenina 2011, 101–102; Gorshenina and Rapin 2011, 30; Gutmeyr 2017, 83–87.

31 E. g. Von Richthofen 1877, 43–56. This engaged with a powerful topos on the pastoral nomad; see useful discussion on this topos in ancient times in Shaw 1983; and Barfield 1993 on ethnography on nomadic pastoralists in general.

between two world halves and inhabited by savage tribes, contending that control over this intermediary zone was vital for restoring the communication between East and West and rejoining the two halves in a moral unity.[32]

Tales of a moral plight to save the 'failed civilization' of Central Asia were echoed in Russian society in the quest for imperial glory. Deeply influenced by European Romanticism, ideas of colonial superiority and the noble mission to civilize the 'backward' and 'barbaric' people of the still poorly-known region of Central Asia were taken over in Russian narratives to compete with their European rivals.[33] By appropriating a colonial realm of their own, the Russian Empire posited itself as peer on the stage of world politics, claiming a share in the colonial prestige of the French and particularly the British. Indeed, in the words of David Schimmelpennick van der Oye, "Asia was one place where Russians could be the Europeans' equals."[34] In this ideological rivalry, Russian intellectuals and officials claimed a distinct European identity, together with the European philosophy of the 'white man's burden', to deepen the contrast with the 'backward' Central Asian lands and peoples they conquered.[35] At the same time, the cultures of the Asian lands that belonged to Russia's domain in the spatial imagination of its empire, increasingly came on display in exoticizing paintings and photography, as well as in ethnographic exhibitions in Moscow and St Petersburg. Interacting with artistic and wider cultural trends of European Romanticism, fashionable practices of collecting and showcasing exotic and antiquarian artworks and crafts from 'Russia's own Orient', as well as the didactic and ideological display of the splendid ethno-cultural diversity within the Russian empire, came to serve the social prestige of Russian elites.[36] That the 'barbarization' of Central Asia went hand in hand with its glorification – emblematic for Russia's dualist struggle for identity – is further illustrated by the Russian adoption of the late 19th century thesis of the Aryan race, widely shared by other colonial powers too. Initially based on linguistics, this theory claimed that the forebears of the Indo-European race (and by extension, European civilization) had their roots in the heart of

32 Reclus 1894, esp. 485, 487.

33 Gorshenina and Rapin 2011, 30; Gutmeyr 2017, 83–84. On 'barbarian' as a pejorative cultural construct, see the informative discussion in Beckwith 2009, 321–61. Their 'European rivals' were the Russian and British empires, which were the largest imperial powers in the world at that time.

34 Schimmelpennick van der Oye 2010a, 4.

35 Gorshenina 2011, 103–104; Hofmeister 2016; Gutmeyr 2017, 83. The term 'white man's burden' was popularized by Rudyard Kipling in his 1899 poem with the same title, in which the American colonization of the Philippines is morally encouraged and justified. The phrase refers to the moral task of the white man to civilize non-white peoples which underpinned European imperial ideology. NB: Not all Russian intellectuals took over a European identity. At that time, Russian society was divided between two opposing intellectual movements: the Slavophiles and Westernizers. For an excellent overview, see Fabian 2018, 58–125.

36 Gorshenina 2004; Schimmelpennick van der Oye 2010a, 60–92, Wageman and Kouteinikova 2010; Di Ruocco 2016; Gutmeyr 2017, 84–87. For Russian perceptions of the 'East' in relation to their conception of the Self ('Russia's own Orient'), see Tolz 2011. For the paradox of Russian Orientalism, see Schimmelpennick van der Oye 2010b.

Asia. The Russian appropriation of this prestigious myth of identity, which assumed Central Asia to be the cradle of the Aryans, would not only give them a lion's share in a (proto)European identity, but also allow for an extra legitimizing factor for their colonial drive eastwards.[37] In combination with the thesis of a third continent through which the Aryan cradle naturally belonged in Russian domain, a powerful internally logical discourse was constructed that justified their eastern expansion, culminating in the full annexation of Central Asia in the Russian Empire.

