

The Ancient History Bulletin

VOLUME TWENTY-EIGHT: 2014

NUMBERS 1-2

Edited by:

Edward Anson ✦ David Hollander ✦ Timothy Howe
Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel ✦ Pat Wheatley ✦
Sabine Müller



ISSN 0835-3638

ANCIENT HISTORY BULLETIN

Volume 28 (2014) Numbers 1-2

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Edward Anson, David Hollander, Sabine Müller,
Joseph Roisman, John Vanderspoel, Pat
Wheatley

Senior Editor: Timothy Howe

Editorial correspondents

Elizabeth Baynham, Hugh Bowden, Franca
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W.W. Tarn and the philosophers*

Paul McKechnie

The purpose of this article is to show that W.W. Tarn's principal hope as a historian across the first half of the twentieth century was to identify a philosopher king and to expound his history for the edification of his readers. In a narrative long enough to encompass some decades, I will propose that this agenda crystallized in the context of Tarn's response to his own education. Therefore the philosophers considered will be, first, the philosopher and university reformer whose abiding influence on Tarn is demonstrated by their extant correspondence, and afterwards the ancient philosophers who were listened to by Tarn's two successive candidates for the philosopher-king accolade.

William Woodthorpe Tarn, born in London in 1869,¹ was given substantial advantages in life by his parents. A small one was his middle name, added after his birth was certified: on W.W.'s birth certificate, the name of the child is identical to his father's, William, and the father's occupation is given as 'draper',² but in F.E. Adcock's entry for W.W. in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the father's occupation is given as 'silk merchant': a resonant job title, but one which to be informative today needs to be glossed. Starting out in life as a draper, William Tarn built his fortune in the department store business, when department stores were the newest and best idea in retailing: William Tarn & Co., his store, was in Elephant and Castle, on a block between Newington Causeway and the New Kent Road.³

William Woodthorpe, the younger Tarn, was put down for Eton. His father perceived that making money was not all there was to social climbing. W.W., however, won a King's Scholarship—a circumstance which might have been read as a mixed blessing, since Collegers (King's Scholars) at Eton could be drawn from a less affluent stratum of society than Oppidans.

* I wish to thank the anonymous referees for *Ancient History Bulletin* and Dr. Pat Wheatley for a number of suggestions which have enabled me to improve this article. I wish to thank Trinity College, Cambridge, and its archivist Ms. Diana Chardin, for allowing me access to the correspondence and College documents referred to in this article, and to thank Mr. I.G. Murray (archivist, Inner Temple) and Mrs. P. Hatfield (archivist, Eton College) for helpful correspondence. Completion of this study has come too late to allow me to thank the late Prof. W.K. Lacey. None of those mentioned here is responsible for the shortcomings of this article.

¹ F.E. Adcock, 'Sir William Woodthorpe Tarn', 253-62. This British Academy obituary is the source for Tarn biographical data not attributed to another source in this article.

² Birth certificate in registration district of Wandsworth, sub-district of Clapham, in the county of Surrey, no.378, dated 26 February 1869.

³ *Business Directory of London 1884*, 635 (online at: <http://cdm16445.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16445coll4/id/218332/rec/1>

[11 February 2014]). Harold P. Clunn wrote: 'A long row of buildings which stood on the east side of Newington Butts, at its junction with the New Kent Road, was destroyed in the air raids of 1940 and has since been razed to the ground. This included the large tailoring establishment of Messrs. Isaac Walton & Company, formerly the dry goods store of Messrs. Tarn & Company, which, in the eighties and nineties of the last century, was a centre of fashion. Well-to-do residents of the South London suburbs used then to drive in their carriages and pairs to shop at Messrs. Tarns', but about 1910 this store closed down.' (*London Marches On* [1947], 191).

William Tarn Sr. could well afford any fees a school was likely to charge, and was far from minding who knew it. W.W. did well at Eton, serving as Captain of the School⁴ before going up to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1888 to read Classics. At Trinity, he was taught among others by Henry Jackson, Fellow of Trinity from 1864 to 1921.

Jackson is the first of the philosophers referred to above. Born in 1839, he was thirty years older than Tarn. Before 1888, Jackson and other reformers had already made a large part of their impact on Cambridge and Trinity. In a Commemoration sermon preached in 1913,⁵ Jackson said that 'Whereas in 1858 our institutions were still medieval, in 1883 the lines of a new Cambridge and a new Trinity had been laid down.' 1858 Jackson mentioned because it was the year when he first came into residence at Trinity—and the College's statutes were changed in 1859, 1872 and 1882. The change allowing Fellows to marry made it possible for Jackson to continue his academic career after his marriage in 1875. But for nine years before he was married, he was an Assistant Tutor in Trinity, and together with Richard Jebb and W.E. (Pat) Currey he created an energetic and efficient programme of teaching and supervision in Classics for Trinity undergraduates. A published product of this phase was Jebb's, Jackson's, and Currey's *Translations* (Cambridge, 1878), a book of pieces for translation to and from Latin and Greek, aimed at school students preparing for entry to university classical courses.

