

John Walsh and Elizabeth Baynham (eds.), *Alexander the Great and Propaganda*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. 205 pages. \$128, hardcover. ISBN 9781138079106.

Alexander the Great is one of the most famous figures in all of history. Worldwide, most people know of his exploits and many could add a few key details about his life or campaigns. What is less understood, even by students of history, is the level to which what we know about Alexander is tainted by and almost completely dependent on the whims and biases of writers from the Roman Empire. Much like an earlier edited book, *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), by one of the same authors, Elizabeth Baynham, this new book, *Alexander the Great and Propaganda*, presents detailed analyses of many of the hidden aspects of Alexander's life and legacy. Boasting a great collection of current Alexander scholars, every chapter analyses a different topic, yet all (bar one) maintain enough connection within the propaganda theme despite quite large differences in length. Though a little hard to follow for those uninitiated in the primary accounts of Alexander the Great, and with a few sections of harder to read prose, this is a great resource as an introduction into the complicated historiography of the sources for Alexander.

Elizabeth Baynham begins the book not with a traditional Introduction but with a chapter titled "*Selling Alexander*": *the concept and use of "propaganda" in the age of Alexander*. Despite a somewhat misleading title, the latter half of this is a traditional introduction to the volume laying out brief summaries of all the papers and how they fit together in the volume. The first five and a half pages of the chapter provide a useful and relatively wide-ranging summary of propaganda in a general sense as well as the specific background of the Alexander sources. This latter section focuses on Alexander's personal control of art, sculpture and texts as propaganda within his own time, yet none of these themes actually appear in the subsequent chapters. It would work better if this introduction also laid out the principal Greco-Roman authors responsible for our knowledge of Alexander's life and exploits and when they were written, especially since a number of the chapters in the book go on to analyse specific authors in great detail. However, the rest of the chapter summarises very well and succinctly each of the papers in the book while simultaneously introducing the historiographical themes they each examine.

Edward Anson's second chapter partly bridges the gap left by the introduction by covering most of the sources for Alexander. While pursuing his examination of Alexander's own promotion and "interplay of self-image and propaganda" (12), Anson provides a useful introduction to the reader of the main highlights of Alexander's life as well as the sources which detail it. The events Anson covers are those of most import to the discussion of propaganda: Alexander's founding of cities named after him and his horse, his control of propaganda in launching his Asian invasion at Troy and using Callisthenes as his personal Homer, his connection to Achilles, his wanting to surpass Dionysus' and Hercules' exploits in India, his

relationship with Hephaestion, his crossing of the Gedrosian desert, oracular prophecies at Delphi, in his trip to the oracle at Siwah, in the loosing of the Gordian knot, and in the eagle flying at Gaugamela, and finally *proskynesis* and Alexander's desire to be treated as a god. This chapter is an enlightening and rapid-fire survey of Alexander's image making and perhaps explains why Baynham does not mention these topics in her introduction. Anson covers so much so fast it is hard to keep up, but he justifies his argument that Alexander created his own image of godlike hero, which "was an evolving and complex image he wished to project in life to demonstrate that he was not an ordinary man." This is a very fitting chapter laying the groundwork of Alexander himself before the later chapters examine how the sources represented him.

The third chapter, by Frances Pownall, examines in detail the historiographic details behind the accounts of Alexander's trip to the oracle at Siwah. Long known as an account tinged by the personal Egyptian propaganda of Ptolemy I Soter, one of the Alexander historians, Arrian, provides two specific instances where Ptolemy's version differs from Arrian's other source, Aristobulus. The first, much discussed, is where Aristobulus says that two crows guided Alexander to the oracle and back and Ptolemy has snakes guide him instead. The second differs as to the route Alexander took to return from the Oracle. Pownall examines the second and argues convincingly that Ptolemy created the story of Alexander returning via Memphis in order to justify his own rule there through a propagandistic connection to the illustrious Alexander. This works well as a third chapter in order to emphasize the importance of Ptolemy's biased and propagandistic account in shaping our understanding of Alexander. Indeed, Baynham (6) rightly lists as the first theme of the whole volume "the dominance of Alexander's general, Ptolemy Soter, the later Pharaoh of Egypt, and one of the most important historians of the eyewitness tradition, in both the historiographical...and iconographical media...."

