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Alexander the Great and the East

History, Art, Tradition

Edited by
Krzysztof Nawotka
and Agnieszka Wojciechowska

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Alexander the Great and the East: History, Art, Tradition: An Introduction

Krzysztof Nawotka (Wrocław) and Agnieszka Wojciechowska (Wrocław)

This volume presents final versions of papers read at a conference in Wrocław on 12–14 September 2013. It was the second in a series of scholarly meetings on Alexander the Great, initiated in November 2011 by Volker Grieb of Hamburg, Krzysztof Nawotka and Agnieszka Wojciechowska of Wrocław, with a conference "Alexander the Great and Egypt: History, Art, Tradition". In 2014 it was followed by "Historiography of Alexander the Great" and in 2015 by "Alexander Romance: History and Literature" co-organized by Richard Stoneman of Exeter. All these conferences were well-attended and the acts of the first in the series appeared in 2014 as Philippika 74.

Alexander left Macedonia in the early Spring of 334 BC, less than two years in his rule, to cross to Asia in May 334 BC, never to return to Europe. In fact we do not know whether he ever intended to come back. Indeed, classical and oriental evidence alike show Alexander's efforts to assume trappings of the Achaemenid monarchy both in political practice of taxation, appointments of satraps, usage of oriental troops and image-building. This, traditionally called, Orientalizing policy of Alexander manifested itself in his proclamation as King of Asia at the battlefield of Gaugamela, to culminate in the so-called proskynesis affair and to be sealed by mass wedding of Susa and Alexander's decision to select Babylon as his primary residence, just as late Achaemenids did. Having in mind that most of Alexander's life career and his epic conquests evolved in the East, there is an ample justification for publishing a volume "Alexander the Great and the East". For all recent progress in the field of Egyptian and Middle Eastern studies, the eastern campaigns of Alexander and his rule in Asia still have to approached primarily through the study of classical sources which are the only contiguous accounts of Alexander's history. No surprise therefore that Alexander historians and other Western authors are the primary research focus of most papers included in this volume. Nevertheless the organizers of the conference tried to encourage papers broadening the approach to Alexander beyond Arrian, Plutarch and the Vulgate authors as much as possible, both in selection of themes and in study of non-classical evidence.

This approach proved very successful in the first Wrocław Alexander the Great conference during which a number of Egyptian evidence to the reign of Alexander in Egypt was presented and analyzed, including those on the widely discussed issue of his usage of all five pharaonic names, or of his pharaonic coronation or his building program in Egypt. But not all lands in the East have produced contemporary evidence equal in size and importance to that from Egypt. Outside of Egypt most of usable written evidence in the East comes from Mesopotamia and for this reason alone this land has to be a focus of any serious study of Alexander in the East. Another way of coping with lack of meaningful contemporary

evidence is study of late and even medieval sources which still might be of use in reconstructing of historical geography and ideology of the age of Alexander.

There is a growing perception in modern scholarship, accentuated also in a number of papers read at the first Wrocław Alexander the Great conference, of the Second Persian Rule in Egypt as of a time of military occupation contested by Egyptian elite whose members were referring to the Persians with pejorative expression "foreigners/aliens". It thus separated two periods of legitimacy of power in Egypt: this under the last native XXX dynasty and that under Alexander and his Macedonian successors. The issue of continuity of the legitimate Egyptian rule under the Macedonians pharaohs is further investigated in two papers in this volume. Ivan Ladynin analysis a statuette, now lost (?) or kept in an undisclosed location, with a dedicatory inscription set up by a prince, the son of Nectanebo, probably of Nectanebo II, the last native pharaoh, happily returned to Egypt from foreign the lands. The discrete elements of his inscription indicate, Ladynin shows, that the son of Nectanebo stayed abroad with a benevolent king, in all probability Alexander the Great. Nothing indicates that he participated in Alexander's wars, more likely paying a visit at his court in Asia and seeking his support for some Egyptian cause. His inscription seems to draw a fine line between the Egyptian elite enjoying benevolence of Alexander the king of Egypt and their reluctance to acknowledge him as a full *ritual* pharaoh as in the inscription of the son of Nectanebo Alexander is never referred to quite the same way the father of the dedicant would have been.