Changes to the Classical Tripos in 1869 created an examination in ancient philosophy, and with it an audience for philosophical lectures, which Jackson began to give at Trinity. In 1875, Jackson was appointed at Trinity as Praelector in Ancient Philosophy, a job which he held until he became Regius Professor of Greek in 1906. During the 1880s, Jackson's sequence of articles on Plato's later theory of ideas was appearing in the *Journal of Philology*. When Tarn came up to Trinity in 1888, therefore, Jackson, aged in his late forties, was Cambridge's leading exponent of Platonism.

The evidence for the impression Jackson made on Tarn is conclusive, even though Tarn did not seek to linger in Cambridge, and proceeded from Trinity to the Inner Temple, where he was admitted on 16 April 1890,⁶ in accordance with his father's wish that he should be a barrister. About a year and a half after completing his degree and leaving Trinity, however, Tarn wrote pessimistically to Jackson about the prospects of finding satisfaction in work: in a letter of 14 November 1893 he says 'Neither bar nor business are likely to be enough, as I see things at present, to keep me going'. This was not because bar and business (the latter meaning the work he contributed to William Tarn & Co.) could not fill his time: in another letter on 27 November he says,

I shall have both a good deal of law this spring, & a good deal of business, as I intend going thoroughly through the stocktaking & yearly wash up in February [...] I really think I shall have a fairly busy spring.

⁴ P. Hatfield (Archivist, Eton College), letter to the present author dated 27 March 1997.

⁵ Henry Jackson, 'Commemoration Sermon' in Parry, *Henry Jackson*, 293.

⁶ I.G. Murray (Archivist, Inner Temple), letter to the present author, dated 21 March 1997.

These kite-flying letters, hinting at hopes of a change of occupation, address Jackson as a trusted figure. Much later, in 1948, in a letter to Sir Henry Cholmondeley Jackson, son of Sir Henry Jackson, Tarn wrote that 'Your father was not one whom I am ever likely to forget; I owed him a great deal, and he taught me many things of more importance than Greek philosophy; it was character rather than learning (though he was learned enough) which made such an impression on me.'⁷

In the first 1893 letter, Tarn says,⁸

You told me once to start a literary hobby, &—why I can hardly tell except that I can't find a great deal about it—I have been thinking of Hellenism, or the expansion of Greek life after Alexander—I have begun reading in a sort of way, & seeing what there is to be read that should bear on it.

He goes on to ask Jackson whether he thinks this 'literary hobby' is worth pursuing. Jackson's reply is preserved—or rather, a handwritten copy of part of a longer letter is preserved, in which Jackson refers to something which is not openly avowed in Tarn's letter: Tarn's prospects of a Fellowship of Trinity. Jackson writes,⁹

What you say about Hellenism makes me wonder if I advised you well about the Fellowship exam. If you are drawn to this subject wh. wd. keep you in touch with the old reading, would it after all be a good thing to go in for the exm. next September? I am afraid that the decision must rest with yourself. In the competition of studies, I do not think that your chance of election would be a good one: but if your candidature did not hinder, but rather helped, other things, there can be no reason whatsoever to prevent you from offering yourself. You must not for a moment imagine that either I or anyone else would think that you ought not to be a candidate.

Apparently there had been an earlier exchange, and Jackson had discouraged Tarn from going in for the Fellowship competition. Candidates for Fellowships sat examinations in their subjects: for classical graduates, the Fellowship exam which Tarn might have attempted in 1894 had three papers (three or three and a half hours each) of translating Greek or Latin into English, and one three-hour paper each of Greek and Latin prose (i.e. translation into the ancient language), a three-hour paper with essay questions on philosophical topics from Plato and Aristotle onwards, and a three-hour paper of Classical Questions, which included a number on historical topics. In addition to the examination, candidates had to submit a dissertation.

Tarn had reason to judge that his prospect of performing in the examination at a level which would secure him a Fellowship was not solid. In 1891, he had been placed fourth among

⁷ MS Trinity Add. c.44.10.

⁸ MS Trinity Add. c.44.6.

⁹ Jackson to Tarn 19 Nov 1893: stored with MS Trinity Add. c.44.6-10.

eleven Trinity men who got Firsts in Part I of the Tripos¹⁰—the part whose content and method was the more similar to that of the Fellowship examination. In Part II in 1892, across the University, fifteen Firsts were given, nine of them starred ('with distinction'): Tarn got one of the six without a star.¹¹ The Trinity Fellowship examination principally measured proficiency in the Latin and Greek languages. In these languages Tarn both at Eton and Trinity had come close to, but not excelled, the best of his contemporaries.

A dispassionate analysis, then, would have told Tarn that the hope of doing better in an examination this time than the best classical students was unlikely to be justified. Tarn, however, did not calculate so coldly: in his reply to Jackson, his refusal to take the bait dangled in front of him was emphatic:¹²

I don't think I could, were my chances never so good, endure yet another examination in the same old round. As a matter of fact, I think it would be absurd for me to try. It is just conceivable that I might do a passable dissertation, tho' I could not now have one ready by Sept. next; it is absolutely certain that I should do a thoroughly bad examination.

