

The differing modern representations of Alexander the Great's military conquests.

The aim of this piece is to look at a multitude of different scholarships that have been published within the timespan of 2000 to 2020 and to analysis how each scholar has represented Alexander the Great's military conquests and what the scholars believe to be the reason why Alexander was so successful during his campaigns against the various groups that he encountered during his travels.

Looking deeper into Alexander's military career, you can see that he adapted the Macedonian cavalry into a force to be feared and reckoned with nearly across the entirety of the Mediterranean and some parts of Asia. This started with him abandoning traditional Greek heavy infantry armaments and rearming them into an anti-cavalry force that would be able to support his own cavalry to concentrate on decimating his enemy's infantry, this revolution in military tactics could have easily allowed him to conquer the rest of the Mediterranean and the middle East as it allowed for unprecedented speed on the battlefield¹.

One scholarship that follows this statement of facts would be *Alexander the Great and The "Clash" Of Ancient Civilizations*, written by Mădălina Strehie who shall be referred to as M throughout the rest of this written piece. M's articles, mostly follows the theme at looking at Alexander, though the 19th-century historiography, great man theory, as M refers to Alexander being the major source of change for the for the period, M also makes remarks on Alexander's self-proclaimed titles of half-god and multitude of times throughout her articles and follows though by giving evidence of Alexanders' utter confidence and belief in his own words.

Although the more interesting part of M's article would be the on page 423, chapter 3 where M looks deeper into Alexander military history, and one phase that M uses repeatedly throughout this section would be lightning war which is more commonly known in the modern day as the Blitzkrieg. "To all this, Alexander the Great added speed, imposing an infernal rhythm on his armies, even forced marches. He was the creator of the lightning war,"² this isn't the only time that M represents Alexander as an ingeniousness thinker and shaker of ancient warfare as not long after M also states "All his Granicus, Issus and Gaugamela victories against the Persians were masterpieces of attack strategy, but Tyre's siege for seven months, which ended with his victory, is the fourth masterpiece of his military genius."³ With all of this evidence it is quite clear to see how M have presented Alexander, this is as an revolutionary in military tactics and strategic thinking, with M laying out evidence for such statements as seen in the quoted text, also M's conclusion on this subject

¹ (Strehie, p 423, 2018)

² (Strehie, p 423, 2018)

³ (Strehie, p 423, 2018)

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continues to present Alexander in this light as M states "Alexander of Macedon was more than Great, a true titan of military art."⁴

The next piece of scholarship that I wish to review in this text would be, *In the Path of Conquest: Resistance to Alexander the Great*, written by the scholar Waldemar Heckel who shall now be referred to W throughout the rest of this text, W's book provides an unique insight into looking at the conquered territory's by Alexander the Great, as the main theme of the scholarly writing focuses on the defeated point of view and wishes to challenge various theories on the reasoning behind the start of Alexander's path of conquest throughout Persian Empire and Asia.

The chapter that caught my interest whilst reading *In the Path of Conquest: Resistance to Alexander the Great*, would be Persianizing and the Internal enemy which looks at opposition to Alexander from within his own army, the origin of the rebellion within Alexander's army started off with the ideal of Panhellenism and as W puts it, "The effective propaganda of Panhellenism and vengeance was a double-edged sword."⁵ W explains that his belief of the betrayal of Hermolaus, an *Paides basilikoi* (royal Pages) of Alexander, is linked to the persianization of the King and W provides substantial evidence to his claim by providing an quotation directly from Hermolaus just before his execution.

Although after these events Alexander had dismissed a large part of his army, and W continuing from the point of view from the soldier in Alexander's forces, provides evidence that this wasn't enough to stop degrading perception of Alexander from the Greek forces, as W states that "For them, all their previous victories were for naught, as the king's actions appeared to elevate the vanquished over the victors."⁶

W representation of Alexander throughout his scholarly work appears to oppose that of the previous scholar M where as M heaps praise upon the conqueror and even at points refers to his self-proclaimed divinity and states that his deeds are similar to that of Heracles, whilst W is critical of Alexander and some of the decisions that he made, one such event that W has appeared to represent Alexander in an negative light would be when is they are discussed the death of Cleitus and states "It was either in the very banquet hall that Alexander snatched a spear from one of his hypaspists and ran Cleitus through or, as the apologists depicted it, it was when Cleitus, who had been ushered out of the room, returned to continue the quarrel"⁷

⁴ (Strechie, p 424, 2018)

⁵ (Heckel, p 201, 2020)

⁶ (Heckel, p 203, 2020)

⁷ (Heckel, p 211, 2020)

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Although historically accurate this statement paints a picture for the modern audience of Alexander's darker tendencies when referring to his rage, as he murders an old companion of his father and ally during his conquests due to drunken rage but W does provide the alternative interpretation of this clash by providing the apologists' point of view of the events.

Another scholarship that I also wish to review in this text would be *The Treasures of Alexander the Great: How One Man's Wealth Shaped the World* by Frank L. Holt who shall now be referred to as F throughout the rest of this review, F's main theme throughout his book would looking at Alexander's Wealth that he accumulated during his wars against the multitude of civilisation that he conquered. F view on Alexander is seen as early in his scholarship, in the abstract, where in his scholarship he wishes to reevaluate the past conceptions of Alexander being financially savvy, although the main point of this review of F's book would be looking at how F represents Alexander's finances in the terms of his military.