Nectanebo II is the key figure of the so-called Egyptian logos of the *Alexander Romance* in which he moves from Memphis to Pella to seduce Olympias and to sire Alexander. With the general agreement that the story is early Hellenistic, Krzysztof Nawotka and Agnieszka Wojciechowska investigate when the interest in Nectanebo was born in Macedonian-ruled Egypt, having in mind a very strong case for the Ptolemaic origin of his cult as the divine falcon. But the gist of the Nectanebo story in the *Alexander Romance* is unmistakenly Egyptian and unlikely to have been devised in the Greco-Macedonian environment: his magical power is deeply rooted in traditional Egyptian tales and its presence in the story reflects real interests of the historic Nectanebo II in magic. And the seduction of Olympias is but a Greek rendition of the Egyptian royal sacred marriage. What is most astonishing, however, is that Alexander seems to have treaded in the footsteps of Nectanebo not only in the *Alexander Romance* but also in the pronounced animal cult and in his construction projects in Egyptian temples. Thus, Nawotka and Wojciechowska show, Alexander and his Egyptian advisors took an effort to obliterate the Persian rule and to present the new king as the direct successor to Nectanebo II.

The greatest physical imprint of Alexander in Egypt is the city named after him, even if the actual construction in Rhakotis barely started during Alexander's short sojourn. Alexandria, as it was known to later generation, is the product of the enormous building effort of first Ptolemies but, Adam Łukaszewicz argues, according to the original blueprint from the age of Alexander which included also the island of Pharos, at that time just off-shore of Alexandria's harbor and now a part of it. Pharos is of course best known as the site of the famous lighthouse regularly featured among the Wonders of the World. Łukaszewicz makes the case for beginning of the construction of the lighthouse by Kleomenes of Naucratis, most probably on orders of Alexander, in this case leaving to Ptolemy I or to his son the completion of the building, while the alleged architect Sostratos of Knidos was

responsible only for putting up the final embellishment of the lighthouse, the statues of the king. He shows the triple function of the Pharos tower, all probably belonging to the original plan of Alexander: lighthouse, watchtower guarding the harbor of Alexandria and the focal point of the fire telegraph, known to us only from a mid-third c. BC papyrus, but almost certainly implemented from an Achaemenid template.

Alexandria in or near Egypt proved the most successful of all real or attributed foundations of Alexander, both as the capital city of the Ptolemies and a centre of arts and commerce. Starting from her research on the Hellenistic vitreous ware in the Sandwich Gold-Glass technique, Giulia Cesarin investigates the motive of hunting iconography in Hellenistic art. She notices a strong, if circumstantial Alexandrian connection of the scene of a young horseman dressed in *kausia* and hunting big game with a spear. Its origin is related to the Macedonian art, best represented by the hunting scene (of Alexander?) on the façade of the Tomb II in Vergina. Cesarin shows its transformation in the Greco-Egyptian milieu of Alexandria.

The dearth of contemporary Greek sources on Alexander necessitates study of any evidence, no matter how incomplete and ambiguous. A broken stele containing the Athenian honorific decree (*IG* II² 356) of 327/6 BC for a descendant of Pharnabazus and Artabazus is the case in point. The name of the honorand is usually restored as Memnon, with an almost universal agreement that it a member of family of the famous mercenary general Memnon of Rhodes. But, following upon a new restoration of S. Lambert, Eduard Rung, shows new possibility of historical interpretation of the decree and its geopolitical context. To him no Memnon was ever mentioned as honorand and the Athenians passed this decree for Thymondas son of Mentor. In Rung's tentative interpretation Thymondas earned the praises having successfully negotiated release of Athenian mercenary soldiers and envoys from Alexander's captivity.

