

BOOK REVIEW

Alexander the Great in the Early Christian Tradition: Classical Reception and Patristic Literature. By CHRISTIAN THRU DJURSEV. Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception. New York, NY and London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. x + 232. Hardback, \$115.00. ISBN: 978-1-78831-164-9.

Christian Thru Djurslev surveys Christian receptions of Alexander the Great, focusing on the period from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine, with occasional forays into later literature. Coverage of this topic has been sporadic, so Djurslev is filling a real gap in scholarship.

Djurslev's approach to the material is thematic. After a general introduction, Chapter 1 provides background information on most of the Christian authors discussed. Chapter 2 addresses the themes of education and deification, exploring how Christians incorporated Alexander into their critiques of pagan philosophy and the gods. Chapter 3 covers Christian engagement with Jewish traditions about Alexander, with detailed treatment of Josephus and the prophecies in the Book of Daniel. Chapter 4 offers a series of case studies about Alexander's appearances in Christian historiography and rhetoric. The conclusion provides by far the clearest statement of the book's arguments and functions almost as an extended abstract of the four chapters. Readers may want to consult the conclusion first alongside the full *Index Locorum*, then consider which sections of the book may be relevant for them.

Throughout, Djurslev points to the need for a more inclusive approach to the reception of Alexander. The inclusion of Christian authors helps Djurslev to show that receptions of Alexander were less dictated by language and geography than earlier studies have suggested. As Djurslev argues, Christian receptions of Alexander were not uniformly negative and often drew from standard *exempla/paradeigmata* about him. Djurslev demonstrates that Christian authors adapted common stories about Alexander for their own purposes, often incorporating Jewish traditions in the process. Djurslev's thorough coverage of Christian references to Alexander represents the book's most significant achievement. I found especially helpful the moments when Djurslev offered parallels between Christian and non-Christian authors who are rarely read together. One rarely

sees the *Chronicon* of Pseudo-Hippolytus cited alongside Frontinus, Polyaeus and Aelian (151), or the Syriac exegete Pseudo-Ephrem compared with the Younger Seneca, Lucan and Plutarch (113). Clearly, the book is based on an expansive reading of sources extending beyond the authors most studied by scholars of Alexander.

A few features, however, make the book less helpful. First, the book is often sparing in its citations of scholarship, using parenthetical references rather than notes. This tendency is notable when Christian authors are introduced early in the book, a section where the main references are to the helpful – but aging – volumes of the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* and *Latinorum*. Readers seeking more information about Christian authors will often find little guidance from Djurslev. Second, the book quotes from ancient sources inconsistently. The first sustained quotation of one of the major Christian authors under examination comes on page 99. The quotations that do appear sometimes include only a translation, and sometimes only the Greek or Latin text accompanied with a close paraphrase in English. The inconsistency in quotations requires readers to seek out on their own the passages being discussed.

These features contribute to some unevenness in the book's treatment of Christian authors. This is generally accurate, and based on good scholarship, whenever it is explicitly identified. But there are missteps and places where readers could benefit from additional help, some of which I identify here. Justin Martyr is wrongly identified as a "clergy member" (4). The *Refutation of All Heresies* sometimes attributed to Hippolytus is cited from the problematic edition of Miroslav Marcovich (35), whose name is misspelled, rather than the more recent and accessible edition of M. David Litwa. And the discussion of the Pseudo-Clementine literature includes no information about these difficult works and their complicated transmission history, topics that are unfamiliar even to many specialists of early Christianity. The book discusses an impressive range of Christian authors, but it does not always display total command over them.

All of this contributes to the impression that the book is designed mostly for scholars interested in the reception of Alexander, rather than for scholars of early Christianity. Djurslev suggests early on that the book is meant to be "accessible to readers of all backgrounds" (ix). But a subsequent section refers to the Christian authors discussed in the book as "esoteric figures" (21) who will be unfamiliar to most readers, even though this group includes well-known figures such as Eusebius and Jerome. There is no comparable effort to introduce the authors of the

major works about Alexander, much less more obscure sources like the *Metz Epitome*.

The most significant result of the book's focus is limited engagement with scholarship in the field of early Christian studies. Works of scholarship on Christian authors serve mostly as background information to be referenced selectively, rather than as conversation partners. The major exception to this tendency comes in discussion of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, where Djurslev advances a novel argument about Alexander's significance for this work, and the possible familiarity of Eusebius with the *Alexander Romance* or a similar source. More such moments challenging and adding to previous interpretations of early Christian sources would have been welcome.

In sum, Djurslev's book is a useful contribution towards scholarship on the reception of Alexander. It should be a helpful reference and starting point for future work in this area. The occasional references to Coptic and Syriac works may even help inspire more research on Alexander's reception in these languages. Djurslev convincingly shows that there is much to be gained by casting a wider net in studies of the reception of Alexander.

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