Modern archaeology in Central Asia

The Great Game and the wider perennial power play between the Russian, British, and the French over geopolitical influence in the Middle and Far East – from Persia to China – had an immense impact on archaeological, historical, artistic, and wider public interest in these regions 'in between East and West' amongst West-European governments, officials, journalists, travellers, and scholars in the 20th century. For Central Asia, the craze of collecting exotic artefacts from 'the heart of Asia' instigated a high demand for the region's antiquities, galvanizing a frequency of treasure hunts, archaeological explorations, and often illicit amateur excavations, through which much of Central Asia's heritage objects ended up on the local market, to be sold further to private or public collectors and museums in Russia and Europe.[38] At the same time, there was a resurgence and wide circulation of evocative legends of the once blooming and rich oasis cities of Fergana, Samarkand, Bokhara, and Balkh on the fabled Silk Roads, which had been traversed by famous historical figures such as Alexander the Great, Marco Polo, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane and, as such, acquired an aura of symbolic significance in both the Russian and West-European imagination.[39] Foreign western explorers, too, such as the Swede Sven Hedin (1893–1897), the Hungarian Englishman Aurel Stein (1900, 1906–1908, 1913–1916 and 1930), the German Albert von Le Coq (1904, 1906, 1913–1914), and the Frenchman Paul Pelliot (1906–1908), were drawn by legends of the 'lost treasures of Central Asia', and ventured to discover these desired antiquities themselves.[40] The pioneering expeditions and detailed scientific reports

37 Influential publications of that time include Müller 1888; Rendall 1889. For the Aryan myth in Russian scholarship, see Laruelle 2005; 2009; Gorshenina 2014, 402–407. For the Aryan myth in West-European scholarship on the central Eurasia, see Wiesehöfer 1990; Wiedemann 2010; 2017.

38 Gorshenina and Rapin 2001, 38–41. Such as the Oxus Treasure, a hoard of golden objects discovered near Takht-i Sangin which found its way to Europe via India (Curtis 2012). The Oxus Treasure is now on permanent display in the British Museum.

39 Among these, Samarkand stands out as the most evocative and mythologized city; further discussion in Gorshenina 2014b.

40 These Western expeditions were neither large state-funded projects nor conducted with a particular colonial interest in the greater context of world politics (Osterhammel 2008, 151–153; see also Hopkirk 1980). However, the Great Game and the struggle for 'the heart of Asia' had greatly aroused their archaeological interest for Central Asia's treasures.

and records of these and many others to follow – both foreign and local – resulted in the discovery of material evidence of the flourishing towns in those Silk Road regions that Von Richthofen had written about. It was in this context that the beginnings of systematic archaeology in Central Asia took place in the late 19th and early 20th century, starting with the first officially authorized excavation of Afrasiab (modern Samarkand in Uzbekistan) – identified as the legendary city of Marakanda (as known by the Alexander historians) whose fame as the jewel of Asia had excited the imagination of poets, travellers, and conquerors throughout history.

The beginnings of modern archaeology in Afghanistan, too, were deeply entangled with Russian and European imperial matters. Since 1880, Afghanistan had become a military dominion of British India, effectively functioning as buffer against the Russian encroachment in Central Asia. When Afghanistan won its independence from British rule in 1919, the Emir (and later King) Amanullah turned to France for aid to modernize the country and elevate its prestige through, amongst others, its national heritage. The political interimperial power play on the Eurasian stage thus formed the context for the year 1922, when Orientalist Alfred Foucher signed the Franco-Afghan archaeological convention on behalf of the French government which would grant France archaeological monopoly in Afghanistan, (practically) until the Soviet invasion in 1979.[41] The subsequently established *Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* (DAFA) – although meagrely financed and often with serious personal investment under sometimes strenuous circumstances – formed a watershed moment for the systematization of archaeology in Afghanistan. The creation of the DAFA had, however, taken place first and foremost in a diplomatic context, as it importantly signified the strengthening of French influence in a most coveted region.[42] Influenced by, and in competition with contemporaneous popular narratives indulging in the 19th century idea of a *mission civilisatrice*, motivated by travel reports and archaeological activities by other Western parties in neighbouring regions, the DAFA was keen to investigate material remains of Greek culture and civilization, associated with conquerors from the West.[43]

Elsewhere in Central Asia, after the collapse of the Russian Empire, the 1920s and 1930s similarly saw the rise of several large-scale and innovative multidisciplinary expeditions, such as the TAKE in Uzbekistan (1936–1938) and the YuTAKE in Turkmenistan (since 1946), which signified an important step in the professionalization of Central