Alexander's expedition to Asia was first of all a military endeavor although few contributors to this volume would be inclined to reduce its history to strictly military matters, least of all not in the modern, seemingly rational understanding of war making. But even now, for all logistical and intelligence sophistication the very outcome of many military operations is largely unforeseeable. In ancient warfare a universal answer to the powerful factor of unpredictability was ascertaining future through divination. Krzysztof Ulanowski looks from this point of view at campaigns of conquest of rulers of Neo-Assyrian Kingdom and of Alexander. His aim is not to prove direct influence of the Assyrian divination on that of the Greeks and Macedonians of the fourth c. BC, but to show basic, universal approach to warfare from the Assyrian empire to that of Alexander, despite all differences, the greatest being perhaps the very nature of Assyrian divination: with a highly structured hierarchy of experts drawing on extensive specialized literature devoted to discreet disciplines. Even if nothing betrays a similar structure of Greek seers serving Alexander, the divinatory techniques and questions were similar to those applied in Neo-Assyrian armies.

With every new fourth c. BC cuneiform tablet published grows our understanding of the Babylonian society of the age when the Achaemenid kings were replaced by Alexander on the throne of Babylon. And since some cuneiform documents, especially Astronomical Diaries, supply precise dates and data unobtainable in classical sources, to mention only the daily date of the battle of Gaugamela, there is the constant trend towards identifying in Babylonian sources direct corroboration of facts of the age of Alexander known from Greek

and Roman authors. A case in point, Micah Ross shows, is the van der Spek's identification of a Chaldaean Belephantes known from Diodorus with a Babylonian astronomer Bēl-apla-iddin attested in cuneiform texts of the age of Alexander. However attractive, this hypothesis in untenable on linguistic grounds and Diodorus' Belephantes may not be a name but a misread Babylonian priestly title. Ross further points to the danger of overenthusiastic interpretation of episodes of the last months of Alexander's life: the Babylonian Omen Episode and the Substitute King ritual. Their description in classical sources, he shows, is at odds with the standard Mesopotamian practice known from cuneiform tablets. In the Spring of 323 BC, Ross shows, Alexander received an astrological warning from his Babylonian scholars and it did affect his behavior, although the details transmitted by classical authors were edited post eventum to amplify the impact of omens made apparent only after Alexander's death.

The episode of a stranger on Alexander's throne in Babylon placed by classical authors among omens and signs predicting the king's death is now commonly interpreted as the Substitute King ritual, i.e. not as an omen but as a release ritual set in motion in response to an earlier grave warning provided by a real omen. This interpretation, grounded in studies of Babylonian omens and rituals, and generally accepted by Assyriologists and a number of classical scholars has some weakness from the Assyriological point of view too, as indicated by the paper of Micah Ross. Robin Lane Fox questions this interpretation entirely, reversing the now generally accepted scholarly approach which gives preference to sources grounded in Babylonian culture and which is prone to blame Western accounts for lack of precision or misunderstanding of the events in Babylon in the Spring of 323 BC. The story, as we know it from Diodorus, Plutarch and Arrian, is multilayered and distorted with the increased component of the miraculous. The first layer, however, Lane Fox asserts, is based on the account of a reliable eye-witness, Aristobulos, but later it was tainted with a dim reflection of the substitute king tradition known to Cleitarchus. So, in Lans Fox' interpretation based on close reading of classical sources, the famous episode can be read as an account of an accident aggravated by Alexander's growing suspicion of plots surrounding him which necessitated execution of the poor interloper who sat on the king's throne, made temporarily vacant by Alexander on account of his other activities.

Alexander's campaigns further east were fought in the land little known to most ancient authors and never visited by those whose accounts of his rule constitute the core of our source bases. The outcome of this to a modern scholar is that geography of ancient Central Asia and Alexander's movements within Baktria and Sogdiana has always been a puzzle. It is created, Jeffrey Lerner shows, by a number of intersecting factors: names of rivers and towns, particularly prone to misspelling by medieval scribes unfamiliar with geography, overzealous emendations proposed by modern editors and the difficulty in identifying ancient toponyms with rivers and places on modern maps. Archaeology rarely provides conclusive evidence on Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia too, since safe date for Hellenistic pottery and other diagnostic materials are early Seleucid at the earliest. Murky geographical knowledge among Alexander historians and numerous mistakes and misguided simplifications and corrections in Ptolemy's *Geography* affect our understanding of Alexander's campaign in 329 and 328 BC. Lerner's detailed analysis of various recent attempts at pinpointing Alexander's route through Baktria and Sogdiana proves how much caution needs to be applied in charting his movements through Central Asia.

