

BOOK REVIEW

Alexander the Great and Egypt: History, Art, Tradition. Edited by VOLKER GRIEB, KRZYSZTOF NAWOTKA, AND AGNIESZA WOJCIECHOWSKA. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014. Pp. 460. Hardcover, €83.00. ISBN 978-3-447-10270-4.

East and West in the World Empire of Alexander: Essays in Honor of Brian Bosworth. Edited by PAT WHEATLEY AND ELIZABETH BAYNHAM. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxviii + 372. Hardcover, \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-19-969342-9.

Two books in which Alexander III the Great features dominantly. At first sight, both books have a different origin and emphasis (one book the reflection of a conference (Wrocław/Breslau, November 18-9, 2011) in 22 papers plus introduction and in its entirety dedicated to various aspects of Alexander's stay in Egypt (ToC: http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/dzo/artikel/201/185_201.pdf?t=1409221543)), the other also the reflection (in 19 papers) of a conference (18-20 July 2007, Perth/Crawley (WA), specifically convened to honour Brian Bosworth. Obviously, Egypt plays a much less prominent part in this book (ToC: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/east-and-west-in-the-world-empire-of-alexander-9780199693429?q=Baynham&lang=en&cc=nl#>). All papers in the book honouring Bosworth are in English, four of the papers in the book dedicated to Alexander's impact on Egypt are in German, one in French, the remaining in English.

Together, however, the books provide a kaleidoscopic view on both Alexander and his legacy, adding to the flow of (quite) recent books on the subject, like, e.g., Burgersdijk, Diederik; Wouter Henkelman; and Willemijn Waal, (eds.) *Alexander en Darius. De Macedoniër in de Spiegel van het Nabije Oosten* (= *Alexander and Darius. The Macedonian in the Mirror of the Near East*). Hilversum: Verloren, 2013. Though the contributions in this book generally offer little news, it nevertheless is quite interesting in (and by) its cohesion and the 14 chapters of which it consists, written by acknowledged specialists, offer a

pleasant read for a wider audience at undergraduate level.¹ Regrettably, all chapters are written in—or are translated into—Dutch, denying access to it to as wide an audience as the book deserves. In this respect, the books under scrutiny might well be a better choice, though not for a more general audience: in fact both books require a quite specialised public.

The book edited by Grieb, Nawotka, and Wojciechowska offers, as the subtitle suggests, a wide variety of approaches to Alexander's involvement in various aspects of life and culture in Egypt. The publisher's blurb describes the book effectively: "Regarding military aspects, there are papers focusing on Egypt's strategic significance in 4th-century Greek sources as well as on Alexander's conquest in comparison to earlier conquests of the land of the Nile. Furthermore, they re-examine the chronology of Alexander's stay in Egypt and discuss the founding of Alexandria, e.g. by linking it with 4th-century urban developments in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since Alexander's policy in Egypt is in large part reflected by hieroglyphic inscriptions and papyri, other contributions focus on his legitimization as a pharaoh, his royal title as well as on Egyptian temples renovated on his order. Alexander's expedition to Egypt and the East was also a powerful stimulus for the development of science in antiquity, which is covered by papers on the mystery of the flooding of the Nile and the spread of astrology. His afterlife and legend is presented in this volume by a nuanced position of Alexander in Ptolemaic ideology and art, while further papers scrutinize and dismantle modern scholarly myths of Alexander's sarcophagus and his tomb in Alexandria."

Quite fundamental as regards the appreciation of Alexander (by his contemporaries and in later historiography) is the paper by Pfeiffer (89–106), "Alexander der Große in Ägypten: Überlegungen zur Frage seiner pharaonischen Legitimation". One of the most telling aspects, in my view, is the reference to the s^c-R^c-name (sa-Re = Son of Re, one of the five "great names" of any Egyptian 'king) of Alexander on the pedestal of a ceremonial barge at Bahariya and dedicated to the god Amun, which reads "Son of Amun, Alexander" (90). It underlines the (alleged) divine legitimization of Alexander's kingship, even though there is in the traditional Greek literature on Alexander no reference at all to a *coronation* (my emphasis) as ruler of Egypt of Alexander. Only the often

¹ For the ToC: <https://www.verloren.nl/boeken/2086/212/5325/oudheid/alexander-en-darius->inhoudsopgave>.

fantastical *Romance of Alexander* preserves such a tradition.² Having discussed the various opinions expressed in modern literature regarding this issue, Pfeiffer believes there is no evidence whatsoever that a coronation—in whatever form—ever occurred, but he states that a coronation was no necessary condition for the legitimacy of Alexander’s position. In Pfeiffer’s view it sufficed that Alexander could be welcomed as liberator after the Persian domination, which was presented extremely negatively—notably in Greek historiography, first of all by Herodotus, but (regrettably Pfeiffer omits to mention it) also in the Egyptian text “The appeal of Thoth to Re-Harakhte”.³ However, as Pfeiffer argues, Alexander was not merely welcomed by the Egyptians but had himself also a vested interest in his Egyptian adventure. Alexander saw himself as the son of Zeus and (urgently) needed corroboration for this view by Zeus-Ammon in Siwa, not to strengthen his position in Egypt but especially towards the Greeks (90 and notes 37–8, *inter alia* referring to the work of Bosworth; also see further below, the paper by O’Sullivan in Wheatley/Baynham).

