

GREEK IMPERIALISM

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Greek imperialism by William Scott Ferguson

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WILLIAM SCOTT FERGUSON

**GREEK
IMPERIALISM**

GREEK IMPERIALISM

BY

WILLIAM SCOTT FERGUSON

PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT HISTORY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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ABSTRACTS TO VOLUME
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TO MY MOTHER



PREFACE

THIS book contains seven lectures, six of which were delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston during February, 1913. In the first of them the main lines of imperial development in Greece are sketched. In the others I have tried to characterize, having regard rather to clearness than to novelty or completeness, the chief imperial growths which arose in Greece during the transference of city-states from ultimate to constituent political units. I hope that these discussions of the theory and practice of government in the empires of Athens, Sparta, Alexander, the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Antigonids will be found useful by the general reader, and especially by the student of politics and history. The idea I wish particularly to convey, however, is that there was continuity of constitutional development within the whole period. The city-state, indeed, reached its greatest efficiency in the time of Pericles, but the federation of city-states was being still perfected two hundred years afterwards. In government, as in science, the classic period was but the youthful bloom of Greece, whereas its vigorous maturity — in which it was cut down by Rome — came in the Macedonian time.

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Lowell

Briefly stated, my thesis is this: The city-states of Greece were unicellular organisms with remarkable insides, and they were incapable of growth except by subdivision. They might reproduce their kind indefinitely, but the cells, new and old, could not combine to form a strong nation. Thus it happened that after Athens and Sparta had tried in vain to convert their hegemonies over Greece into empires, a cancerous condition arose in Hellas, for which the proper remedy was not to change the internal constitutions of city-states, as Plato and Aristotle taught, but to change the texture of their cell walls so as to enable them to adhere firmly to one another. With a conservatism thoroughly in harmony with the later character of the Greek people, the Greeks struggled against this inevitable and salutary change. But in the end they had to yield, saving, however, what they could of their urban separateness, while creating quasi-territorial states, by the use of the federal system and deification of rulers. These two contrivances were, accordingly, rival solutions of the same great political problem. Nothing reveals more clearly the limitations of Greek political theory than that it takes no account either of them or of their antecedents.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., June, 1913.

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