One episode in Alexander's campaigns in Baktria or Sogdiana, whose geography is as imprecise as any other's and whose meaning has baffled scholars is the massacre of Branchidai. Olga Kubica attempts to find out who they were and to gauge their guilt in a mock trial. Kubica reminds the reader that Alexander's deed, an act of genocide by our standards, was almost universally construed in ancient sources as just punishment, even if this explanation was no more than a cover up absolving Alexander from the charge of inadequate control of his troops, guilty of massacre. But, Kubica shows, Branchidai did not disappear completely: there are epigraphic traces of their survival in Central Asia a few hundred years after Alexander, while in Asia Minor divinatory practices harking back to their tradition are attested as late as the fourth c. AD.

Although Alexander's conquests ended at the Hyphasis and in modern geographical terminology he barely made an inroad into India, serious scholars and history enthusiasts have long been asking questions about his real and possible relations with the great nation east of India, China of the Warring States period. Gościwit Malinowski notices that in many eastern versions of the *Alexander Romance* Alexander conducts a peaceful conquest of China. But this is certainly a literary fiction, introduced much later than the age of Alexander, long after diplomatic contacts between China and the Roman empire had been established under Marcus Aurelius. Even if contacts, certainly not limited to trade in goods, between India and China existed in the age of Alexander, no evidence proves the knowledge of China at the court of Alexander, nor did his conquest found any reflection in Chinese sources.

To many Alexander is also and to some mostly a literary figure. Guendalina Taietti investigates parallel handling of motives in Herodotus and among Alexander historians, treated as a notionary unity. She finds some remarkable parallels between the Herodotean image of the Persian king and the representation of Alexander in later authors, e.g. in terms of conquests or in bold engineering feats, but also in negative traits. On poignant example is the topical representations of tyrants, with their excessive longing on which the famed *pothos* of Alexander certainly bordered. In Taietti's analysis some other principal characters in Alexander's historians were re-modeled to fit the Herodotean patterns; the most convincing case to be made for Parmenion, a tragic-warner, not unlike Croesus or Artabanaus. Alexander historians, Taietti shows, freely borrowed story patterns from Herodotus which only helped them to promote their agenda in presenting the portrait of Alexander, both modelled on the Herodotean Persian King and being its reversal.

The idealized portrait of Alexander could and did serve non-literary purpose too. Sabine Müller demonstrates how the idealized representation of Alexander translated into the language of power of Ptolemy, in his own words the best friend of Alexander, with the unique legitimation to rule, and how this inherited friendship stayed at the core of the Ptolemaic ideology of power. Alexander features strongly, if often indirectly, in epigrams of an Alexandrian poet Poseidippos of Pella, now accessible thanks to a Milan papyrus. His learned epigrams, Müller shows, refer to Alexander's victories by allusions to defeated Persian kings or to objects brought from the most distant parts of the world or through Panhellenic motifs. By blending elements of Alexander's legends known from earlier sources with symbols of the Ptolemaic ideology, Poseidippos contributed to building legitimacy of the Ptolemies as successors to Alexander.

Image making and *topoi* were as much preserve of poetry as of "serious" rhetorical history, whose prime representative was Curtius Rufus, studied in this volume by Igor Yakubovitch. Curtius, in Herodotean ethnographic tradition, acted at the crossroads of history and geography, satisfying his readers curiosity for exotic places in which Alexander fought his wars, and indeed for *mirabilia*, things utterly out of the ordinary. For all its informative *cum* entertaining qualities Curtius' ethnogeography was, Yakubovitch shows, an element of his Roman ideological agenda. This included moral judgement on luxury, orientalization of Alexander and weakening of *mos maiorum*. Thus the conquest of the East is in Yakubovitch's reading of Curtius the prelude only to the moral downfall of Alexander caused by assimilation to lower standards represented by the topical Oriental reversion of (conservative Roman) standards.