41 Olivier-Utard 1997, 17–33, 36–41; Fenet 2010; 2015; most recently 2021. The convention initially decreed a monopoly of thirty years, but the DAFA remained active throughout the 1960s and 70s. The Emir had modelled the archaeological convention almost exactly after the Iranian-French archaeological convention in Teheran 27 years earlier in 1895, which had led to the successful creation of the *Délégation Archéologique Française en Perse* (for the negotiations about the details of the convention, see Olivier-Utard 1997, 30–42). Despite political instability, the DAFA has resumed its activities in Afghanistan since 2003; see Bendezu-Sarmiento 2013; 2018; Bendezu-Sarmiento and Marquis 2015.

42 Olivier-Utard 1997, 48, 54.

43 Olivier-Utard 1997, 54; Fenet 2011, 64. Further discussion in Chapter 8.

Asian archaeology.[44] In reaction to pre-revolutionary Russian scholarship and concurrent with massive ethnic nationalist movements across the USSR, Central Asian archaeology became particularly interested in constructing an autochthonous ancient past, focusing on its original ancestral people while minimizing the role of foreign, particularly European influence.[45] Research questions in this period were commonly framed to accommodate the search for ethnogenesis, a particularly important research agenda in Soviet archaeology from the late 1930s onwards, reaching its peak in the 1960s.[46] Politically, the material evidence for deep, locally rooted ethno-archaeological cultures would support new nationalist narratives propagating self-determination, through the advancement and affirmation of a historically continuous line between the ancient and modern territory and its eponymous people of the newly created states. After the Soviet-Afghan war, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent independence of the Central Asian states in the early 1990s, archaeological activity shortly disrupted because of the difficult economic transition from a Soviet centrally-controlled economy to an independent market economy. Archaeological endeavours in the now independent states were soon taken up again in reorganized and renewed structures, with Central Asian and Afghan researchers entering in collaborative archaeological missions with French, German, Italian, Polish, Japanese, and Russian-trained archaeologists, which resulted in a series of fruitful expeditions over the past decades.

1.2.2 Temporal inbetweenness

The time of Hellenistic Central Asia within Classics

Narrativized and emplaced as both an exotic periphery and a central heartland, a transit zone of crossroads yet also a locus of meetings, Central Asia's geographical inbetweenness also locked into the region's temporal inbetweenness, particularly within Classics. In between ancient (and disciplinary) worlds, Central Asia had no distinct place in studies of antiquity which traditionally focused on the great civilizations of the East (Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India) and particularly those of the West (Greece and Rome). The broad discipline of Classics, practiced across time and space, traditionally refers to the study of Graeco-Roman antiquity, centred on Greek and Roman civilizations around the Mediterranean as the pillars of the humanities and 'the golden

44 Gorshenina 2013, 27–29; 2021. For perceptive discussion on colonial dynamics during excavations in Central Asia, see Gorshenina 2019. Concise overviews of the development of archaeology in Central Asia are provided by Gorshenina and Rapin 2001; and regional overviews in Bruno 2021; Lindström 2021; Martinez-Sève 2021; Stančo 2021.

45 Leo Klejn 2012, 138–141 called this "the syndrome of national sensitivity". Despite the ubiquity of this 'syndrome', it should be noted that archaeology developed differently per Soviet state.

46 Shnirelman 1995; Klejn 2012, 135–157; Gorshenina 2013, 28; Fabian 2020.

heritage' of modern Western culture since the Renaissance.[47] Hellas in particular plays central role as a powerful commonplace, one that has culturally and intellectually been appropriated in West-European and American scholarship interested to study and trace their cultural heritage to the civilization of ancient Greece (and by extension, Rome).[48] Conventional curricula within Classics divide the ancient world in historical epochs typologized by events important to political geographies of Greece and Rome, while marginalizing other regions from scholastic periodization. In accordance with common temporal terminology, a traditional education in Classics thus covers the periods of Archaic Greece, the Classical Age, the Hellenistic Age, the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, and Late Antiquity, cultivating knowledge of Greek and Latin languages, philosophy, art, architecture, and history, while other regions, histories, and associated notions and skills can be chosen as distinct but often non-compulsory specializations.[49] Although this gradually begins to change, like other inbetween regions, Central Asia's antiquity frequently enters the academic mind as outsider's history, a perennial periphery brought to light only when deemed important to the Greek and Roman time-world of the Classics.

