

**John Boardman (2019) *Alexander the Great: From His Death to the Present Day*.** Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018, Pp. v-x + 160. ISBN-13: 978-0-691-18175-2.

In his new book, *Alexander the Great: From His Death to the Present Day*, John Boardman produces a highly enthusiastic and knowledgeable romp through the historical and fantastical stories surrounding Alexander the Great. This volume is not meant to be an academic study, although there is considerable analysis and reference to scholarship. It is rather a 'story' aimed at specialists and non-specialist alike documenting Alexander's legacy in the imagination of scholars, poets, artists, musicians and film directors from antiquity down to the present day. It is only marginally devoted to the 'real' Alexander, as openly acknowledged in the introduction, focusing on the more important and evocative tales and images that have become associated with the legendary Macedonian across the Mediterranean, northern Europe, the Near East, India and China. Colour and monochrome pictures of paintings, busts, mosaics, coins, figurines, and tapestries of these stories proliferate the work and reflect the vitality and richness of the imaginary Alexander.

The preface sets the tone of the work as a piece celebrating the memory and adoption of the legendary man with lines from the 18<sup>th</sup> century British Grenadier's marching song (vii–viii), which invokes Alexander alongside Hercules, Hector and Lysander, before heading off into a list of abbreviations of scholarship (ix–x) and the Introduction (1–12). It is openly acknowledged that the book's originality lies primarily in its assembly rather than content and that the selection of sources and legends is more a matter of personal choice than systematic investigation. This is an imminent scholar showing us the joy of his research. The direction of scholarship on Alexander is outlined (most is laudatory, but some sceptical; a recent shift more in favour of the Persians) and certain works recommended (notably Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander*). The first picture of the volume reminds us that this is also a work about images: P. Peyrolle's painting, "The Last Supper of Alexander", for King Paul I of Greece's obscure "Order of Alexander the Great", illustrates how the legendary Macedonian had come to represent a patron of the arts and sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The rest of the book follows in nine chapters, moving in chronological order and taking a special interest in his influence on the arts. Chapter 1 on His Biographers (pp. 13–22) provides a survey of the oldest Greek and Roman sources for the Macedonian but focuses on two, Plutarch (AD 46–120) and Arrian (AD 92–175), for the completeness and critical nature of their work, and the characteristics they emphasised which became key to Alexander's image down the ages: his warrior and intellectual status, passionate and wild behaviour, and endless ambition. Chapter 2 (pp. 23–37) dives into the stories and controversies surrounding his death and burial (e.g. did Alexander die from drinking too much wine, from poison, or from malaria or typhoid fever? Was he buried in Alexandria? At Vergina? Siwah? In a sarcophagus in the Attarine mosque once belonging to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Pharaoh Nectanebo?). Unravelling

these and offering a definitive answer is an impossible task and not Boardman's purpose here. The variety of tales and the long-lasting fascination with his death and burial is what drives the discussion. In Chapter 3 the portrait of Alexander in Antiquity is explored (pp. 38–52): his wild hair, jutting features, stocky build, lion skin/head cap, elephant's head, Macedonian *kausia* (flat cap), Macedonian armour, and diadem. Examples range from as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC head of Alexander from the Acropolis in Athens (Plate 2), to the famous 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC "Alexander Mosaic" from the House of the Faun in Pompeii (pp. 44–46; Plate 1) and a 4<sup>th</sup> century AD mosaic at the Villa of Souedia near Baalbek in Lebanon showing him as a baby attended by an nymph and seated in a shell, his mother above him with a snake around her arm (figure 12).

Chapter 4 moves into the realm of literature and The Alexander Romances in the Middle Ages (pp. 53–85), focusing on their occupation with his parentage (Philip, Zeus, Ammon, Nectanebo?), wives and lovers (Roxane, Barsine, Campaspe), steed Bucephalus, his meeting with the Amazonian Queen Thalestris and the Indian Brahmins, his defeat of the giants Gog and Magog, his journey to the bottom of the ocean in a bell jar and his ascension to the heavens in a chariot pulled by swans, and connection with the Egyptian king Nectanebo. Two short chapters then narrow in on the Persian (pp. 86–97) and Indian (pp. 98–103) Romances. In the Persian tales, Alexander becomes part Persian, converts the Indian king Kavd to Islam and visits Ceylon, the Tomb of Adam, the Garden of Eden, China, and England. He meets the fairy queen Araqit, and can confusedly be taken as the servant of Mohamed, the Jewish Jehovah or the Christian Messiah. The Indian stories and pictures of Alexander were much inspired by the Persian ones; alongside the historical influence of Graeco-Macedonian culture in the region (for instance, on coins, the *kharoshti* script in India, the introduction of wine), Alexander was also said to have built the site and statues of Elephanta, and the cave temples at Yogeswari, Mandapeswar and Kanheri near Bombay.

The next three chapters explore his influences, appearances and treatment in art, literature, music and film. Chapter 7 moves the Alexander story forward through the Renaissance to the present day (pp. 104–137) and is divided up into four parts: the Renaissance, Seventeenth-to Eighteenth-Century France and Britain, Eighteenth-to Nineteenth-Century European Arts and Literature, and Twentieth Century Britain. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Robert Steele, James Elroy Flecker, Mozart, Vivaldi and Wagner were all inspired by the great Macedonian. Louis XIV and John Churchill both commissioned Charles le Brun to produce giant tapestries of his exploits (the Blenheim Tapestries), and Sir Robert Steell made the bronze statue of Alexander taming Bucephalus now before Holyrood in Edinburgh in 1862 (figure 29). We are in the twentieth century in chapter 8 and see Alexander in new media – on the silver screen and as a protagonist in novels (pp. 138–46). Alexander appears first in Terence Rattigan's *Adventure Story* (1949), then portrayed by Richard Burton in the 1955 *Alexander the Great*, and Colin Farrell in 2004. He features in Alexander Nevsky's

Russian film, *Alexander the Warrior Saint*, in children's films, Japanese cartoons, and the *Horrible Histories*. In the modern novel, his story is retold by Louis Couperus, Mary Renault, N. Nicastro, Christian Cameron, Will Adams, Baha Taher, V. Massimo Manfredi, and Klaus Mann. He suddenly becomes prominent in modern day Greece, Macedonia and the Balkans: he is on the Greek stage, notably in the *Karagiozis* shadow/puppet plays, and used symbolically at the beginning of the Greek War of Independence; he appears on an Albanian one *lek* coin in 1926–31 and a Greek 100-drachma coin in 1992. The final chapter (pp. 147–153) turns to how Alexander's campaigns have been an inspiration to travellers from Marco Polo to the British and Russians in the Great Game for India via Afghanistan, Napoleon, Wellington, Arnold Toynbee and modern day films/TV series. An Envoi (p. 154) then bids farewell and leaves further exploration to the reader and scholar, before an Index (pp. 155–160).

Boardman's *Alexander the Great: From His Death to the Present Day* is a wonderfully playful and informed work. More perhaps could have been made of the ways and whys we have held on to, used and adapted Alexander over the centuries, particularly in the later chapters and the ending which stops rather abruptly. However, the reader will undoubtedly share the same delight in reading the volume as the author did in writing it.

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