One such event that is quite prominent would-be Alexander's use of mercenary's and one example of Alexander's use of mercenary and trust in his childhood friend Harpalus, lead to the events where he had a dramatic loss of money (30,000,000 Drachma) and armed forces, this is mentioned by Diodorus in his Library of Histories and is quoted by F, where Diodorus states "Harpalus became alarmed at the punishment which might befall him. He packed up five thousand talents of silver, enrolled six thousand mercenaries, departing from Asia, and sailed across to Attica."⁸

It here that in response to the information luckily salvaged from Diodorus's Library of Histories that F gives his own point of view on the matter where F states that "The chaos wrought by Harpalus upon Alexander's empire and its finances must be blamed, in part, on the king himself."⁹

Here you can see that F's modern day representation of Alexander's financial woes following the previous scholar's theme of presenting Alexander in an negative light although agreeable when you look at the bigger picture, this dramatic loss of armed forces and the sheer amount of talents lost would have delivered an small dent in Alexander's wallet and forces but the main blow that was delivered would have been the destabilisation of Alexander's military forces in the Babylonian region, which was destabilised even further with the implementation of Antimenes whom little is known about other than his oppressive financial policies that he imposed upon the Babylonian region. Returning to the topic of Harpalus, F continues his point by stating that "Too late, Alexander

⁸ (Diodorus., p 437, 1952)

⁹ (Holt., p 133, 2016)

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responded to Harpalus's crimes, and even then the king's concerns were less about the money than the political meddling and the private mercenary army."¹⁰

Although F's main theme throughout his scholarship is the finances of Alexander and in the provided quote, seems to present Alexander as dismissive to the problem at hand, from the point of view of an military historiography Alexander's focus on the private mercenary army is an valid concern as even an small group of freelance soldiers could wreak havoc on supply lines and other strategic positions, thus the quote, without dismissing the monetary loss, could paint Alexander in a positive light to the modern audience as scholars looking at Alexander as an military general, as the point previously mentioned, the armed forced of six thousand mercenaries could have easily wreaked havoc to Alexander's significantly larger army though attacking strategic positions.

Lastly before moving onto a conclusion, we have to look at a great piece of scholarship published by Brill, and edited by Joseph Roisman, *Brill's Companions to Alexander the Great*, specifically chapter five of the book, which was written by Barry S. Strauss who shall now be referred to as S throughout the rest of this text, and is title Alexander: The Military Campaign.

Starting off S gives praise and a brief description of Alexander and his troops greater accomplishments, continuing with this theme S brings in quotation by famous general, Carl Von Clausewitz who gained his modern-day fame though the publication of his unfinished book, *On War*, it here that S states with his Clausewitz quotation afterwards "Clausewitz judged Alexander to be a supreme historical example of boldness, a quality which he considered to be the first requirement of a great military leader."¹¹

Firstly it clear to see that in this section S has represented Alexander to his modern audience as a brilliant general, which with the results of Alexander's various campaigns is hard to argue against and S continues to present Alexander as such throughout the rest of his work and another example would be when S discussed Alexander's tactics against the Persian Empire, "Alexander's intellect was biting and shrewd. As a strategist, he planned to conquer the Persian Empire by avoiding its main strength, its fleet."¹² In stark contrast to the previously two exceptional scholarships who delivered their work quite objectively, S manages to deliver concise and scholastic points about Alexander's military career whilst also praising the strategic aspects and bravery shown by Alexander as seen in the previously quoted text.

¹⁰ (Holt., p 133, 2016)

¹¹ (Roisman and Strauss, p 135, 2002)

¹² (Roisman and Strauss, p 136 2002)

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Another aspect of Alexander's military career that S manages to represent in his scholarly writing would be the allies that Alexander encountered, and S refers to this as luck due the competency shown by the allies that Alexander came upon. "Alexander was lucky both in his friends and in his enemies. Among his Macedonians he found brilliant commanders, both experienced veterans and ambitious young comers."¹³ This fortune is explained by S as he gives a multitude of examples of Alexander's commanders performing expertly in the battlefield.

Even with all the praise that S delivers to Alexander about his military genius, S isn't blind to the faults of Alexander and presents this in his scholarship, for instance would be the reasoning behind the Persian War, it here that S communicates that "He was not given to doubt nor to the contemplation of ethical niceties. Macedon's invasion and conquest of Persia was, after all a war of aggression. Alexander either did not mind aggression or he believed his own propaganda"¹⁴ At this stage, S manages to represent a more realistic presentations of Alexander in his scholarship, providing the modern audience with a detailed picture that they could visualise Alexander as a military leader.

In conclusion of this scholarly review, the four authors that have been mainly looked at throughout this text have provided an multitude of interesting representations of Alexander's military career for the modern reader, as the first scholar M provided an deeper look into Alexander's tactics and the brilliance behind them and how they have influence the modern world, this depth of insight is continued by the second scholar W who represented an differing point of view on Alexander which looked deeper into how the conquered territory's viewed Alexander and the struggles presented in Alexander's armed forces.

This theme of betray against Alexander is continued in the third author F's scholarship although this piece of scholarship focused more on the economical side of sustaining Alexander's conquests and how the mistakes made by Alexander could have led to the devastation of his empire whilst he was still alive. Finally, the fourth author, S manages to deliver an unique presentation of Alexander, looking at him from an lens of objectivity, praising him for his triumphs but disparaging him for his failures.

Bibliography

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