Within Classics, furthermore, the Hellenistic period too has only relatively recently emerged from a marginal inbetween place in the temporality of antiquity. Following Johann Winckelmann's division of artistic styles as evolutionary phases within Greek art, historical periodization of the ancient world had long been centred on the great cultural and political achievements of Classical Greece on the one hand, and the military prowess of the Roman empire on the other.[50] In fact, it was the Western gaze towards Classical Greece and the Roman empire that defined the temporal limits of the Hellenistic period: Alexander of Macedon and Augustus – two Great Men in Western history. However, conventionally commencing at the death rather than the birth of Alexander in 323 BCE, the Hellenistic age was not associated with greatness, but with the perceived decline of the Greek polis, considered as the embodiment of Greek civilization at large.[51] Moreover, pertaining to imperial claims and political activities in the regions east of the Mediterranean, the world of the Hellenistic period was considered to be far away from the centres of civilization. Characterized by increasing 'Oriental' influences and accordingly typologized as 'Hellenistic' rather than 'Hellenic', this period was thought to have contributed little to the foundation of Western civilization and therefore deemed

47 Terrenato 2002, 1109; see instructive discussion in Vlassopoulos 2007b.

48 Leontis 1995, 28. In her book, Leontis makes a distinction between Western Hellenism by modern West-Europeans (particularly the British, French, and Germans) and Neohellenism by modern Greeks – both parties "used a different entity and mapped a different kind of homeland" (Leontis 1995, 13).

49 Although this recently began to change; for instructive discussion on the development of standard curricula, its thematic priorities, and the internationalization of the discipline of ancient history, see Wiesehöfer 2017a.

50 Cartledge 1993, 3–5; Alcock 1994, 171–173.

51 For the polis as the uniting factor of Greek history, see particularly Vlassopoulos 2007b, 38–63.

less relevant and worthwhile to study. Although Hellenistic studies have now gained steady ground in curricula of Classical studies, distinct traces of such temporal interest focused on Greece and Rome are still visible in the structure of educational systems.[52] Within conventional history writing, the 'location' of Hellenistic-period Central Asia, therefore, not only acquired peripherality in terms of geography, but also in terms of its temporal position in the story of Classical civilization.

This double marginality is perhaps most visible in the distinct usage of the temporal marker and cultural category 'Parthian'. Within traditional narratives of Hellenistic history, the Parthians are frequently (though often implicitly) considered as outsiders. They represent a new Oriental Other due to their non-Greek origins in the Central Asian steppes and in light of the Parthian secession from the Seleukid empire around the mid-third century BCE, simultaneous with the so-called Baktrian revolt.[53] The Arsakids developed a dynastic identity through the distinct use of Iranian imagery and practices especially from the first century CE onwards, which has long been interpreted as an ethnic and nationalist claim to Iranism – an 'indigenous' break-away from Hellenism.[54] Framed as an Iranian invasion of Greek history, the Parthian kings are thus commonly considered as not Greek enough to be emplaced within traditional Hellenistic scholarship. Indicative of such understanding of historical time are Stanley Burstein's words on the Hellenistic empires of the Ptolemies, the Seleukids, and the Antigonids: "For over two centuries, this system of kingdoms was to provide the framework of Greek life and culture before the expansion of Rome in the west and Parthia in the east put an end to it."[55] Although the Arsakids came to power within the conventional time limits of the Hellenistic period, and although Parthian elites engaged with wider Hellenistic cultural practices, Parthian history is not considered to belong in the periodic division of Hellenistic time, which betrays the conceptual baggage behind the seemingly neutral label of the Hellenistic period.

The world of Hellenistic Central Asia: between Classics and Indology

While the Hellenistic world was long considered a 'stepchild' of Graeco-Roman history, and the Parthians the 'stepchildren' of Hellenistic history, the double marginality of Hellenistic Central Asia manifested itself somewhat differently in the historiography of Baktria.[56] Similar to Central Asia's geographical inbetweenness, the region's ambiguous

52 The increasing and developing scholarly interest in the Hellenistic age is not neutral, but had much to do with current identity issues in the present. For a recent discussion, see Wiesehöfer 2017a.