He goes on to say how much he hates Latin and Greek composition, and refers again to his 'horror of another examination'. It seems clear that he was speaking his heart's truth about exams; but it is less clear that he was right about having no chance of a Fellowship. The reservation I have about drawing the latter inference arises from the overall nature of the competition, which did not consist only of a language examination, and the lists of successful candidates.¹³ One could enter three times: few were chosen at their first attempt, and men trying for the third time had the best chance. Candidates were men who had first-class degrees. Surely they were not going to improve much in language skills, in three years after graduating?¹⁴ They could already read and write Latin and Greek accurately. Marks for translation and composition papers cannot have had all that wide a spread. Probably as long as a candidate's basic skills as measured in the examination were good enough, other factors were important: first, research work as evident in the dissertations must have been given significant weight; secondly, there must have been some element of examiners' subjective

¹⁰ *Historical register to 1910*, 663.

¹¹ *Historical Register to 1910*, 666.

¹² MS Trinity Add. c.44.7.

¹³ Data about the Fellowship examination in this paragraph from a list appended to a letter from Diana Chardin of Trinity College Library to the present author, dated 7 April 1997. The list shows that four out of eleven examination candidates were elected to a Fellowship in 1894 (the year when Tarn might have entered, if he had taken the hint from Jackson). Five of the eleven were candidates for the third time, four for the second time, and two for the first time. The two classical Fellows elected (Crompton Llewelyn Davies and Theodore Llewelyn Davies, uncles of Peter Llewelyn Davies, whom J.M. Barrie was to identify as the original for the character of Peter Pan) were both making their third attempt at a Fellowship, while Philip Herbert Cowell (Mathematics: Senior Wrangler 1892) and Daniel Henry Moore (Natural Sciences, Physics) were each making their second attempt. John Herbert Stamp, a classical student who made his first attempt at a Fellowship in 1894, would be elected in 1895.

¹⁴ I owe this point to discussion with the late Prof. W.K. Lacey, who in the 1950s and 60s taught and examined in the Cambridge Tripos.

views on who ought to be elected (the tendency of third-time candidates to do well points to this¹⁵); and thirdly, it is probable that there was a real role for what Jackson called 'the competition of studies' in the decision-making process.

Jackson himself had built his Cambridge career on his success in that competition, that is, by making a case for his specialized studies, while simultaneously strengthening Trinity's work in the studies, tedious to Tarn by 1893, which Tarn called 'the same old round'. Jackson had combined the language work which resulted in *Translations* with the philosophical work which gave his colleagues reason to appoint him, innovatively,¹⁶ as a Praelector in Ancient Philosophy. If Jackson had some sense (expressed with reservations) that the 'competition of studies' in the 1890s might have been capable of creating space on the payroll for a Hellenistic historian, it would be reckless now to contradict him.

I know of no sources for the next five years. Tarn's first article in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* came in 1901,¹⁷ eight years after he suggested to Jackson that Hellenistic History might be a suitable 'literary hobby' for himself. In it he dealt with the Oxo-Caspian trade route, i.e. the Silk Road. The personal factors behind his choice of subject are clear: his father, whose ghost had pushed him into a legal career, had been a silk merchant. A decade after his father's death, his father's identity and importance in his own life were evidently still of concern to Tarn.

In 1905 came the nervous breakdown which changed everything. A letter written to Jackson in May 1904 has some pointers to the crisis ahead. 'I am still pegging away at the law,' he says, but he adds, 'I shall never be really fond of the work.' About his scholarly publications he is modest, but here again the letter shows that he is in the wrong career: he gets 'a lot of pleasure' from hellenistic history, but (he says) 'Write a law book I simply couldn't'.

Why did the breakdown come when it did? As the 1904 letter shows, Tarn had emerged in 1903-4 from the long preliminary stages of a London barrister's career and was making a mark in his own right. At the very time of his breakdown in summer 1905, he was offered the legal work of a government office. This was security and advancement on a plate. Failure compels retreat, but career success brings indefinite continuance: for Tarn at the age of 36, success at the Bar was a twenty- or thirty-year sentence to work he hated. By having a breakdown, Tarn forced himself (I speak metaphorically) to face his inner need not to be a lawyer.

¹⁵ Note further Mary Beard's observation that (in the Tripos) 'Jackson and his contemporaries were [...] concerned with seeing enough of an individual candidate's work to *make a judgement*' (Beard, 'The invention [and re-invention] of "Group D"', 99, italics in original); that there was at least as important a subjective element in decisions on Fellowships as in assessment for the Tripos seems plausible.

¹⁶ Todd, 'One of the great English worthies', 89, and Parry, *Henry Jackson*, 295.

¹⁷ Tarn, 'Patrocles and the Oxo-Caspian Trade Route'.

After convalescence in the Mendips, Tarn settled in Scotland for the rest of his life, first at Mountgerald near Dingwall, and later at Muirtown House, outside Inverness. There is no source known to me which would cast light on what connection Tarn's state of mental health had with William Tarn & Co., the department store, closing in about 1910 (see above). Tarn in Scotland learnt carpentry, as a therapeutic exercise, and published articles on Hellenistic history every year until his *Antigonos Gonatas* was published by Oxford University Press in 1913.

