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978-0-521-43264-1 - Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's Life and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandrou

N. G. L. Hammond

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Plutarch and Arrian have contributed more than any other ancient authors to our picture of Alexander the Great, but since they wrote four or more centuries after his death the value of what they said depends upon the sources of information on which they themselves drew. In this book the attempt is made (surprisingly for the first time) to define and to evaluate those sources in a detailed study, analysing the historians' works section by section and comparing them with other accounts of the same episodes. Plutarch and Arrian rank among the finest writers of antiquity, and their charm is not ignored in this appreciative study.

Professor Hammond maintains that a close analysis of the sources is essential for a balanced view of the history of Alexander the Great. After writing his *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (1980; 2nd edn 1989) he published *Three Historians of Alexander the Great* on Diodorus, Justin and Curtius (Cambridge University Press, 1983). The present book completes his study of the five Alexander-historians and lays a new basis for work in this area.

This book will be of particular value to ancient historians but also has much to offer to anyone seriously interested in the life of Alexander the Great.

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SOURCES FOR ALEXANDER THE GREAT
AN ANALYSIS OF PLUTARCH'S *LIFE* AND
ARRIAN'S *ANABASIS ALEXANDROU*

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SOURCES FOR ALEXANDER THE GREAT

An analysis of Plutarch's *Life* and Arrian's
Anabasis Alexandrou

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**IN MEMORIAM
J. L. AND L. B. HAMMOND**

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PREFACE

This book is the second part of a comprehensive study of the sources which lie behind the five main extant accounts of Alexander the Great. Thus it is a companion volume to my publication of 1983, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great: the so-called Vulgate authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius*. The preliminary part of the comprehensive study was conducted as the basis of my book, published in 1980, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman*, in which the reader was informed of the divergencies in the sources of information at each critical event and encouraged to make his own evaluation of those sources.

The need for an analysis of the sources of Plutarch's *Alexander* is obvious and undisputed, and in the Prolegomena I have written about previous work in that field, culminating in the commentary by J. R. Hamilton, published in 1969. The need for a similar analysis of the sources which lie behind Arrian's *Anabasis Alexandrou* is equally great despite the fact that important commentaries have been published during the last fifteen years. P. A. Brunt revised the text and the translation of the Loeb edition, and he added a new Introduction and twenty-eight Appendixes, which constituted an extensive, if uncoordinated, commentary; the first volume appeared in 1976 and the second in 1983. Meanwhile, A. B. Bosworth published in 1980 a full-scale commentary on the first three books of the *Anabasis*. Both commentaries are of great value in collecting and collating a mass of relevant material. However, they have defects. The Greek text and the English translation of the Loeb edition are both faulty in my opinion, and the unindexed Appendixes are difficult to use. Bosworth's commentary is marked by a continuous and, in my view, unjustified distrust of Arrian, and by a tendency to seek errors

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PREFACE

in Arrian's work of which some at least are due to modern misunderstanding. But the serious defect in both is a dependence on the concept of 'The Vulgate Tradition' and in consequence a failure to analyse the sources and thus the merits and demerits of the versions of the three authors who are grouped together under that label – Diodorus, Justin and Curtius. Moreover, there has been a tendency to prefer the versions of one or more of those authors to the version supplied by Arrian, e.g. for the attack on Thebes, Diodorus 17.9–13 being preferred to Arrian 1.7–8; and the preference seems at times to be based on personal taste rather than any comparison of the sources used respectively by Diodorus, writing three centuries after the event, and Arrian, writing nearly five centuries after the event. Indeed it has become customary with some recent writers that they turn more to the 'Vulgate' authors and cut Alexander down to an ordinary size.

In this book, as in my earlier book on three authors, I am breaking new ground, because a detailed analysis has not previously been attempted. It has therefore been possible to keep the footnotes within a reasonable length and to concentrate on fairly recent literature. The help which I have received has been from colleagues and especially pupils in recent years when I have lectured on Philip and Alexander, for instance at Trinity College, Hartford, Carleton College, and the University of Newcastle, New South Wales. It has been a great pleasure, as always, to work with the staff of the Cambridge University Press in the production of this book.