53 Cf. discussion in Chrubasik 2016.

54 See e. g. Wolski 1966; 1983. Such views have increasingly been challenged over the past decades, see notably Wiesehöfer 1996a; Canepa 2017a; Fowler 2017; Strootman 2017; Canepa 2018, 68–94.

55 Burstein 2008, 61.

56 Jong 2015, 94 astutely states that the Parthians are not only the 'stepchildren' of Greek history, but also of Iranian history. Further further useful discussion in Wiesehöfer 2017.

position in ancient temporalities allowed it to become contested ground for scholars to claim its antiquity. This is best illustrated by the now classical dispute between the British historian W. W. Tarn and the Indian historian and numismatist A. K. Narain. Their writings illustrate the increasing tensions between colonial and nationalist historiography, as their views are distinctly contrasted in their seminal books *The Greeks in Bactria and India* by Tarn (1938) and *The Indo-Greeks* by Narain (1957).[57] Reacting to the neglect of Baktria and India in Classical scholarship, Tarn determinedly proclaimed the Greek kingdom in Central Asia to have been a distinctly Hellenistic state, in line with the kingdoms of the Seleukids, Ptolemies, Antigonids, and Attalids.[58] He contended that the history of the Greeks in Central Asia should be treated as a "unique chapter in the dealings of Greeks with the peoples of Asia" and thus an integral part of Greek history rather than Indology: "to omit the Euthydemid dynasty from Hellenistic history, and to confine that history to the four dynasties which bordered on the Mediterranean (…) throws that history at least out of balance."[59] For Tarn, the Greeks in Baktria and India were unlike the 'tribal' Parthians from the Central Asian plains and were to be considered as Europeans who defended their Greekhood "both in blood and civilization", and "shielded the settled world in Iran from the semi-barbarism of the northern steppes".[60]

Tarn's book was a distinct plea to include the Greeks in Baktria and India in Hellenistic history writing – because it concerned Greeks rather than (and opposed to) indigenous Central Asians. Writing in the aftermath of the Great Game, he implicitly portrayed the Greeks in Baktria and India as analogous to contemporaneous British colonial settlers in India, which had fostered and indulged in the justifying belief that Western imperialism brought cultured sophistication to the East.[61] Thus, it was under Greek rule that "the level of Asia was slowly but steadily tending to rise" through the founding of organized and quasi-autonomous towns which, according to Tarn, formed "the real gift of the Greeks to Baktria".[62] Although his 1938 book reads more nuanced than his works on Alexander the Great, Tarn's views created a resonating legacy of interpretations about Greek rule in Central Asia and its civilizing impact.[63] Although his

57 For a broader discussion on this, see Mairs 2006.
58 Tarn 1938, xix–xx, 409–410.
59 Tarn 1938, 409.
60 Tarn 1938, resp. 37, 79.
61 E. g. in Tarn's description of Antiochos' 'hellenizing' and Demetrios, 'pro-native' styles of government in Baktria: "The most important fact in the history of the Greek East is that something not very unlike the modern struggle between nationalism and co-operation was fought out two thousand years ago under the shadow of the Hindu Kush." (Tarn 1938, 412).
62 Tarn 1938, resp. 33, 124. For Tarn, this was already foreshadowed by Alexander the Great – "one of the supreme fertilising forces of history" – whose rule gave Asia "those possibilities of ethical and intellectual progress." (Tarn 1948a, 145, 142 respectively).
63 This view was particularly voiced in his book *Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind*, published in 1933, followed by a more comprehensive work entitled *Alexander the Great* in 1948, which would greatly influence popular thinking about the Hellenistic period. See Chapter 2.

historical narrative attracted scholarly criticism, it was through his seminal work that Hellenistic Central Asia decidedly entered the time-world of Classics.[64]

Published just a decade after the decolonization of India and the emergence of Indian nationalism, the Indian scholar A. K. Narain brought out an evocatively titled book *The Indo-Greeks* – in direct response to his British colleague. While Tarn positioned his historical narrative in the setting of Alexander the Great and Seleukid rule in Western Asia, Narain chose to approach the Greeks in Central Asia from a distinct Eastern perspective, embedding them in the context of the Achaemenid empire, the aftermath of Alexander's campaigns, and the rise of the Mauryan empire in India. This resulted in two contrasting, politically inspired accounts, focusing on either the Western (Greek) or the Eastern (Indian) side of the story. For Tarn, the Greek kingdom(s) of Baktria and India were 'a fifth Hellenistic state' and an organic part of expanding Greek civilization to Asia. For Narain, on the other hand, these Greeks were not fresh colonists brought by Alexander or his Seleukid successors, but were rather Greeks *of* Baktria and India: children of older generations of settlers who had been displaced and dispersed to Asia by Xerxes and other Achaemenid kings.[65] He argued that when Alexander arrived in Central Asia, many of these earlier Greeks would have mixed and merged with local peoples so that they were thoroughly localized 'Baktrian-Greeks' and 'Indo-Greeks' rather than pure Hellenes who kept to their Greekhood. According to Narain, these local rulers,