In a way for the Western, Roman in particular, reader, the ultimate Orient is India. Igor Yakubovitch shows it on many examples derived from Curtius and Christian Djurslev comes back to this idea, albeit from a different angle anchored in the mythological exploits of Dionysus in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*. By the time it was composed similarities between two sons of Zeus and conquerors of India, Dionysus and Alexander, were a commonplace in Hellenistic and Roman literature. Nonnus, Djurslev shows, exploits these similarities to a very considerable degrees, modelling his Dionysus on Alexander, both in outward appearance (horns), epithets, general line of exploits and travels, close parallels in battle description. Thus the *Dionysiaca* share in the late-antique revival of Alexander, greatly contributing to mithologizing the Conqueror.

Born Macedonian, educated in the best of classical Greek tradition and the conqueror of the East: Alexander acted within diverse cultures which were, nevertheless, never totally apart, influencing each other throughout most of the classical age. Hence a handful of papers in this volume looks at the intersection of cultures and at the persona of Alexander in this variegated world. The nature of our sources determine that the conqueror of the East is approached here mostly in the Greek context. Agnieszka Fulińska looks at Alexander's ancestral Macedonia as the place of criss-crossing cultural influence. Although kings of Macedonia, at least in the account of Herodotus, strove to be seen as members of the wider Greek world, their land shared a number of distinct cultural features, from monarchy, to the role of women in society, to drinking unmixed wine, with the neighbouring Thrace and Persia rather than with mainstream Greece. Archaeology makes us appreciate depth and breadth of Persian influence in Macedonian art and funerary architecture in the fourth c. BC. Much of this results from the Achaemenid policy of integration of elites of subject lands with the imperial aristocracy. The same policy, Fulińska concludes, albeit on the post-haste rate, can be seen in the orientalizing policy of Alexander, some tenets of it Alexander brought to his new empire from the Persian-influenced Macedonia.

The much maligned orientalizing policy of Alexander first came to the fore during the campaign in Baktria and Sogdiana. In this volume Dan-Tudor Ionescu studies its context and outcome for Alexander's image, principally on example of the proskynesis affair. The intellectual debate on tradition and proskynesis was won by Callisthenes, who, however, lost his position at Alexander's court, Ionescu shows, to the faction of unscrupulous courtiers and officers. The intellectual influence of his historical writing is felt through next generations of historians, thanks to the intermediary of Cleitarchus.

The controversy over proskynesis, as amply evidenced by Ionescu, arose from the Greek and Macedonian misunderstanding of the Eastern ceremonial bow as a sign of the divine cult of the living man. In a way it belongs to the broader issue of divinity of Alexander, some scholar thinks imposed by the king on the Greeks during his stay in the East. Przemysław Siekierka asses in this volume the question of Alexander's divinity in Athens, the only place in the Greek world whose evidence from the age of Alexander make in-depth study of this issue viable. Literary sources on Alexander's cult in Athens acquire clarity only when confronted with epigraphic evidence which explain the precise meanings of terminology the authors may have applied. There is no doubt, Siekierka shows, that a motion for deifying Alexander was tabled by Demades in the Athenian assembly in 324 BC. Nothing, however, proves that it carried the day: Alexander was never a god in Athens and probably also not in Sparta, although he received divine honours among the Greeks in Asia.

A spectacular aspect of cultural or political only Hellenization of Macedonia was the royal promotion of theatre, begun with Archelaus hosting Euripides at the latest. Agnieszka Kotlińska-Toma acknowledges Alexander's consummate knowledge of drama and gathers evidence for his patronage of stage performance. But it was more to the theatre than to provide entertainment to Alexander's troops in Asia, no matter how important this was for soldiers' morale. Kotlińska-Toma notices also a lesser known activity of actors in the age of Alexander: diplomatic and intelligence missions performed by them in the king's service. Nothing perhaps testify more vividly to the importance Alexander attributed to theatre than his sponsorship, but rather not his authorship, Kotlińska-Toma shows, of the satyr play *Agen* written and performed to mock the fugitive treasurer Harpalus and thus to diffuse the tension created in Alexander's empire by the prolonged affair of Harpalus.