Following the Ptolemy theme, Timothy Howe in Chapter 4 examines in great depth the level to which Ptolemy exaggerated his involvement in the pursuit of Bessus in order to create an *imitatio Alexandri*. Howe argues, probably rightly, that Ptolemy's narrative (54) "deploys an intratextual literary emulation of Alexander (*imitatio Alexandri*) to comment on the nature of monarchy and legitimate succession, specifically the comparison of Bessos and Ptolemy to their respective kings Darius and Alexander." Howe begins with a useful opening summary of "narrative mechanics" (54–58) and follows with a close reading of Arrian's accounts of the two pursuits in question, Bessus and Darius. The long quotations given are very helpful in allowing the reader to follow the subsequent arguments evincing how and why Ptolemy's lost history drew parallels between the two pursuits. A very scholarly article, it is perhaps a little too hard to follow for those not already aware of the intricacies of historiography, Ptolemy and Alexander. Nonetheless it is a very enlightening, and as usual with Howe a very erudite paper.

Perhaps the easiest chapter for readers new to the concepts of historiography is John Walsh's Chapter 5. In it he dives deep into an analysis of the main sources of one of the main five historians of Alexander, Diodorus Siculus. Walsh provides an excellent background summary of the controversies in the sources of Diodorus' account, while also examining Hieronymus in particular in detail. In his close analysis of Diodorus 18.8–18, where we hear details about Antipater and the Lamian War, Walsh is able to present an alternative reading of the history while also laying clear for general readers how scholars go about historiographical analyses and why it is so important to do so. Walsh goes section by section through Diodorus providing a commentary on how the text is infused with the bias of Hieronymus and thus where exactly Diodorus' account is less reliable. His analysis is even more invaluable since Diodorus' account is the only narrative of this episode of the Lamian War that has survived. Thus, it is even more important to deal with historiography as the only source. Walsh also provides a useful short appendix in which he lists the known historical accounts of the Lamian War that are lost. This chapter in particular would be a most useful case study for students of ancient history to learn the tools and importance of historiography, especially in studies of Alexander, and likewise of the early Successors where the sources are so limited.

Chapter 6, by Franca Landucci, is a short but most insightful analysis of the court of Antigonos Gonatus emphasizing that he finally unified the two Macedonian rivalries of the family of Antipater (the Antipatrids led by Cassander) and the Antigonids (most famously begun by Antigonos the One-Eyed and Demetrius the Besieger). Following Walsh's analysis of Hieronymus, Landucci also begins with a useful summary of both the historiography of the accounts of Gonatus, focusing also on Hieronymus alongside Plutarch, as well as an introduction to Gonatus' court as a famed location of philosophers and writers. Though the English in the chapter is occasionally flawed (something we can forgive Landucci but less so the editors), Landucci adds a useful layer of depth to the traditional view of Gonatus as a 'philosopher-king'. Landucci's closing remarks are apt to remember, specifically that Athens remembered Gonatus as a soldier and conqueror of Athens in the Chremonidean War, not as a philosophical patron of learning. However, the paper lacks a definitive conclusion, and the discussion of the Athenian viewpoint seems a little out of place following the rest of the paper.

Sabine Mueller's seventh chapter raises the intriguing possibility that Onesicritus' reference to the epitaph from the tomb of Darius I preserves lost information that Alexander may have visited this tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam while staying at nearby Persepolis, even though all the sources are silent about it. However, rather than focusing on this small nugget of information, Mueller instead presents the analysis through a successful attempt at undermining the prominent notion of the Greeks and Macedonians being separated distinctly from Persian culture. As she says, "the idea of two worlds apart, completely strange to each other, is a misleading literary device shaped in accordance with well-known stereotypes concerning Persians, non-

Persians, and their relations that are coloured by panhellenic ideals.” Mueller outlines the large number of connections between Persia and Macedon and usefully emphasizes Alexander’s own panhellenic propaganda concerning Persian culture, in particular painting Xerxes and Darius I as villains to his Hellenic audience. “Visiting the tomb of Darius (and Xerxes) might have been an interesting part of a sightseeing tour in Fars. However, Alexander will have taken care that it was not integrated into the official report and not become widely known.” Overall, this chapter provides a very useful window into the level of propaganda that Alexander employed himself within historical accounts.