> did not look back to the Seleucids or to the Greek world in the Middle East for inspiration and help and they never cared to meddle in the struggles of the Hellenistic powers. The new state of Bactria [therefore] cannot be regarded as a succession state of Alexander's empire; it developed from the revolt of a governor who had the backing of the people. (…) Bactria became independent in the same way as Parthia and possibly other areas close to it.[66]

Narain's narrative reflects well his anticolonial claim on the history of Baktria and India as a distinct part of Indian history. Like the Indian freedom movements against the British occupation, the local Greeks of Central Asia gained independence on their own strength, rising out of local revolt against Greek and Macedonian colonists after Alexander the Great. Reversing the narrative of Greek colonists hellenizing (civilizing)

64 While Tarn's *Greeks in Baktria and India* was the first study to treat them as part of Hellenistic history, it was Theophilus (Gottlieb) Siegfried Bayer's 1738 *Historia Regni Graecorum Baktriani: In qua simul graecarum in India coloniarum vetus memoria*, published in Saint Petersburg, which addressed for the first time the obscure and fragmented history of the Greek kingdoms in Baktria and India. For the reception and impact of T. S. Bayer's *Historia*, see Mairs 2013a; Gorshenina 2017, 160–162; and further discussion in Coloru 2021.

65 Narain 1957, 1–11; 1989 [1989]. The bicultural label 'Baktrian-Greeks' and 'Indo-Greeks' prioritized the local element; this subtle yet significant difference can also be discerned in Narain's choice for the book title: 'the Greeks *of* Baktria and India' compared to Tarn's 'Greeks *in* Baktria and India'. Further reflection on the label 'Indo-Greek' in Holt 2014.

66 Narain 1957, 10–11.

indigenous populations, Narain's Greeks had assimilated into locals: "they came, they saw, but India conquered".[67]

Further along in time, the world of Central Asia was claimed again in another anticolonial historical narrative of the Greeks in Baktria. In 1972, the Tadzhik-born Soviet scholar Bobojon Ghafurov published a monumental work with the title *The Tajiks: Prehistory, Ancient, and Medieval History*, in which he sharply criticized both the 'Western' and the 'Eastern' views of Tarn and Narain as completely out of balance. Admitting both the Seleukid background and the linkage with the history of India, Ghafurov emphasized that Central Asian culture had an equal share, if not leading role in creating the culture of Hellenistic Central Asia: "The sources of the history of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom lie in Central Asia. Here it emerged and (in Afghanistan) it became strong. Therefore, Greco-Bactria is first of all Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as India and the Hellenistic world."[68] While Narain's narrative portrayed the Graeco-Baktrian and Indo-Greek kings as local rebels who gained independence on their own strength, Ghafurov argued for a version of history in which it was the mixture of many different peoples that created the 'genius' of Hellenistic culture in Central Asia. Although the contrast between these scholars is more pronounced than its scholarly resonance, the historical narrative of Tarn, Narain's anticolonial inversion of it, and Ghafurov's emphasis on Central Asian contributions illustrate well the modern claims and frames of the inbetweenness of Hellenistic Central Asia.

