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BOOK REVIEW

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great. Edited by KENNETH ROYCE MOORE. Series: Brill's Companions to Classical Reception, volume 14. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2018. Pp. xxiii + 855. Hardback, $218.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-28507-1.

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Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great, is among the historical figures who has cast a long shadow for a very long time. As the recent conflict between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has shown, Alexander (even as a statue) still can provoke serious emotions. This makes it clear that almost every civilization (in its widest sense) touched by the Macedonian, along with many more that he never imagined, has scrambled to "own" some part of his legacy. In the view of the editor of the volume under scrutiny, all these attempts together constitute, it appears, at least part of the "reception" of Alexander, which -in its turn- may help to shape our image of the Macedonian.

Consequently, the volume sets out to canvas a comprehensive array of these (almost by necessity very varied) receptions, which are discussed by specialists in the respective fields. They start with views from Alexander's own era to the present age. In total, the volume consists of 33 contributions (excluding the Preface) by a total of 35 contributors (see the publisher's ToC under the "Biographical Note" for all names). The contributions have been divided in three parts, each dedicated to a more or less confined time-span. Obviously, it is impossible to discuss all contributions even in minimal depth in the confined space of a book review, which is why I opted to select a few to examine, more or less guided by personal interests. The volume is, basically, aimed at a wide audience, consisting of anyone who is interested in Alexander the Great and his later reception (spanning Ancient, Medieval, Early-Modern and (post)Modern History), including university students, academic scholars but perhaps also casual readers.

Part 1 (3-376) discusses "Ancient Greek, Roman and Persian Receptions" in fourteen contributions. Moore's contribution, 'Framing the Debate' (Chapter 1, 3-40) explains the volume's purpose. Moore starts with the observation that "it is obligatory to concede that we may never know the 'real' Alexander, if he may be said to exist anywhere at all", even though Moore claims that the combined "receptions" might provide a clue "to attain the 'truth'" (3). The various chapters in this volume "have been chosen to reflect the range and the scale of impact that scarcely a century of prodigiously historical activity has inflicted … " (4).

In Chapter 2, Koulakiotis discusses "Attic Orators on Alexander the Great" (41-71). From the mid-4th century BC onwards, orators in Athens tried to convince their audiences to opt either for or against the kings of Macedon. Only after the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC did the Athenians honor the Macedonian king, Philip, and his son, Alexander, with a decree (and Athenian citizenship), if only to appease them. The relevance of these orators for us is that "the evidence by the Attic orators is an almost contemporary historical source, and very often a direct one … " (42), making them an essential basis for further research. An interesting issue is treated by Mullen in his contribution "Beyond Persianization: The Adoption of Near Eastern Traditions by Alexander the Great" (Chapter 9, 233-253). Mullen sets out to "challenge the constraints imposed on our perception of Alexander's engagement with his new subjects, and how that was received by them, by the tendency in modern scholarship to reduce these activities to consideration of the Persian nobility under the heading 'Persianization'" (233).[1] Though Mullen concedes that some Persianization was visible in Alexander's behavior and practices, he stresses that the term "needs to be treated with caution" (247). In this respect, Mullen's appendix of Persianizing elements (253) is helpful for our understanding his view. Asirvatham (in Chapter 14) pays attention to Plutarch, one of the classical authors who "generally present Alexander as a hero, or at least someone capable of heroic behavior" (355). As such, Plutarch's work deviates from more critical approaches (already) encountered in the Hellenistic period. "Plutarch's Alexander" (355-376) therewith focuses on Alexander-works that might be ranked among the most colorful and are "today, the most popularly influential writings on Alexander" (355), not necessarily being equal to the most trustworthy ones. In his analysis, Asirvatham stresses that Plutarch's "Greekness" leads

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[1] For various approaches to the concepts of Persianism respectively Persianization see notably: Strootman, Rolf and Miguel John Versluys (edd.), *Persianism in Antiquity*. Oriens et Occidens, 25. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017.

Plutarch to finally conclude "that the Romans cannot live up to him [sc. Alexander] any better than the Hellenistic kings" (373).

Part 2 (377-542), counting seven contributions, is devoted to "Later Receptions in the Near- and Far-East and the *Romance* Tradition." In this respect, the Far-East connection seems largely inspired by Alexander's fictional journey to China, even though there is no reflection at all of "Alexander's exploits in contemporary Chinese sources" (535). In my view, the Far-East Tradition of this part's title is, therefore, actually equally fictional (or at least badly defined). Chapter 18, by Jouanno (449-476), is much less fictional, discussing "Byzantine Views on Alexander the Great." She notes the special position in Byzantine political imagery taken by the Macedonian king from the start, the result "of the omnipresence of Alexander in Graeco-Roman *paideia*" (449), largely thanks to Plutarch's works. Consequently, Alexander features prominently in Byzantine letters and orations, two prominent literary genres but -e.g.- also in military treatises. However, no new material was created by the Byzantines and the "predominantly positive character of the [Plutarchian, JPS] image of the Macedonian king in Byzantium" (471) was maintained.

Part 3, "Modern and Postmodern Receptions' (twelve contributions, 543-843), takes off with Chapter 22, Fulińska's contribution "Alexander and Napoleon" (545-575). She believes that -though it was (Napoleon's) official policy to reject any comparison with ancient models- he "never escaped the employment of ancient comparisons and associations" (545). The first to employ such comparisons was the French orientalist De Volney, but others followed suit, certainly during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Such, very diverging, models of reception of Alexander have been previously discussed by Briant.[2] Regrettably, Fulińska's investigation largely ends at the time of the Viennese Congress and adds too little to the picture already created by Briant. She believes that the era of Romanticism "to a lesser extent needed ancient heroes" (573). Consequently, we are -I think- left with an incomplete picture regarding Napoleon's "relation" with Alexander, also in view of the "Napoleonic revival" from the mid-19th century onwards.

McAuley pays attention, in Chapter 29 (717-728), to "The Great Misstep: Alexander the Great, Thais, and the Destruction of Persepolis." Our ancient sources quite unanimously condemn the burning of the Persepolis palace as an act of wanton violence, unworthy of Alexander. Simultaneously, this act fanned speculation over "why Alexander would have done such a thing" (717), speculation that continues till today. Three potential causes prevail in the discussions: perversity and revenge; drunken indiscretion; and calculated policy. Neither of these causes, however, did/does anything "to illuminate the historical reality of the situation" (718). Therefore, McAuley opts to focus instead on the act's evolving "cultural significance." Central in this approach stands Thais of Athens, who, together with Alexander and Persepolis, forms (in McAuley's view) a "cultural trio" (719). The discussions (notably in "popular" literature) increasingly tend to iconize Thais, distinctly differing from the view expressed in our ancient sources. Moreover, these discussions too often tend to stress the (obviously disputable) "virtues" of the "West" against the (equally elusive) "evils" of the "East."' Though the fact has remained the same, the interpretation has dramatically changed.

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[2] Briant, P., *The First European. A History of Alexander in the Age of Empire*, Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard UP, 2017 [translated from the French by N. Elliott].

It may have become clear that the current volume is wide-ranging, indeed. The chapters are mostly inviting, well documented (good bibliographies concluding all chapters), and often challenge our own views. Moreover, the volume is -as may be expected- well executed and counts very few typos. It may have become clear as well that the contributions essentially do not discuss Alexander himself but rather the views on him and, inherently, the changing sentiments in the times such views took shape. As such, this volume constitutes a worthwhile addition to the still expanding Alexander-bibliography. The index concluding the volume, moreover, adds to its practicality.

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