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Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

Alexander and Rome

- Traditions about Alexander well-known: “The more casual allusions in Cicero – to Alexander’s birth and education, his relations with Callisthenes or Black Cleitus, his destruction of Thebes, his portraits by Apelles and Lysippus, his supposed encounter with Diogenes -make it quite clear that **by the mid-first century BC all levels of the historiographic tradition were familiar to educated Romans**” (Green, P. ‘Caesar and Alexander: Aemulatio, Imitatio, Comparatio’ in Green 1989 Classical Bearings, p199) Alexander useful for when Romans thought about the East (Alexander territory)

Counterfactual history

- One strand thought about what would have happened had Alexander turned West after and went to Mediterranean/Italy (rather than turned round; also didn't secure conquests): e.g. Livy 9.18.1-7: 1ff "And we are speaking of an Alexander not yet overwhelmed with prosperity, which none has ever been less able to bear. For viewing him in the light of his new fortune and of the new character—if I may use the expression—which he had assumed as conqueror, he would evidently have come to Italy more like Darius than like Alexander, at the head of an army that had forgotten Macedonia and was already adopting the degenerate customs of the Persians. I am loath, in writing of so great a prince, to remind the reader of the ostentatious alteration in his dress, and of his desire that men should prostrate themselves in adulation, a thing which even conquered Macedonians would have found oppressive, much more than those who had been victorious; of his cruel punishments and the murder of his friends as they drank and feasted; of the boastful lie about his origin. What if his love of wine had every day grown stronger? and his truculent and fiery anger? I mention only things which historians regard as certain.."

Livy

- 6 “But there was forsooth the danger—as the silliest of the Greeks who exalt the reputation even of the Parthians against the Romans, are fond of alleging—that the Roman People would have been unable to withstand the majesty of Alexander’s name, though I think that they had not so much as heard of him; and that out of all the Roman nobles not one would have dared to lift up his voice against him, although in Athens, a city crushed by the arms of Macedonia, at the very moment when men had before their eyes the reeking ruins of the neighbouring Thebes, they dared inveigh against him freely, as witness the records of their speeches.”

Livy

- 8ff “However imposing the greatness of the man may appear to us, **still this greatness will be that of one man only, and the fruits of little more than ten years of success.** Those who magnify it for this reason, that the Roman People, albeit never in any war, have yet suffered defeat in a number of battles, whereas Alexander’s fortune was never aught but prosperous in any battle, fail to perceive that they are comparing the achievements of a man—and a young man too—with those of a people that was now in its four hundredth year of warfare. How many Roman generals could I name who never suffered a reverse in battle! In our annals and lists of magistrates you may run through pages of consuls and dictators of whom it never on any day repented the Roman People, whether of their generalship or fortune.”

Livy

- “And what makes them more wonderful than Alexander or any king is this: some were dictators of ten or twenty days, and none held the consulship above a year; their levies were obstructed by the tribunes of the plebs; they were late in going to war, and were called back early to conduct elections; in the midst of their undertakings the year rolled round; now the rashness, now the frowardness of a colleague occasioned them losses or difficulties; they succeeded to affairs which others had mismanaged, they received an army of raw recruits, or one badly disciplined. Now consider kings: not only are they free from all impediments, but they are lords of time and circumstance, and in their counsels carry all things with them, instead of following in their train. So then, an undefeated Alexander would have warred against undefeated generals, and would have brought the same pledges of Fortune to the crisis.”

Alexander and Rome

- See Peltonen ch 2 p32 „The Macedonians had only one Alexander, while the Romans had produced several Alexanders who were capable of the same magnificent achievements as the Macedonian conqueror and proved it by their successes. If the Macedonians had lost their king – which was a possibility since the king deliberately exposed himself to all sorts of dangers – the state’s existence would have been at risk. In contrast, the ‘Roman Alexanders’ fulfilled their destiny without endangering the state [Liv. 9.18.18–19]. Rome’s governmental system is superior to the Macedonians’, as shown by its continuity: in other words, the Roman political order is constitutionally superior to the traditional monarchies of the surrounding peoples.,, Nb Alexander as Hannibal



Alexander at Rome: associations with politicians

- Good to think with when thinking about power relationships in Rome (nb rise of one man rule): esp when Romans had associated themselves with Alexander
- Pompey the Great: took the cognomen *Magnus* in imitation
- (nb *Megas* title for Alexander probably a result of Antiochus III's propaganda when he first begins to use this title after his own campaigns in the eastern half of his ancestral empire. See Rubincam 2005.)



