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Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

Myth making and India



Myth-making

- myth-making during Alexander's life-time (by himself and his circle)
- How was this possible?
- “very soon after his accession to the throne he was available to most of his subjects only as a legendsary figure. No one but those accompanying him got the chance to meet the full-fledged famous “Alexander” unmediated by texts of one kind or another, and no biological successor survived to perpetuate— and thereby dilute—the unique image conjured up by “Alexander the Great.”” (Spencer, D. 2010, in *Philip II and Alexander the Great: Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives* edd. E. Carney and D. Ogden, p175)

Myth-making immediately after: Myth-making friends/family/successors

- e.g. general Ptolemy I (who was appointed satrap of Egypt after Alexander's death and stole Alexander's body to help legitimize his rule. He was the founder of Ptolemaic dynasty which ensured until Cleopatra VII's death, 30 BC)
- cf. e.g. Erskine 2002 on body/ tomb (nb Alexander visiting Achilles' tomb at Troy)
- See coin of Ptolemy I: why elephant scalp and horn of Zeus-Ammon?



Myth-making immediately after: friends/family/successors

- e.g Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus I Nicator (founder of Seleucid empire)
- Rubincam (2005) has suggested the name Megas (Great) applied to Alexander was a creation of the propaganda of **Antiochus III** (ruler of Seleucid empire, 241-167 BCE) when he first begins to use this title after his own campaigns in the eastern half of his ancestral empire



Myth-making

- Even down to sex life...
- “the reluctance to identify potential liaisons for Alexander may be the result of the Diadochoi’s desire to monopolise links with their deceased king” (Erickson 2018, *Brill’s Companion*)
- “The relative inactivity of Ptolemy in expanding his empire beyond its base in Egypt has led some scholars to suggest that he had no desire to recreate Alexander’s empire and instead sought to consolidate his gains. Meeus and Strootman have both separately argued that the rhetoric employed at the Ptolemaic court gave no hint of abandoning the dream of re-uniting the empire even if it proved beyond the realm of practicality and thus never abandoned the Alexander prototype for a Hellenistic king, including the last of the Ptolemaic queens” (Erickson 2018: p256)



India

- Alexander campaigned in India (e.g. left Bactria in 327 BCE, returned over mountain range Hindu Kush to go into India, massacred the Assaceni in the Lower Swat Valley; sieges of Massaga and rock of Aornus. In 326 he crossed the Indus to Taxila. Fought battle of Hydaspes against Porus)
- ▪ India often used to represent East by the Greeks



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Alexander/his successors' myth-making

- Blanshard, A. 'Alexander's Mythic Journey into India' in *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia*, ed. by Himanshu Prabha Ray and D. Potts (2007) argues always potential for Greeks to call India home (as opposed to the place of "other")
- "A large number of the identifiable fragments of these traditions are attributed to writers who were either on campaign with Alexander or who were writing soon after. The conceptualisation of Alexander's campaign as a mythic journey seems to have been important in Alexander's circle and was actively perpetuated by his successors" (Blanshard p30)
- "One of the clear trends in our accounts of Alexander's journey is that the density of mythological allusions increases the closer one gets to India. It is a growth that can be observed both in density and variety. It is in India that we see Alexander's Trojan War intersect with the mythical narratives of two other deities Heracles and Dionysus" (Blanshard p33)

Myth-making

- Alexander surpassed Heracles (forefather) in taking the Aornus rock (e.g. Curtius 8.11.2); A. goes from Caucasus mountains down to India: cave in range (“Here the inhabitants pointed out the cave of Prometheus as well as the nest of the eagle and the signs of Prometheus’ chains” (Diod. 17.83.1) (unusual to be placed so far East)
- Dionysus: “As for Dionysus, the city of Nysa is a fine memorial of his expedition together with Mount Merus and the ivy growing on this mountain, and the habit of the Indians themselves in setting out to battle to the sound of drums and cymbals, and their dappled costume, like that worn by the Bacchanals of Dionysus.” (Arrian Indica 5.9-10)

Myth-making

- “[Megapenthes says the Indians] were originally nomads ... Just so the Indians had no cities and built no temples, but were clothed with the skins of wild animals they would kill, and ate the bark of trees; these trees were called in the Indian tongue Tala, and what look like clews of wool grew on them.. They also fed on what game they had captured, eating it raw, at least until Dionysus reached India. But when he arrived and became master of India, he founded cities, gave them laws, bestowed wine on the Indians as on the Greeks, and taught them to sow their land, giving them seed... Dionysus first yoked oxen to the plough and made most of the Indians agriculturalists instead of nomads, and equipped them also with the arms of warfare. He also taught them to reverence various gods, but especially of course himself, with clashing of cymbals and beating of drums..” (Arrian Indica 7.2-8)

Myth-making

- ““Sire, the people of Nysa beg you to leave them free and independent, out of reverence for Dionysus. For when Dionysus had subdued the nation of the Indians, and was returning towards the Greek Sea, he founded this city with the men unfit for service among his soldiers, who were also his Bacchi, to be a memorial to posterity of his wanderings and victory, just as you have yourself founded Alexandria by Mount Caucasus and another Alexandria in Egypt, and as there are many other cities you have founded already or will found in course of time and thus give proof of more achievements than those of Dionysus.” (Arrian Anabasis 5.1.5) “this latent power of myth was exploited by Alexander and his successors to effect a change in thinking about the past (and hence the present) of India. After Alexander, the story of Dionysus in India enters onto the intellectual landscape and becomes a permanent fixture” (Blanshard p38) NB on India in the Alexander tradition, impact of now-lost Indica of Ctesias (5th c. B.C.)