

A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture

Alexander III of Macedon (356–323 BC) has for more than 2,000 years been one of the best-recognised names from antiquity. He set about creating his own legend in his lifetime, and subsequent writers and political actors developed it. He acquired the surname ‘Great’ by the Roman period, and the *Alexander Romance* transmitted his legendary biography to every language of medieval Europe and the Middle East. An adventurer who sought the secret of immortality and discussed the purpose of life with the naked sages of India, he became a model for military achievement as well as a religious prophet bringing Christianity (in the Crusades) and Islam (in the Qur’an and beyond) to the regions he conquered. This innovative and fascinating volume explores these and many other facets of his reception in various cultures around the world, right up to the present, and his role in gay activism.

RICHARD STONEMAN is Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of Exeter. He was President of the Classical Association (UK) in 2010, and is widely known for his work on the Alexander legends, having both organised and participated in various Alexander conferences. His books include *Land of Lost Gods: The Search for Classical Greece* (1987) and *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (2008), both of which have been shortlisted for the Runciman Prize. His most recent work, *The Greek Experience of India* (2019), was described by the *Times Literary Supplement* as ‘the best book ever written on the subject’.

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Tradition’, in *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, edited by Carolina Cupane and Bettina Krönung (2016); ‘The Caliph’s Mirror Reflecting Aristotle’s Frowning Face: The Transition and Restyling of Ancient Political Philosophy Concerning Good Kingship’, in *New Themes, New Styles in the Eastern Mediterranean: Christian, Jewish, and Islamic Encounters, 5th–8th Centuries*. Late Antique History and Religion, vol. 16; *Beyond the Fathers*, vol. I, edited by Hagit Amirav and Francesco Celia (2017); and ‘The Consul and the King, Wetzstein and Alexander’, Part 2: Wetzstein Collections, in *Manuscripts, Politics and Oriental Studies: Life and Collections of Johann Gottfried Wetzstein (1815–1905) in Context*, edited by Boris Liebrecht and Christoph Rauch (2019).

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of the sixteen manuscripts of the French prose *Roman d'Alexandre*. In 2019 she published, with Alison Stones and David J. A. Ross (†), *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books in French Verse*, listing all the iconography of the novels of Alexander of Paris and Thomas of Kent. At the same time she was preparing the edition and translation of the first catalogue of moralised monsters in French, an anonymous work of the thirteenth century. In 2018 she was appointed to the Academic Institute of France for a project on the presence of literature in domestic iconography, mainly painted ceilings, in Europe (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries).

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Preface

Not another Companion? This book is intended not so much as an aid to research as an attempt to present a complex historical phenomenon – namely, the continuing re-emergence of the figure of Alexander III (the Great) of Macedon as a way of articulating people’s understanding of events and intellectual positions over more than two thousand years of world history. No historical personage other than Jesus has been so persistently the subject of attention since the end of his earthly life. When I wrote *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (2008), it was the product of some twenty years of research, yet there were aspects of the story that I was scarcely able to touch, sometimes through lack of space but more often through lack of competence in the relevant fields. Michael Sharp’s interest in commissioning this book for Cambridge University Press offered me the opportunity to compile a book with a wider purview and to introduce aspects of the subject that I had been unable to tackle. The subject resists a systematic treatment because of its vast scope, yet the chapters in this volume represent a series of windows, through each of which another intellectual landscape may be discerned: like landscape paintings, they are focussed selections of phenomena that, perhaps, convey the quality of the panorama in its entirety. Some historical moments, trends and turning points may be brought into focus through contemplation of the role of this long-dead king.

In the past twenty-five years interest in the Alexander legends has grown considerably. I am delighted that so many distinguished scholars agreed to join me in the task of presenting Alexander as a figure of world culture. Some of those scholars, alas, showed more enthusiasm than staying power, and I particularly regret the absence of chapters on the medieval epics and on Alexander in modern Greece. I would also have wished to see the Greek origins of the *Romance* more extensively treated by a different hand from mine – though this is not a book about the *Romance* as such. Other subjects too still lack a full treatment – for example, the Far Eastern versions of the

Romance (but Su Fang Ng's work *Alexander the Great from Britain to South-East Asia* (Oxford 2019) goes a long way to filling the gap) or the reimagining of his legend in Africa (not just the Ethiopic translation of the *Romance*). I fully expect that over the coming years more manifestations of Alexander's persistent presence in world culture will be revealed.

Abbreviations

Classical authors and works are cited according to the conventions in Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, edited by P. Glare.

In addition, note the following:

BNJ	<i>Brill's New Jacoby</i> . Leiden. Ed. I. Worthington.
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> . Turnhout.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . Salzburg.
FGrH	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Ed. F. Jacoby. Leiden, 1923–.
MGH SS M	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> . Munich.
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca</i> . Ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, 1857–66.
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> . Lyon.

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