Here we come to the second philosopher with whom this article will deal, and the first of Tarn's philosopher kings. Born probably late in 320BC,¹⁸ Antigonos Gonatas was the son of Demetrius the Besieger. Tarn in his first chapter takes the story briskly from Antigonos' birth to the time in 294 when Demetrius became king of Macedon:¹⁹ 'Now fortune had again turned her wheel,' Tarn wrote, 'and at the age of twenty-five he [Antigonos] stood heir once more to another great kingdom. If Antigonos was not by this time absolutely contemptuous of what fortune might bring him, it was not the fault of that goddess.'

At this point Tarn lays aside political narrative for the rest of the chapter, and turns to introducing Antigonos' philosophy-teachers. He begins by citing the obvious text: 'Plato,' he says, 'had laid it down that for the world to be well governed philosophers must become kings or kings philosophers. Never yet had philosophy attained to such a position as she held at the beginning of the third century; and [...] she could and did aspire to train a king; and Antigonos inevitably offered himself for the attempt.'²⁰

Having signalled where his line of thought is going, Tarn exemplifies his theme with a sort of mini-philosopher-king: Menedemus of Eretria, 'the centre of cultivated society in Eretria at this time,' as Tarn calls him,²¹ and 'the informal head of the little commonwealth.'²² With the latter inference, Tarn is on thin ice. Menedemus did well in politics, especially for a man who was poor and worked for a living as a building-foreman;²³ being of good family, even though he was poor, must have been a help. When he reached the top in politics (προύστη τῆς πολιτείας) he was able to make a second marriage with a rich lady (D.L. 2.137), and so solve the problem of his poverty—but he had reached his eminence in a democratic city (D.L. 2.143), where there were two views of his merits (D.L. 2.140), espoused by adherents of two parties (D.L. 2.141). So although Tarn writes of 'the informal head of the [...] commonwealth,' there was nothing informal about Menedemus' political position. Like Disraeli, he had 'climbed to the top of the greasy pole.'

Tarn has read against the grain of Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Menedemus*, then, to spin Menedemus as a kind of philosopher king. Scandalously, Tarn goes on to say of Menedemus,

¹⁸ Wheatley, 'Lifespan of Demetrius Poliorcetes', 25.

¹⁹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 15-21.

²⁰ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 21.

²¹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 22.

²² Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 23.

²³ D.L. 2.125 (ἀρχιτέκτονος [...] καὶ πένητος): or a scene-painter, or both. In view of Eretria's small size, it seems improbable that a scene-painter could make a living by doing nothing but scene-painting.

‘whether his influence was exerted [on Antigonos] on the lines which the Stoics afterwards laid down for the true practice of kingship we do not know.’²⁴ This is scandalous because we know perfectly well that such a thing is extremely improbable. Menedemus was a democrat, though a pro-Macedonian one: there is no good cause for foisting on him the kind of monarchic theory which belonged to a later generation. It is all done in aid of building Menedemus into a philosopher king.

At the same time, Tarn spins Menedemus in another plane, as a latter-day Socrates. Menedemus was indeed a Socratic, the last of the philosophers grouped together as Socratics in Diogenes Laertius Book Two—Book Three deals with Plato, a Socratic if you look at it that way, but not classified under that heading by Diogenes Laertius. But consider how far, and how misleadingly, Tarn advances towards making Menedemus like Socrates: he writes that²⁵

... his chief claim to the title of ‘philosopher’ must rest on mental attitude rather than actual teaching, he had the one great gift of character [...] Indolent, and contemptuous of the routine of the schools, with which he had little enough in common, he taught, not a host of pupils on the ranged benches of a class-room, but a few who walked or sat with him informally, as it might chance.

This is hardly fair comment: Menedemus was a professional philosopher and kept a school, though perhaps a poorly organized one (D.L. 2.130). Pupils lived at his house (D.L. 2.138), and he had supporters—patrons (σωματοποιοῦσαντες)—who subsidized Asclepiades and Menedemus, and provided dowries for Menedemus’ daughters.

Conversation with Menedemus was worth the effort, if one did not mind his coarse language. Tarn says that

Illdoers feared that mocking speech, invincible in retort, and apt to go to its point with a coarseness of satire as brutal as effective; while behind it lay a nobility of character that could deter a man from a dubious act ‘lest Menedemos should hear’.

This phrase (‘lest Menedemos should hear’) recalls a strange incident—strange, that is, given that Menedemus was pro-Macedonian and took refuge with Antigonos at the end when the political tide turned against him in Eretria (D.L. 2.142). But the act called ‘dubious’ by Tarn, despite Menedemus’ otherwise positive stance towards Antigonos, would have been none other than *accepting an invitation from Antigonos*. Eurylochus of Cassandreia was invited [to court] by Antigonos, together with Kleïppides of Cyzicus, but he declined. Why, then, would Eurylochus be ashamed to accept an invitation from Menedemus’ old student Antigonos? What made that a ‘dubious act’? The best surmise seems to be that the comment Eurylochus feared Menedemus would embarrass him with was, ‘So Antigonos invited a cute boy for you, did he?’ (i.e. Kleïppides).