I paid relatively much attention to this paper. I did so because it is not merely interesting, but also because this paper typifies the thoroughness of the contributions in this book, and lastly because it links both books through the work of Bosworth himself. Bosworth is intimately familiar with the world of Alexander, not merely as commenter on Arrian’s *Anabasis Alexandri* (2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980 and 1995; a third volume forthcoming), but also as an author of several books and papers on Alexander. Among the more recent books written by him *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1996) and *The Legacy of Alexander, Politics, Warfare, and Propaganda under the Successors* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2002) directly connect with the book edited by Wheatley and Baynham.⁴ The same applies to a book edited by Bosworth and Elizabeth Baynham, sc. *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*

² ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἰς τὴν Μέμφιν παρεγένετο, ἐνεθρόνιζον αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἥφαιστου ἱερὸν θρονιστήριον καὶ ἐστόλιζον ὡς Αἰγύπτιον βασιλέα (“And when he [sc. Alexander] arrived at Memphis, they [sc. the Egyptians] enthroned him in the holy throne-room of Hephaestus [sc. the Egyptian god Ptah] and robed him as an Egyptian king”: Ps. Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni*, 1.34.1).

³ See: Schwartz, J. (1949), ‘Les conquérants perses et la littérature égyptienne’, *BIFAO* 48, 65–80.

⁴ For a full review of papers and books written by Bosworth, see the book under scrutiny, xxi–xxvi.

(Oxford: O.U.P., 2000).

As regards the book edited by Wheatley and Baynham, here as well the publisher's blurb provides the best introduction to the book: "... The collection's coverage ranges from Egyptian and Homeric parallels, through Roman historiography, to Byzantine coinage. However, the life of Alexander provides the volume's central theme, and among the topics explored are the conqueror's resonance with mythological figures such as Achilles and Heracles, his divine pretensions and military display, and his motives for arresting his expedition at the River Hyphasis in India. Some of Alexander's political acts are also scrutinized, as are the identities of those supposedly present in the last symposium where, according to some sources, the fatal poison was administered to the king. Part of the collection focuses on Alexander's legacy, with seven essays examining the Successors, especially Craterus, and Ptolemy, and Alexander's ill-fated surviving dynasty, including Olympias, Eurydice, and Philip III Arrhidaeus."

In the book under scrutiny, one contribution almost directly links to the paper by Pfeiffer discussed in the book edited by Grieb, Nawotka, and Wojciechowska. It is the very worthwhile contribution by O'Sullivan "Callisthenes and Alexander the Invincible God" (35–52). As Plutarch informs us (Plu. *Alex.* 14.6–7), Alexander had visited Delphi to consult the god prior to his expedition. There, the Pythia (under duress) exclaimed that Alexander was invincible. Though Plutarch's story is hardly corroborated in ancient literature (the *Historia Alexandri Magni* does to a great extent, but also see D.S. 17.93.4), the so-called vulgate traditions largely transpose it to the Siwah-oasis in Egypt. There, the prophet announces that Alexander's invincibility will be proof of his divine descent (cf. e.g. D.S. 17.53.3). O'Sullivan describes how Callisthenes (*FGrH* 124) elaborates on the way(s) Alexander used the prophecy in the sequel of his expedition and the use made of Callisthenes' account in historiography.

Another useful contribution on a politically important (and hotly debated) issue is that by Worthington, "From East to West: Alexander and the Exiles Decree" (93–106), discussing Alexander's decree of 324, ordering the return of Greek exiles in Asia to their native cities (cf. D.S. 17.109.1, 18.8.4). Worthington supports the view that the 'Exiles decree' was issued following the so-called 'Dissolution decree' and intended to safeguard Alexander's position in Asia as well as Antipater's in Macedon. In his contribution, Worthington argues that both decrees did not sprout from fear but largely from pragmatism and with an eye to future campaigns. As it was, the reaction in Greece was not euphoric, as it was recovering from a famine: returning exiles only could provoke further

distress. Probably Alexander foresaw this problem, according to Worthington, but would have had to face more problems in Asia if he had not issued the decree. As Worthington describes the situation, I believe he is right in his assessment.

Though there are many more contributions in this collection as well that fully deserve to be discussed, I will leave it with these two examples. The contributions in both books under scrutiny are well written, both books are well-edited, well taken care of (as might be expected from such renowned publishers), and are –above all- a must-read for every dedicated student of the expedition of Alexander and the Early Hellenistic Period. Moreover, to my joy, the contributions in both books have been provided with footnotes and a general bibliography at the end. The general index in Wheatley/Baynham is without a doubt sufficient, as are the index of names and the index of places in Grieb/Nawotka/Wojciechowska. The latter collection has the added bonus of an index of sources, an index I certainly (and regrettably) missed in the former. It is the only negative point in a further excellent collection.

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