

Daniel Leon, *Arrian the Historian. Writing the Greek Past in the Roman Empire*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. 192 pages. ISBN 9781477321867.

Daniel Leon's new book is a welcome addition to a growing number of works examining the intellectualism of previously neglected ancient historians,¹ offering a clear and concise analysis of Arrian's historical thought and historiographical purpose. L. employs reader-response criticism to show that Arrian encourages his reader to consider the importance of ongoing revision and reinterpretation of the past. Arrian, L. convincingly argues, is a highly intellectual historian, closely engaged in the social, cultural, and philosophical trends of his time and valuable for much more than the reconstruction of lost primary accounts of Alexander the Great. The *Anabasis*, naturally, is a major focus, but Arrian's minor works and the *Discourses of Epictetus* provide important comparative material particularly in the first two chapters.

In Chapter 1, "Amateurs, Experts, and History", Leon situates Arrian in his intellectual context, suggesting that Arrian, like earlier historians, sought to distinguish himself and his historiographical projects from the declamatory performances of the sophists. L. emphasizes historians' concerns for a future, reading audience as a fundamental difference between historians and sophists, whose ready-made images of the past appealed primarily to an immediate audience and lacked the intellectual rigour which, for Arrian, make the study of the past valuable. Arrian, L. suggests, draws this audience in with occasional references to his methodology, which encourages a more accurate understanding of the topic at hand and a recognition of the limits imposed on historical knowledge. In both his major and minor works, Arrian revisits well-treated topics with an eye to correcting distorted accounts and adding to incomplete knowledge.

Chapter Two, "Novelty and Revision in the Works of Arrian", focuses on Arrian's conception of his role as an intellectual historian and the importance of revisiting well-studied topics anew. L. argues that linguistic echoes (especially of Xenophon) in Arrian do not show idealizing imitation but rather serve as acknowledgement of the authority of his Classical predecessors and encourage the reader to consider how Arrian's own works, benefiting from the increased knowledge and experience of the present, add to and improve upon earlier treatments of the same topics in terms of completeness and accuracy. In the case of oft-treated subjects such as Alexander the Great, Arrian suggests that revision leads to a more truthful and accurate understanding: Present knowledge can resolve contradictions and omissions resulting

¹ E.g., S.R. Asirvatham, "Historiography", in D.S. Richter & W.A. Johnson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic* (New York, 2017): 477–492; C.E. Muntz, *Diodorus Siculus and the World of the Late Roman Republic* (Oxford, 2017); V. Fromentin, *et al.* (eds), *Cassius Dio: Nouvelles Lectures* (Bordeaux, 2016); Brill's *Historiography of Rome and Its Empire* series has also produced multiple volumes exploring various aspects of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*.

from mistaken and incomplete accounts. When resolution of contradictions is not possible, Arrian points to a deeper, fundamental truth behind the disagreement of his sources. For example, it matters less to Arrian whether crows (Aristobulus) or snakes (Ptolemy) led Alexander to Siwah than that he received divine aid. By drawing attention to contradictions and omissions, Arrian invites his audience to consider the truth of events and characters, as well as the gaps in our sources which make certain knowledge of the past elusive. L. compellingly suggests that Arrian's Alexander serves as a model reader, as the historian creates verbal echoes of Herodotus to show Alexander using his own contemporary knowledge to "update" his knowledge, gained from Herodotus (e.g., on the supposed connection between the Indus and Nile rivers [59-60]).

In Chapter 3, "Alexander among the Kings of History", L. focuses on the *Anabasis* as a test-case of sorts for the truth-seeking revision which he identifies in Arrian's *corpus* in the second chapter. Here, he argues that Arrian used Alexander as a thought experiment in his exploration of kingship, building on comparisons which Alexander himself had encouraged with earlier Persian kings. L. reads Arrian's Alexander as a complex, evolving figure who is both "more and less approachable than he appears in the work of other authors" (63). By focusing on Alexander as a flawed but nevertheless outstanding leader and king, L. argues, Arrian reminds his reader that, for all his accomplishments, Alexander was still "only a man", and so his virtues and achievements can be emulated by Arrian's contemporary (and future) audience. Initially, L. argues, Arrian carefully presents Alexander as a Panhellenic hero, downplaying early examples of his brutality. After Gaugamela, though, when the Panhellenic justification for Alexander's campaigns had disappeared, Arrian begins both to emphasize the difficulties faced by a Panhellenic hero constrained by traditions of Persian kingship and to problematize Alexander's brutality. Arrian thus, L. suggests, insists that we reconsider the initial idealization of Alexander's character in light of his later activities as we continually update our understanding of the Macedonian king. That is, even within a single text, Arrian shows that ongoing revision is necessary if we are to arrive at the truth of the subject. L. tentatively suggests that this ongoing revision of our understanding of Alexander's character also invites a reflection on the discourse of kingship (as reflected in, e.g., Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, and Pliny the Younger, among others) on the nature of imperial power. Given the subtlety of L.'s Arrian and the prominence of Alexander in discussions of kingship and virtue during the Roman period, this possibility is difficult to dismiss.

The final chapter, "Sickness, Death, and Virtue", shifts the focus from Alexander's character and virtue as a king to Alexander's personal character and virtue. L. argues that here, again, Arrian insists on an evolving characterization. His Alexander displays a mastery of his own body consistent with Stoicism and the self-control emphasized in the elite masculine discourse of imperial Rome: Alexander's endurance of injuries and sickness demonstrates his personal virtue. At the same time, though, L. points to Arrian's account of Alexander's youthful, epic responses to the deaths of

Hephaestion and Bucephalas, suggesting his inability to cope with the death of those around him and calling into question his earlier virtue. Arrian's account of Alexander's response to his own final sickness invites a further revision of our understanding of Alexander's virtue, as Arrian's Alexander now shows a mature recognition of his own human limitations. By exploring Alexander's virtue in terms of sickness, injury, and death, Arrian points to the body as "a universalizing element of the human experience" (84), thereby suggesting a truth about Alexander that goes beyond his campaigns: His best qualities are achievable for "ordinary human beings" (111).

There follows a brief appendix discussing the date of Arrian's *Anabasis*. L. briefly reviews the problems of attempting to date Arrian's works in relation to one another and the difficulties of finding firm internal evidence. Following a critical review of Bosworth's arguments for a date of the *Anabasis*, L. concludes, based on Arrian's apparent unfamiliarity with Cappadocian geography, that the work was composed before his legateship in Cappadocia (131/2 CE) and probably in the 120s.

L.'s reader of Arrian is necessarily well-versed in the works of earlier historians such that (s)he can recognize the often subtle linguistic echoes that L. notes and therefore perceive Arrian's underlying premise – that contemporary knowledge can help us better understand the past and even correct misunderstandings of the past provided that we are ready to reconsider and re-evaluate what we think we know. Many readers of Arrian may have missed some of these allusions and/or the pattern which L. detects in them. Nonetheless, since Arrian and his audience operated in a highly textual and intertextual literary environment, as L. notes, these echoes deserve careful attention. They point to a consistent and nuanced historical intellectualism, the appreciation of which will significantly benefit students and scholars of all of Arrian's works.

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