Alexander is among best the established heroes of various cultural traditions in Asia and he owns this success to the enormous popularity of the *Alexander Romance* which is the ultimate source of most renditions of Alexander in the East. Aleksandra Szalc notices that Persia is a conspicuous exception to this rule with the original Zoroastrian tradition on Alexander, preceding Ps.-Callisthenes by hundreds of years, hostile to the conqueror of the Achaemenid empire. The second Iranian tradition, that of the national epic, is firmly grounded in the *Alexander Romance*, adopting Alexander to the Achaemenid dynasty. This new tradition of the Iranian epic poetry is incredibly complex, Szalc shows, with a mixture of motifs and episodes borrowed from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance*, odd Hellenistic influences, Islamic ideology which makes Alexander destroy fire temples, and even with the authentic Indian lore.

Arabic manuscripts now kept in Istanbul contain another branch of tradition of Alexander, his purported correspondence with Aristotle, arranged in form of an epistolary novel. Emily Cottrell studies authorship, origin and composition of this collection, ultimately derived from Greek collections of spurious letters of Alexander and Aristotle referred to by late antiquity authors. Some of them crept into later tradition of the *Alexander Romance* too but the epistolary novel known in Arabic is, Cottrell shows, largely independent of Ps.-Callisthenes and it focuses on Aristotle rather than on Alexander. The epistolary novel, in its original form, is dated by Cottrell to the Umeyyad court of the first half of the eighth c. (under Caliph Hishām).

Already in the earliest Greek version of the *Alexander Romance* (ms. A) Alexander excels so much as warrior as a trickster and this aspect of his persona grows with a develop-

ment of his medieval legends. Richard Stoneman investigates the miraculous and cunning in Arabic and Persian versions of the *Alexander Romance* and other Alexander legends in the Muslim world. Muslim Alexander legends, he shows, were particularly prone to emphasize his trickster qualities and his clever inventions, including a diving bell or numerous miraculous mirrors (all-seeing, weapon etc.), because of Alexander's association with Aristotle, himself credited for wisdom and various inventions. In fact the Muslim fascination with mirrors reflects, often indirectly, Plato and Neoplatonic works which filtered to Sufi thinking, while in the mirror stories Alexander is often a figure of a (Muslim) mystic.

In a way an offshoot of the Arabic tradition of Alexander is the significant part of the Hebrew tradition: this based on the Hebrew *Alexander Romance*, itself a translation from the unknown to us Arabic version of the *Romance*. Again, Alexander is in it not so much a historical figure as a paradigm of the imperfect worldly wisdom. Aleksandra Klęczar studies in the volume the concept of wisdom, Greek in Jewish, in a branch of the Hebrew tradition of the *Alexander Romance*. Alexander is here, as in the Jewish tradition in general, a chosen king, endowed with wisdom. It, however, fails him on some occasions, being imperfect, since perfect is only the wisdom of God.

Faced with the enormous output on Alexander the Great, every paper, no matter how much source orientated, has to deal with conflicting opinions of other scholars. Josef Wiesehöfer studies views and attitudes of German ancient historians to Alexander's alleged policy of unity of mankind, alternatively called "policy of fusion". The topic was no less significant in 1933-1945 than it is now, more for ideological than scholarly reasons. It came to the fore, Wiesehöfer shows, as a result of the departure from the positivistic approach to history in the 1920ies, and with the emphasis on the role in history of what was then called "race", and because of the perceived need to appreciate the utilitarian role of ancient history for modern society. This way of thinking, with its glorification of Aryan/Indoeuropean "race", was typical of but not limited to openly Nazi-leaning German intellectuals. The openly pro-Nazi ancient historians F. Schachermeyr and H. Berve extolled virtues of the Aryan race of Macedonians and Persians against the danger of polluting their blood by mixing with inferior Semitic people. The defeat of the Nazi regime in 1945 forced even its most dedicated followers in the scholarly world to tone down their approach but the overall perspective did not change as much as one might expect until the 1970ies. In Wiesehöfer's sober assessment, those among German Alexander historians who stayed closest to the source-critical approach, largely free of ideology, were emigre scholars V. Ehrenberg and E. Badian.