²⁴ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 26.

²⁵ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 23.

Tarn clinches his comparison of Menedemus and Socrates by commenting on Menedemus' symposia. He says,²⁶

It is perhaps at his famous suppers rather than in the lecture-room that we see him most clearly [...] They would sit on through the night, solving the universe [...] cock-crow would not always part them. By this last phrase we are reminded,—we are no doubt meant to be reminded,—of that more famous banquet at which Socrates, after the wondrous discourse in praise of love, drank the whole company under the table and himself departed soberly at cock-crow to his daily work.

That Menedemus' symposia could go on until morning is attested by Lycophron of Chalcis, quoted in Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists* 10.15.39). But all the rest of Tarn's account of these occasions comes from Diogenes Laertius, whose point is to show that Menedemus' main idea was not to have the expense of feeding his guests. They knew they had to eat beforehand, and wait outside Menedemus' house if they arrived too early. Menedemus handed the wine round so moderately that a superior capacity for holding one's drink was not needed. In short, Menedemus was a professional philosopher—as Socrates was not—who sought public office—as Socrates did not—and who when the public finally rejected him, went into exile—as Socrates did not. Contrary, then, to Tarn's creative account of Diogenes Laertius' *Life*, Menedemus was no philosopher king, and no new Socrates.

Antigonus at Athens came into contact with Zeno of Citium, 'the greatest man in Athens, or the world,' as Tarn calls him.²⁷ Preparatory to bringing Zeno on stage, Tarn writes of the condition the other philosophical schools were in:²⁸ Academy, Lyceum, Garden—none of them (least of all Epicurus' Garden) suited to Antigonus' needs. Then Zeno enters: physically unimpressive, Phoenician, a man who did not lecture to classes (as Tarn also did not).²⁹ 'Yet he was of those who have moved the world,' Tarn adds,³⁰ and then he gives an enthusiastic summary of Zeno's teachings, commenting that the idea of duty is a start towards the conception of the categorical imperative,³¹ alluding to the influence of Stoicism on St Paul;³² and then drawing attention to how close Zeno came to saying that one should love one's enemy.³³ That is to say that in Zeno, whose lectures Antigonus went to whenever he was in Athens, and whom Antigonus repeatedly (but unsuccessfully) invited to court (D.L. 7.6), Tarn saw a far from distant precursor of (all three of) Immanuel Kant, Paul of Tarsus, and Jesus.

²⁶ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 24.

²⁷ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 31.

²⁸ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 27-31.

²⁹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 31-32.

³⁰ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 32.

³¹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 33.

³² Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 34.

³³ Von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* vol. 1 (1905), no.297 [= Origen *Against Celsus* 8.35]: Ζήνων δὲ πρὸς τὸν εἰπόντα, Ἀπολοίμην, ἐὰν μὴ σε τιμωρήσομαι, Ἐγὼ δέ, εἶπεν, ἐὰν μὴ σε φίλον κτήσωμαι ('When someone said, "I'll be damned if I don't get my revenge on you!", Zeno said, "Me, I'll be damned if I don't make you into my friend!").

Leaving aside the negative example of Dionysius of Syracuse, who sold Plato into slavery (D.L. 3.14) instead of trying to live up to his teaching, anyone who wanted to believe in philosopher kings would have to concede that their stature as such must depend on their teachers. This sense of the teacher's vital role has determined Tarn's praise of Zeno. In a footnote he quotes misleadingly from Aelian, saying, 'He [Antigonos] was considered Zeno's pupil [...] Ἀντίγονος Ζήνωνος':³⁴ but Aelian's usage here is not the quasi-patronymic applied elsewhere to pupils and teachers (as in 'Eusebius Pamphili'): there is a verb involved, ἀπῆλause, and the phrase means 'Antigonos took delight in Zeno'. Not that Antigonos was not Zeno's pupil in a meaningful sense: the point where Tarn misleads is in citing Ἀντίγονος Ζήνωνος without the relevant verb, as if Aelian had used the phrase in a different way from the way he actually did.

The course of true philosophy did not run smooth all the way through Antigonos' reign. Menedemus and Zeno can be, and are, depicted as worthy mentors in Tarn's book, but there was a third mentor, namely Persaeus, and even Tarn has to admit that he fell short of the standard the others set. Antigonos invited Zeno to court, as might be expected, and Zeno—perhaps shrewdly—preferred to stay in Athens;³⁵ instead, he sent to Antigonos' court Persaeus, a figure whom Tarn finds profoundly unsatisfactory in character terms.³⁶

Tarn finds much to admire, however, in Antigonos' kingship. He received his royal title from the soldiers: 'the crown was legally in their hands,' he says, 'the hands of the Macedonian people under arms [...] Antigonos' title was derived direct from the Macedonian people, and not from any hereditary claim.'³⁷ How Tarn can exclude the idea of a hereditary claim when Antigonos' father was king of Macedonia I do not know. But there is a worse difficulty: the force with which Antigonos defeated the Gauls at the battle of Lysimacheia in 277 was not the army of Macedon: it was a mercenary army, based on the army which had belonged to Demetrius the Besieger, including garrison troops who had stayed with Antigonos through the difficult times he had had since his father's death in 282.³⁸ The exact circumstances of Antigonos' takeover in Macedonia are unknown (as indeed Tarn says)—but 'Macedonian farmers [...] ready to welcome any man strong enough to hold the gates of the land against the

³⁴ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 34 n.73, quoting Aelian VH 12.25.