1.3 Methodology

The case of Hellenistic Central Asia's double marginality highlights how inbetweenness pervades in various layers of meaning and value attributed to perceived marginal places. The ambivalence of these inbetween places allows ample room for different parties to lay claim on their identification and role as particular spaces – as distinct geographical, political, social, and cultural places. Locating discursive constructions and articulations of inbetweenness is therefore a valuable exercise to shed light on the culturalized assumptions and convictions scholars hold about Hellenism to interpret eclectic material culture in Hellenistic Asia. This will help one central aim of this book, of gaining a deeper understanding of the scholarly heuristics behind what has conventionally been termed by Daniel Schlumberger as '*l'hellenisme oriental*' and '*l'hellenisme occidental*' – Eastern Hellenism and Western Hellenism – which form the foundation for a critical exploration towards a translocal approach.[69] Engaging with the paradoxes that Hellenism bears in its conceptual foundations, I explain and discuss why and how

67 Narain 1957, 11.
68 Ghafurov 2011 [1972], 205.
69 Schlumberger 1960; 1969a; 1970

translocalism and related concepts from globalization research have more heuristic potential to assess cultural inbetweenness beyond 'East', 'West', and the inbetween. As such, this book contributes to wider conversations on interpreting cultural interactions, encounters, and transformations in antiquity.

A comparative approach lends itself well to the analysis of perceptions of inbetweenness through Hellenism. Hellenism, sometimes used interchangeably with Hellenization, conventionally refers to the spread and adoption of Greek culture in lands east of the Mediterranean, through which 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultures mixed and merged, producing distinct inbetween cultures of sorts. The word Hellenism is used not only to refer to this phenomenon, but also to the cultural model to interpret it. While there is a consensus about the phenomenon – the increasing presence of (elements of) what we recognize as Greek culture throughout Asia in the Hellenistic period is undeniable – there exists intense discussion on the precise meaning and consequences of such presence, and what form of cultural interaction it implies. In order to situate this study in wider discourse, Chapter 2 examines the controversies of the Hellenization debate, tracing the concept of Hellenism along the currents of significant intellectual streams across the 20th and 21st century, until recent trends of hybridity and globalization. It will be shown that the meaning of Hellenism did not remain the same across time, as it developed from a synonym of Hellenization, to a cultural concept distinct from Hellenization.

Continuing from these theoretical grounds, Chapters 3 to 7 shape the body of this book and explore different notions of Hellenism that have been used to give meaning to eclectic inbetween material culture across Hellenistic Asia. I examine historical interpretations and narratives of Hellenism at specific archaeological sites from Central Asia and Western Asia (Fig. 1.1) which I discuss as case studies. While both macroregions are situated in the landmass of Eurasia, Central Asia is commonly perceived as the fringe of the 'Hellenistic world', in the context of the territorial range of the Seleukid, Ptolemaic, and Antigonid kingdoms in the aftermath of Triparadeisos in 320 BCE and the Battle of Ipsos in 301 BCE which divided the former regions of Alexander's empire. Although Central Asia played an important role for the Seleukid monarchs and their realm in Asia, Seleukid political activities were largely focused on Western Asia and the Fertile Crescent, a desirable and contested region amidst the Seleukid, Ptolemaic, and Antigonid empires, and therefore (now) considered as the core of the Hellenistic world.[70] It is therefore worthwhile to explore how the geographical emplacement of a space as 'core' or 'periphery' shapes scholarly explanations of Hellenism in these places.

The case studies central to this book are prominent archaeological sites across Hellenistic Asia which highlighted their regions in the broader strokes of ancient history. For Central Asia, I selected the city of Ai Khanum (Baktria, modern Afghanistan), the

70 As discussed in handbooks such as Walbank 1981; Green 1990; Erskine 2003; Errington 2008.

temple at Takht-i Sangin (Baktria, modern Tadzhikistan), and the citadel of Nisa (Parthia, modern Turkmenistan), which will be discussed in Chapters 3 to 5, respectively.[71] Raising excitement amongst historians and archaeologists alike, the rich material from these sites have become widely known and celebrated, through which the region of Central Asia passed into the cultural canon of Classical antiquity and even onto the pages of modern travel guidebooks. Prevalent views of the main interpreters of Ai Khanum, Takht-i Sangin, and Nisa significantly influence the image of the region as a whole; the choice of these sites is therefore justified by their academic popularity as 'highlights' of Central Asia. Other regions, such as Chorasmia and Arachosia, have not been selected for discussion since these are less prominent and less extensively excavated. Conversely, Gandhara, though an important region for the representation of Central Asia, is omitted from this study on the grounds that Gandharan studies is an immense and upcoming field of its own. Chapters 6 and 7 move from Central to Western Asia and examine the royal cities of Babylon and Seleukeia on the Tigris (both in Mesopotamia, modern Iraq). Closely connected to each other, these cities both functioned consecutively as residential cities of Seleukid kings. With similar reasoning as the Central Asian case studies, these prestigious sites have been selected over other compelling cities in the region such as Doura Europos. Each case study chapter follows a similar structure to acquaint the reader with a brief research history, an overview of the site context and its material, and a descriptive analysis of how its main interpreters have perceived and asserted the Hellenism of this material. These descriptions are necessarily presented in the terminology and vocabulary of previous descriptions, which are subject to deeper analysis in Chapter 8. It should be also emphasized that the five sites have each been expertly explored by important scholars in the past, and have been subjected to considerable debate within respective fields. The archaeological sites central in this book should therefore be read as illustrative rather than exhaustive case studies which form the basis of my further analysis.