In Chapter 8, Hugh Bowden expands on Mueller’s focus on Alexander’s association with Persia. He argues convincingly that the two famous episodes of Alexander’s ‘orientalising,’ assuming Persian dress and bowing or *proskynesis*, were not as problematic as our extant sources imply and may be a result of Roman negative associations with wearing Eastern dress. Bowden begins in reverse chronological order, examining Roman attitudes to dressing in Persian clothes, most notably Mark Antony clothing his son as a Mede. Octavian’s anti-Antony rhetoric is well known and Bowden argues (130) that “we cannot ignore the Roman attitudes to oriental dress when we examine the question of Alexander’s adoption of Persian practices.” Bowden goes on to address each of the primary source accounts of Alexander’s wardrobe changes to demonstrate that Alexander’s actions were not unusual, nor seen as problematic by his Macedonian subjects. As a lesson to any student of historiography, Bowden demonstrates the importance of placing a text within its own time and cultural influences: “The Alexander historians are likely to be presenting contemporary concerns in their accounts, assuming that the attitudes of their own day could be read back onto Alexander’s time.” In explaining Alexander’s adoption of the Persian ritual of *proskynesis*, an event that has caused much controversy in Alexander studies, Bowden rightly argues that Alexander was utilizing Persian customs in order to publicly show he was assuming the role of Persian king. Overall, this article is another excellent case study of historiography in action.

The short Chapter 9, by Joseph Roisman, is the one chapter that does not entirely fit with the rest in terms of analyses of Alexander’s propaganda. Rather, it deals with the idea propounded by M.M. Austin in “Hellenistic Kings, War, and the Economy” that (150) “Hellenistic monarchy originated in, and survived by, the king’s military prowess and his ability to reward his subjects (including troops) materially.” Roisman provides numerous examples of desertion in the campaigns of Alexander’s immediate Successors through to Demetrius as illustrations of his disapproval of Austin’s contention. Roisman makes a convincing argument, but his paper has little to do with propaganda. Even when he deals with the messages the kings in his examples provided to their army or subjects, Roisman does not really address such events as propaganda. To more closely adhere to the title of the volume, the author would have been better to focus on the extent to which Hellenistic kings’ propaganda was successful in creating and sustaining their rule. By examining army deserters instead,

Roisman rarely discusses propaganda at all and fails to connect the paper to the theme of the volume. Nonetheless it is a very well argued paper that should change the idea of how Hellenistic kings maintained power or lost it.

The final chapter, Chapter 10 by Pat Wheatley and Charlotte Dunn, ends the volume on a high note with a chapter focused on visual propaganda. This is the only chapter that deals in detail with imagery and is better for the number of coins displayed within it. The authors use coinage as a way to examine the development of monarchic images on the coins serving as propaganda from Alexander through his early Successors. They utilize the coins to demonstrate that the propaganda of the Hellenistic monarchs changed as time went on from simply copying Alexander's coins, to emphasize his memory and their own dependance for power on him, to developing their own images representative of their new kingdoms and dynasties. The authors begin systematically by examining the silver, then the gold coinage of Alexander, as well as the Elephant medallions, and then, having laid this foundation, they examine how the Successors (specifically Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Seleucus and Demetrius) adopted and adapted Alexander's imagery for their own purposes. It is a very detailed analysis that illustrates well the importance of examining material propaganda as much as if not more so than textual. The authors' methodology is clear and the layout is extremely easy to follow so that despite the length of the paper (it is the longest chapter in the book by far), it is easy to read and perhaps the most generally useful of all the papers in the volume.

All told this is an excellent resource for understanding most of the controversies in the historiography of Alexander the Great, though one chapters would benefit from a closer examination of propaganda to fit the title. The volume as a whole would read better with an introduction and conclusion, but as a conference proceeding this is a very commendable connected collection of papers. I recommend the book to scholars who will appreciate the novel arguments within as well as to the more casual historians with a passing interest in a more detailed analysis of those who wrote the surviving accounts of Alexander and the propaganda intentions of the man himself.

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