³⁵ On this incident, and more broadly on reluctance of philosophers to commit to royal courts cf. McKechnie, 'Our Academic Visitor is Missing', 141-2.

³⁶ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 231-3.

³⁷ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 167-8.

³⁸ Griffith, *Mercenaries*, 65-67. The last remains of the (partly Macedonian) army Demetrius the Besieger had as king of Macedonia had gone over to Seleucus in Cilicia in 286 (Plutarch *Demetrius* 49.1-3, cf. Griffith, *Mercenaries*, 60). Janice J. Gabbert (*Antigonos II Gonatas*, 27) comments on the role of Ameinias the archpirate on Antigonos' side in the siege of Cassandreia, and notes that some of Antigonos' mercenaries were themselves Gauls. 282 as date of death of Demetrius Poliorcetes established at Wheatley, 'Lifespan of Demetrius Poliorcetes', 19-27.

barbarian'³⁹ are brought into Tarn's story gratuitously, 'intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative'.⁴⁰

A philosopher king has to be a legitimate king, and (given the circumstances in which Tarn wrote) legitimate preferably in terms recognisable in the twentieth century. But if the role of the Macedonian people under arms in making Antigonos king is a mare's nest, Tarn's point that Antigonid Macedonia was the shield and bulwark of Greece against northern aggression in 277 has something in its favour,⁴¹ and at least Antigonos was a Macedonian king of Macedonians⁴²—even if most of those who helped him win the realm of Macedonia were not Macedonian.

Antigonos Gonatas himself might have been surprised, despite the philosophic and literary court circle he built,⁴³ to be thought a philosopher king. At least an anecdote preserved in Plutarch has him telling off a philosopher who was speaking to him on the subject of justice, while he (Antigonos) was attacking cities belonging to someone else.⁴⁴ But Antigonos had an almost unique appeal for Tarn: the combination of Antigonos the Macedonian patriot and Antigonos the defender of the sentimental or spiritual value of Athens⁴⁵ was a powerful attractant. 'Athens alone,' Tarn said,⁴⁶ 'had the secret of the path which raises men to the heavens.' And then there is the clincher, 'the highest view of kingship that the ancient world ever saw':⁴⁷ that is, Antigonos' advice to his son that 'our kingship is a noble servitude'.⁴⁸ Antigonos' point in practice may have been little more than that members of the royal family should not actually beat their subjects—the misdemeanour for which he was correcting his son. But Tarn says, 'that which the Stoic had partially, but only partially, envisaged in theory, Antigonos translated into personal fact; the king must be the servant of his people.'

After 1913 and the publication of *Antigonos Gonatas*, came 1914, and with it, the war. For about a year, Tarn's contribution was to work as a carpenter for the Red Cross. Then he joined the War Office and devoted himself to producing 'official truth',⁴⁹ as he later called it (i.e. British propaganda, in both English and German). There was a hiatus in his work on Hellenistic subjects. But in the early 1920s Tarn began to write about Alexander the Great. In 1921 he published articles on 'Alexander's ὑπομνήματα and the World-Kingdom' and 'Heracles son of Barsine'. In 1922 he wrote about 'The Massacre of the Branchidae', and in 1923 about

³⁹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 166.

⁴⁰ W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Mikado*, Act II.

⁴¹ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 202.

⁴² Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 203.

⁴³ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 223-56.

⁴⁴ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 251-2, quoting Plutarch *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute* 330E.

⁴⁵ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 204-5.

⁴⁶ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 222.

⁴⁷ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 253.

⁴⁸ Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas*, 256 and n.122, citing Aelian *VH* 2.20.

⁴⁹ J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History* vol.6, 352.

‘Alexander and the Ganges’. After these *Vorarbeiten*, he continued to write in learned journals through the mid-1920s, but wrote no more (except one book review) about Alexander until *Cambridge Ancient History* volume 6, with his chapters about Alexander, was published in 1927. These chapters were reused with little amendment as volume 1 of Tarn’s *Alexander the Great*, over twenty years later.