Chapter 8 compares and investigates the (in)consistency of perceptions of Hellenism based on the case studies central in this book. Five interrelated interpretive paradoxes emerge, which will demonstrate that conceptions of Hellenism variously relate to issues of hybridity, localism, ethnicity, syncretism, and philhellenism, which subtly change and adjust the direction, nuance, and agency in the implied cultural dynamics. Exploring how to move forwards from these paradoxes of Hellenism, Chapters 9, then, offers a critical consideration of a translocal approach, based on useful concepts in globalization research. Rather than using globalization vocabulary evocatively, I argue that seriously engaging with globalization theories requires a radical shift in fundamental structures of thinking about Hellenism and localism. In an evocative discussion of how matters would look like from an alternative translocal approach, this book offers novel

71 While the correct name of the archaeological site is Old Nisa (to distinguish it from New Nisa), this book generally uses 'Nisa' to refer to the ancient site, as New Nisa will not be discussed.

directions for interpreting Hellenism that are not only relevant to studies of Hellenistic Eurasia but also to other forms of cultural inbetweenness across time and space in world history.

A note on positionality

This book investigates the different ways in which cultural inbetweenness is articulated and simultaneously constructed through the model of Hellenism. It does so from a particular perspective and facilitated by a distinct standpoint. As a West-European trained scholar writing in light of the global and digital turns, I approach the subject of inbetweenness from a position that enabled me to draw on a diverse interdisciplinary body of sources, information, and theories to explore Hellenism from a wide angle. The fascination with and theoretical interest in borderland concepts, cultural fluidity, and identity construction is very much a product of today's globalized, postmodern world. In the face of pivotal events in 'the global nineties', with the onset of the Internet Age, the end of the Cold War, the independence of the former Soviet republics, the formal end of Apartheid in South Africa, the Gulf War in the Middle East, the forming of the European Union, the Rwandan genocide, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent Yugoslavian wars, the scholarly world has seen a surge in literature devoted to issues of ethnicity, identity, nationalism, and globalization, creating the intellectual wave this study finds itself in. Internet and academic platforms not only granted access to various literature but also made it possible to gain a global view on current interdisciplinary matters and theories, while providing the inspiration and conceptual frame to approach this study. The current globalization paradigm allowed me to critically analyse perceptions of Hellenism with the theoretical apparatus of recent globalization research, as well as to carry out this particular form of research, a geographically wide comparative study of interpretations of material culture, combining sources and methods from ancient history, archaeology, and sociological theories.

While reaping the fruits of recent times, there were also several timely challenges. The broad endeavour of theorizing cultural inbetweenness compelled me to tread the waters of archaeological and historical experts whose specialized views are necessarily presented here in broad lines to approximate general tendencies of interpretation. Focusing on these tendencies, I have lessened the conventional emphasis on particular sources of information such as textual and numismatic material, which I deemed not primarily relevant for this study. Moreover, due to linguistic limitations, I have only been able to cursorily study Russian publications which, therefore, do not feature in the highlights of the analysis, although these provide interesting perspectives (particularly concerning Orientalism).[72] This book does not aspire to offer an exhaustive study of

72 For which the works of Gorshenina remain immensely valuable; most recently and most relevant to 'Hellenism' is Gorshenina 2021.

the archaeological sites in Hellenistic Asia or a complete in-depth history of Hellenism at large, but rather represents a critical exercise in theoretically mapping out distinct understandings of Hellenism to interpret inbetweenness and the issues that emerge when confronting these views in comparison. The next chapter explores how scholars have theoretically approached the notion of Hellenism in the past and in the present, laying out the cultural backbone to the body of this study: Hellenism in Central and Western Asia.