Alexander at Rome: associations with politicians

- “It appears that Pompey’s youthful imitatio Alexandri (Sall. Hist. 3.88 M) triggered the adsentatio of his friends (Livy 30.45.6), which led Sulla to hail him as “Magnus” following his African campaign (Plut. Pomp. 13.1 and Sulla 40.7). He subsequently adopted “Magnus” as his cognomen” (Rubincam 2005)
- Some apparently compared Pompey at his third triumph (61 BC) to Alexander, though age 46 “His age at this time, **as those insist who compare him in all points to Alexander** and force the parallel, was less than thirty-four years, though in fact he was nearly forty. How happy would it have been for him if he had ended his life at this point, up to which he enjoyed the good fortune of Alexander! For succeeding time brought him only success that made him odious, and failure that was irreparable.” (Plut. Pomp. 46.1: Plutarch compares Pompey with Alexander (to Pompey’s detriment): see Peltonen p48)

Alexander at Rome: politics

- See Erskine 2002; Erickson 2018.
- NB earlier **Scipio Africanus** (e.g. tradition about mother being visited by divine snake; retroactive)?
- (So Spencer 2002 *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth*; Spencer 2009 'Roman Alexanders: Epistemology and Identity' in *Alexander the Great: A New History* edited by Waldemar Heckel, Lawrence A. Tritle)
- Julius Caesar? Not much evidence of Julius Caesar making association (esp. given his writings: 1 anecdote about how youthful Caesar making comparison with how Alexander had conquered the world; “a dangerous, possibly embarrassing model for Caesar to emulate”, Green 1989 p196: later on, **Pompey** had associations); **Augustus** visited Alexander’s tomb; **Caligula**; later emperors, including in late Antiquity (e.g. **Caracalla**)

Caligula (reigned 37-41 CE)

- Peltonen argues Curtius was contemporary of Caligula and discusses Caligula's ruler cult: "As with Curtius' Alexander, who alienated himself from his own Macedonian people, Caligula's divine aspirations and provocative policy seemed very distant, condemnable, and regrettable in the eyes of the Roman upper classes. **The Romanized story of Alexander and his radically changing relationship with his Macedonian countrymen served as a warning about the terrible reign of Gaius Caligula.** In Curtius' rhetoric, Alexander did not respect the natural expectations the Macedonians had of their king. The king was not satisfied with his role as the king of Macedon, whose monarchic power was based on the Macedonian *mos maiorum* [i.e. way of doing things], but yearned for more power that in fact did not belong to him. Similarly, Caligula, in the Classical tradition, was not content with his duties as *princeps* but broke his relationship with the senatorial upper class" (p45); "Since foreign practices and despotic one-man rule are interpreted as objectionable, dishonorable, and shameful, imitating these practices and their conduct can only lead to disaster. A corollary of the above message was that when a ruler starts to imitate the foreign practices, he is replacing superior Roman ways with inferior practices."

Alexander as negative example for Latin authors?

- This potentially frightening picture was a severe threat to traditional Roman identity. Even though Rome had conquered the inhabited world, it had to be careful not to adopt the ways of the conquered nations. Although geographically expanded, the Empire should still be Roman. The Latin writers of the Early Empire saw Alexander as a means to discuss the problems that autocracy would bring the empire. **These Roman writers were not setting out to assess the historical Alexander but to comment on and evaluate how and why the princeps should exercise his power for the benefit of his fellow countrymen.** Roman intellectuals repeated the demand that Rome should remain faithful to her institutions and the customs that had made her great. According to this way of thinking, Rome's success lay in her fidelity to her virtues and lifestyle. The message transmitted in their presentations of Alexander denying his *patria* [fatherland] and *mos maiorum* was that it was important to remain faithful to the Roman ruling system and its sociopolitical customs. The princeps should always use his power in a way respectful of the demands of the Roman senatorial class." (Peltonen p46)

Greek authors

- “In the Hellenistic East, the memory of Alexander had lived on during the centuries since his death. When Rome conquered the Greek East, it encountered absolute monarchies ruled by Hellenistic kings or successors in Asia Minor who imitated them. Even though it might be an exaggeration to consider Alexander the inaugurator of a new age who created a new world of kingdoms informed by Greek culture, his legacy in the Hellenistic East was indisputable. 109 In the Hellenistic East, Alexander was treated as ‘the first king’ and as a national hero, a god, or in some cases as the founder of Alexandria. **It can be argued that for Greek Roman writers, Alexander did not belong to the ‘other’ but to the ‘us’.**” (Peltonen p47)
- NB Diodorus (writing during Augustus’ reign) and Appian (2nd C) from Alexandria
- See Peltonen for their positive appraisals of Alexander

Greek authors

- “The idealized Greek Alexander of the Early Empire has been recognized in earlier research. However, scholarly interest has often been directed towards particular writers and particular works such as Plutarch’s Alexander biography and his essay *On the fortune or the virtue of Alexander the Great*. Many other Greek passages dealing with Alexander have received very little attention. Accordingly, passages concerning Alexander have been examined as literary themes appearing in works written by the representatives of the Second Sophistic movement. Questions of language and genre have received scholarly interest, while the idealized image of Alexander has not been considered in its own right as a use of history for specific purposes. I suggest that the portrait of Alexander in the Greek Roman texts should not be considered mainly the writer’s personal opinion about the king, or as a reflection of the Second Sophistic movement, but rather as a conscious attempt to convey a sociopolitical message and promote specific values. Correspondingly, these writers’ presentations of Alexander were closely related to contemporary cultural and political concerns.” (Peltonen)