In 1958 Ernst Badian commented on what Tarn had done to studies of the reign of Alexander. If he had not exactly poisoned the well—I paraphrase—still what he had done to the water would affect the taste for decades to come. Badian concluded his article about Bagoas by saying,⁵⁰ ‘Perhaps, with what materials we have, a proper history of Alexander cannot be written at all.’ On the same page he praised ‘the brilliance and integrity of scholars like Tarn’ (the phrase ‘scholars like’ is redundant), but as the next two years passed, he became angrier. In 1960 he wrote that the ‘attitude [...] of which Tarn was the most distinguished exponent [...] [had] made the serious study of Alexander’s reign from the point of view of political history not only impossible, but (to many students) almost inconceivable.’⁵¹

Badian’s concern in his 1960 article about the death of Parmenio was to bring into question Tarn’s conclusion that Alexander had ‘committed two murders, but only two.’ He was profoundly dissatisfied with this understanding, as many have been since. This is not the place to re-examine how many people Alexander did kill, and how much blame attaches to the killings; but it is the place to note how Tarn’s apologia for Alexander’s killings fits in with the agenda which he first put into action in his *Antigonos Gonatas*, with a degree of success—that is, the agenda of identifying a philosopher king and expounding his history, with an eye always on the question of character. *Antigonos Gonatas* is a good book, but Tarn’s achievement in writing it was circumscribed by the unimportance of Antigonus, in the great sweep of history. *Nobis in arto et inglorius labor* (‘Mine is an inglorious labour in a narrow field’, Tac. *Ann.* 4.32.2). This is how the logic of Tarn’s historical inquiries brought him to Alexander the Great; and when it did, this is also why he began his work with a ground-clearing operation.

At first glance, there were too many imperfections in Alexander for him to fit the philosopher king mould, even to the degree to which Antigonus Gonatas fits it. So in his articles of the early 1920s Tarn set himself to move obstacles aside: on the world-kingdom, he concluded that ‘the idea of Alexander’s world-kingdom has nothing to do with history’;⁵² on Heracles son of Barsine he concluded that there was no such person;⁵³ on the massacre of the Branchidae he concluded not only that there was no massacre, but actually that the story of the massacre was clumsily fabricated to glorify Alexander;⁵⁴ on the Ganges he concluded that

⁵⁰ Badian, ‘Bagoas’, 157.

⁵¹ E. Badian, ‘Death of Parmenio’, 324.

⁵² Tarn, ‘Alexander’s ὑπομνήματα’ and the “World-Kingdom”, 17.

⁵³ Tarn, ‘Heracles son of Barsine’; on the reality of Heracles see Heckel, *Who’s who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 148.

⁵⁴ Tarn, ‘Massacre of the Branchidae’, 66.

Alexander never knew of it, and that when he and his army turned back from further advance into India, Alexander's faith in Aristotelian geography remained unshaken.⁵⁵

This last matter may seem less morally urgent than being able to convince oneself that there was no Branchidae massacre. Even so, it is not without importance to Tarn's metanarrative. Like Antigonus, Alexander had a philosophical education—and Alexander's had come from Aristotle himself. Thus far, on the face of it, Alexander was more fortunate than Antigonus Gonatas, because he was taught by a greater philosopher—though an attentive reader might think back to the reasons Tarn in 1913 had given in the course of showing that Aristotle's successors at the Lyceum were not good enough to be the shapers of Antigonus' mind.

Tarn's programme for making Alexander into a philosopher king, however, advanced beyond the shallows of arguing Alexander's killings away or placing them in a perspective which would make them seem unimportant. Achieving these things was only groundwork. In Antigonus' case, Tarn could build a whole chapter by describing and reflecting on the philosophers at the royal court; but Alexander's philosophical corps, though the members of it are enumerated (Callisthenes,⁵⁶ Anaxarchus,⁵⁷ Pyrrhon,⁵⁸ Aristobulus,⁵⁹ Onesicritus⁶⁰),⁶¹ is not proposed by Tarn as influential on Alexander's way of thinking. More meaningful targets were being lined up. The programme Tarn had was to make Alexander into a philosopher who was better, on the moral plane, than Aristotle, and whose thinking anticipated that of Zeno, 'the greatest man in Athens, or the world'.

Discussing Alexander's reasons for invading Persia, Tarn concedes that 'to the best modern thought, the invasion is quite unjustifiable,'⁶² but he notes, relevantly, that Aristotle called attacking barbarians 'essentially just', and 'told his pupil to treat barbarians as slaves.' Tarn then adds, 'it was to be left to Alexander himself to rise to a higher level than Aristotle.' Here Tarn's logic is questionable. Anyone would agree that Alexander did more than any other student Aristotle ever had to attack barbarians—so that in that respect, Alexander in practice was exactly at the level to which Aristotle's theory had pointed; but is it fair to think that he rose to a higher moral level by not in general treating barbarians—or rather, the survivors of his attacks—as slaves, after he had invaded and conquered them?

Tarn's narrative treatment of Alexander's response to Aristotle's ideas crystallizes after his account of the battle of Gaugamela. Alexander reappoints Mazaeus as satrap after the

⁵⁵ Tarn, 'Alexander and the Ganges', 100.

⁵⁶ Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 75-6.

⁵⁷ Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 27.

⁵⁸ Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 239.

⁵⁹ Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 46.

⁶⁰ Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great*, 183-4.

⁶¹ *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 359.

⁶² *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 357.

surrender of Babylon.⁶³ It is not as clear as Tarn thinks it is that Alexander's reappointment of Mazaeus proves that Alexander no longer believed in Aristotle's view that barbarians were not fit to rule: he knew that barbarians had been ruling other barbarians for a long time, and Mazaeus was already the ruler of Babylonia. To interpret his reappointment as implying rejection of Aristotle's views on barbarians is to draw a conclusion which is not fully supported by the data.