Clare College, Cambridge
October 1991

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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 AG² N. G. L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (2nd edn, Bristol Classical Press, 1989)
- Anc. Mac.* *Ancient Macedonia*, papers read at the International Symposia held in Thessaloniki, 4 vols. (Institute of Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1970, 1977, 1983, 1986)
- Arr. Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandrou*
- Atkinson J. E. Atkinson, *A Commentary of Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4* (Amsterdam, 1980).
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- Brunt L P. A. Brunt, *Arrian* I (Cambridge, Mass. – London, 1976), II (1983), Loeb edition
- Ellis J. R. Ellis, *Philip II and Macedonian Imperialism* (London, 1976)
- Epit. Metz.* *Epitome rerum gestarum Alexandri et liber de morte eius* ed. P. H. Thomas (Leipzig, 1966)
- FGrH F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin, 1923–30; Leiden, 1940–58)

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>FHG</i>	Müller, <i>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</i> (Paris, 1841–70)
Goukowsky	P. Goukowsky, in the Budé edn of Diodorus Siculus 17 (Paris, 1976)
Habicht	C. Habicht, <i>Gottmenschentum und die griechischen Städte</i> (Munich, 1970)
Hamilton C	J. R. Hamilton, <i>Plutarch, Alexander: a Commentary</i> (Oxford, 1969)
Hamilton L	J. R. Hamilton, 'The letters in Plutarch's <i>Alexander</i> ', <i>PACA</i> 4 (1961) 9–20
HA	N. G. L. Hammond, ed., <i>Atlas of the Greek and Roman World in Antiquity</i> (New Jersey, 1981; Bristol Classical Press, 1991)
HAAJ	idem, 'Aspects of Alexander's journal and ring in his last days', <i>AJPh</i> 110 (1989) 155–60
Hammond Ep	idem, <i>Epirus</i> (Oxford, 1967)
Hammond MS	idem, <i>The Macedonian State</i> (Oxford, 1989)
HAT	idem, 'Army transport in the fifth and fourth centuries', <i>GRBS</i> 24 (1983) 27–31
HCR	idem, 'Casualties and reinforcements of citizen soldiers in Greece and Macedonia', <i>JHS</i> 109 (1989) 56–68
HCU	idem, 'A cavalry unit in the army of Antigonus Monophthalmus: ASTHIPPOI', <i>CQ</i> 28 (1978) 128–35
HGR	idem, 'The battle of the Granicus River', <i>JHS</i> 100 (1980) 73–88
HKA	idem, 'The kingdom of Asia and the Persian throne', <i>Antichthon</i> 20 (1986) 73–85
HM	<i>A History of Macedonia</i> I by N. G. L. Hammond (Oxford, 1972); II by N. G. L. Hammond and G. T. Griffith (1979); III by N. G. L. Hammond and F. W. Walbank (1988)
HMAT	idem, 'The march of Alexander the Great on Thebes in 335 B.C.', in Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος 2600 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατόν του, ed. K. Babouskos (Thessaloniki, 1980) 171–81
HPF	idem, 'Papyrus British Library 3085 verso', <i>GRBS</i> 28 (1987) 331–47
HRJ	idem, 'The Royal Journal of Alexander', <i>Historia</i> 37 (1988) 129–50