Gaugamela, the dismissal of the allied troops, and Mazaeus, in Tarn's account, lead into Alexander's plans for organizing peace in his empire—awareness of the need for which was Aristotle's best contribution to Alexander's formation. Tarn writes:⁶⁴

He knew what line he would take: he was not to be a Macedonian king, ruling Persia, but a king of Macedonians and Persians alike; he was to mediate between the Greek and the barbarian,—in Plutarch's phrase to mix them as in a loving-cup.

This idea, only sketchily developed in *Cambridge Ancient History* 6 in 1927, is the germ of Tarn's fifteen-page argument on Opis and the policy of fusion in *Sources and Studies* (1948):⁶⁵ an argument whose weak points have been carefully exposed by A.B. Bosworth among others.⁶⁶ Throughout the pages on the policy of fusion Tarn engages on Alexander's behalf with Aristotle—sometimes Aristotle as borne witness to by the ghosts of his ideas which lived on in Eratosthenes and other epigones. The thrust of the whole *tour de force* is to argue that Alexander's principles of governing were superior to the ideas Aristotle gave him, and that the originator of the change for the better was Alexander himself.

Moderation alone, then, Tarn argues, was insufficient to hold a state together—at least, a state on the scale of Alexander's kingdom. So it was that Alexander, on Tarn's calculation, had to transcend Aristotle, who (Tarn notes in his first paragraph) did teach 'moderation alone'⁶⁷—a doctrine which could not suffice (Tarn continues) for the son of passionate Olympias. But once Aristotle was transcended, there was conceptually still a way to travel: and here again, for the claim that Alexander anticipated Zeno, the line of thought comes from Opis. As Tarn wrote,⁶⁸

Before Alexander, men's dreams of the ideal state had still been based on class-rule and slavery; but after him comes Iambulus' great Sun-state, founded on

⁶³ *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 384. Mazaeus was the first Persian to be appointed as satrap in lands conquered by Alexander (Arrian *Anabasis* 3.16.4, Curtius Rufus 5.1.44): as Waldemar Heckel writes, 'for Alexander's policy of "reconciliation" or "inclusion," Mazaeus was an important symbol' ('Mazaeus, Callisthenes and the Alexander Sarcophagus', 392).

⁶⁴ *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 384.

⁶⁵ W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, vol. 2 *Sources and Studies*, 434-49.

⁶⁶ Bosworth, 'Alexander and the Iranians'.

⁶⁷ *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 353.

⁶⁸ *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. 6, 437.

brotherhood and the dignity of free labour. Above all, Alexander inspired Zeno's vision of a world in which all men should be members one of another, citizens of one State without distinction of race or institutions, subject only to and in harmony with the Common Law immanent in the Universe, and united in one social life not by compulsion but by their own willing consent, or (as he put it) by Love. The splendour of this hopeless dream may remind us that not one but two of the great lines of social-political thought that have divided the world since go back to Alexander of Macedon.

One of the lines of thought Tarn refers to is that of divine kingship; the second is that of (same page) 'the brotherhood of all men which was proclaimed, though only proclaimed, in the French revolution.' There is little to add, so long after Tarn's time, about whether this is a fair view of Alexander the Great—Alexander as both a high Tory, standing for church and king, and a French revolutionary, standing for liberty, equality and brotherhood. Badian proved that Alexander was more a practitioner of a cruel *raison d'état* than Tarn conceded; and the idea that Zeno (or other philosophers) drew their ideas from Alexander's theorizing, rather than partially in response to conditions which he had brought about, confuses the process of social change with the process of speculative thought. In trying to write Alexander up as a better philosopher king than Antigonus Gonatas, Tarn made him into a king-philosopher, thereby on the whole making good history-writing more difficult rather than easier. Badian was right here, even if guilty of exaggeration.

Before 1911, Tarn had given up any idea of a career in Parliament: he says this in a letter to Henry Jackson dated 16 May 1904. I mention 1911 because until that year, members were unpaid—and the reason Tarn gives for having abandoned the thought of Parliament is that he could not afford it. There was a second difficulty in 1904, as Tarn adds: 'I hardly know at present what to call myself politically.' He continues, 'I am far nearer your own position than I used to be [...] I think I am out of touch with the whole spirit of modern Toryism, and with a great deal that calls itself Imperialism.' Reading between the lines just a little, this is to say that Tarn saw himself as a true Imperialist with essentially Tory sympathies, while being hesitant about the modern Toryism of 1904; that was gravitating towards being a mouthpiece for big business. And at the same time (writing to Jackson) he was prepared to be polite, or more than polite, about Jackson's Liberal commitments. In a later letter, Tarn even thinks he is becoming a Radical. Like his king-philosopher, Tarn wanted to combine Toryism and Imperialism with the ideals which fired the French revolution. Decades later, and only a few weeks after regaining office in the general election of 25 October 1951, the Tories gave this strangely conflicted student of the philosophers the knighthood which *Alexander the Great* (1948) might never have gained him under a Labour government.⁶⁹

PAUL McKECHNIE

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

⁶⁹ *London Gazette* 39421, Supplement of 28 December 1951, 1-2.

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