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ABBREVIATIONS

HRP	idem, 'Royal pages, personal pages, and boys trained in the Macedonian manner during the period of the Temenid Monarchy', <i>Historia</i> 39 (1990) 261–90
HSPA	idem, 'Some passages in Arrian concerning Alexander', <i>CQ</i> 30 (1980) 455–76
HVG	idem, 'The various guards of Philip II and Alexander III', <i>Historia</i> 40 (1991)
LCM	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
Mederer	E. Mederer, <i>Die Alexanderlegenden bei den ältesten Alexander-historikern</i> (Stuttgart, 1936)
M–G	<i>Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times</i> , ed. B. Barr-Sharrar and E. N. Borza (Washington, 1982)
Mossman	J. M. Mossman, 'Tragedy and epic in Plutarch's <i>Alexander</i> ', <i>JHS</i> 108 (1988) 83–93
OCD	<i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> ² , ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford, 1970)
PA	Plutarch, <i>Life of Alexander</i> , in the Loeb edition (1971)
Papazoglou CBT	F. Papazoglou, <i>The Central Balkan Tribes in Pre-Roman Times</i> (Amsterdam, 1977)
PCPS	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
Pearson LHA	L. Pearson, <i>The Lost Historians of Alexander the Great</i> (New York, 1960)
Perrin	B. Perrin, <i>Plutarch's Lives</i> VII (1971), Loeb edition
Powell	J. E. Powell, 'The sources of Plutarch's Alexander', <i>JHS</i> 59 (1939) 229–40
Rabe	I. Rabe, <i>Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zu Plutarchs Alexanderbiographie</i> (Hamburg, 1964)
RE	Pauly–Wissowa, <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
Robson L	E. I. Robson, <i>Arrian</i> I (New York and London, 1929), II (1933), in the Loeb edition
Schachermeyr	F. Schachermeyr, <i>Alexander der Grosse: das Problem seiner Persönlichkeit und seines Wirkens</i> (Vienna, 1973)
Stadter	P. A. Stadter, <i>Arrian of Nicomedia</i> (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1980)

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Stadter <i>P</i>	idem, <i>Plutarch's Historical Methods</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1965)
<i>Studies</i>	N. G. L. Hammond, <i>Studies in Greek History</i> (Oxford, 1973)
<i>Studies Edson</i>	<i>Ancient Macedonian Studies in honor of Charles F. Edson</i> (Thessaloniki, 1981)
Tarn	W. W. Tarn, <i>Alexander the Great</i> II (Cambridge, 1948 and 1979)
<i>THA</i>	N. G. L. Hammond, <i>Three Historians of Alexander the Great: the so-called Vulgate authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius</i> (Cambridge, 1983)
Tod	M. N. Tod, <i>Greek Historical Inscriptions</i> II (Oxford, 1948)
Walbank <i>C</i>	F. W. Walbank, <i>A Historical Commentary on Polybius</i> I–III (Oxford, 1957–79)
Wardman	A. E. Wardman, 'Plutarch and Alexander', <i>CQ</i> 5 (1955) 96–107
Wilcken	U. Wilcken, <i>Alexander the Great</i> (London, 1932)

Full bibliographies are provided in *HM* III xviii–xxx and Bosworth *CE* 300–14.

References to Plutarch's *Lives* are to the sections in the Loeb edition.

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PROLEGOMENA

In 1983 when I published in this series *Three Historians of Alexander the Great: the so-called Vulgate authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius*, I wrote on p. 169 that I hoped to conduct a separate inquiry on the same principles into the sources of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* and of Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*. Those principles are a detailed, specific analysis of each section of one work and a detailed comparison of its specifications with the treatment of the same topic in the other four main accounts of Alexander's career. One may wonder why such an inquiry into the sources, for instance, of so widely read a work as Plutarch's *Alexander* has never been undertaken. An answer was offered by J. E. Powell in his article, 'The sources of Plutarch's *Alexander*', *JHS* 59 (1939) 229–40: 'The sources of Plutarch's *Alexander* have hitherto been a subject passed by without examination in detail, not because examination was superfluous but because the task was considered hopeless on account of its complexity' (238).

Powell implied that he had conducted such an examination. However, even if his conclusions had been accepted, he would only have deferred the real issues. He argued that Plutarch used only two sources. The first was a collection of Letters of Alexander, which Powell held to be entirely spurious. The second was 'a *variorum* source' or 'Sammelwerk', 'an encyclopaedic work', to quote Powell's words (234), 'in which the divergent versions of each successive event in a large number of historians of Alexander were collated and registered'.¹ Even if we accept the existence in antiquity of such a work 'of stupendous size and detail', as Powell remarks, and the contin-

¹ As Tarn remarked (307 n. 3), Powell acknowledged that A. Schoene had advanced the theory of a common source for Plutarch and Arrian in 1870. However, that theory did not win acceptance; see Hamilton *C* xlix n. 4.

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uous use of it by Plutarch, we are no further towards knowing the ultimate source of what Plutarch wrote; for Plutarch did not give the names of the authors, one by one, of the variant versions in the source-book which he supposedly was copying.

In fact no one has accepted Powell's view. Tarn demolished it in 1948 (306–9). Rabe published a dissertation in 1964, in which she re-examined the six topics which Powell had examined (Medius, A's illness, Bucephalus' death, Callisthenes' death, A's illness at Tarsus, the Gordian knot) and found his theory unproven in all cases. Hamilton endorsed the views of Tarn and Rabe in his *Commentary* in 1969. Moreover, Hamilton had written in 1961 an important article in which he showed that some of the Letters cited by Plutarch were genuine.

There are, of course, general works on Plutarch's methods as a biographer and general surveys of possible sources for his *Alexander*. An example of the latter is Tarn's study (296–309), in which he argued that Plutarch's picture of a deteriorating Alexander owed much to the influence of the Peripatetic school of philosophy, that some Letters were genuine and each had to be judged on its own merits, and that Powell's theory of 'a *variorum* source-book' (306) was untenable. Hamilton argued in his *Commentary* (xlix–liii) that Plutarch consulted directly Onesicritus, Aristobulus and Aristoxenus, and probably Callisthenes and Chares (li, it 'may reasonably be assumed'), and that in addition Plutarch probably 'consulted Cleitarchus directly'. On the basis of these general probabilities Hamilton listed the passages in the *Life* which, he wrote, 'we may tentatively assign' to five of these writers (he excluded Aristoxenus).² In the course of the *Commentary* he made proposals of source at some points, which I shall usually mention in my own analysis.

Thus we return to my opening quotation from Powell's article, and we can reinforce it with a companion-piece from Tarn (296): 'No one has yet made any real attempt to analyse its [Plutarch's *Life*'s] sources, and it is not likely that anyone

² He added Theophrastus and Ctesias with one passage each in the *Life*.

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ever will, for its ultimate sources must have embraced the whole Alexander-literature, whether known or unknown to ourselves.'

In grasping this particular nettle I acknowledge my debt to my predecessors and especially to Hamilton for his fine *Commentary*. I can make the attempt to analyse Plutarch's sources only because I have already studied the works of Diodorus, Justin and Curtius in depth and I have made much use of Plutarch and Arrian in writing about Alexander.

Plutarch's *Life* partakes of biography and of history. There are a number of passages in which he reflects upon the personality, the character and the changing nature of Alexander. Powell called them 'digressions illustrative of character' (op. cit. 229). I shall call them 'the reflective passages'.³ It is reasonable to put them in one category because they are in one style and of one kind of content. History entered into the bulk of the *Life* in that Plutarch proceeded through the life of Alexander from his birth to his death, and he had to have a chronological, narrative thread to which he attached his chosen incidents. That thread could be tenuous (e.g. 67.1 Carmania, 67.7 Gedrosia, 69.1 Persis, 70.3 Susa and so on), but it had to be more or less continuous. I shall call the record of the incidents 'the narrative passages'. Because the incidents are very diverse, and because, as we shall see, he used many sources, the narrative passages are remarkably uneven, both in style and in content (e.g. in narrative compare 6 with 9.4–11; in attitude compare 13 with 35, in coherence compare 50 and 63 with 50 and 68).

³ Such passages occur in other Lives. H. D. Westlake, for instance, called them 'enlargements' in his article, 'The sources of Plutarch, *Pelopidas*', *CQ* 33 (1939) 12.