

Bosman, P. R. (ed.) 2014. *Alexander in Africa. Acta Classica Supplementum V*. Pretoria: V&R Printing Works. Pp. xiii + 184. ISSN 0065-1141. US\$15.00.

Alexander the Great was in Egypt for a matter of months between 332 and 331 BCE. This period is often viewed with a curious mix of inconsequentiality and dire importance. On the one hand, Egypt was a distraction from Alexander's declared intent of defeating Darius and conquering Persia, included seemingly for the purposes of capturing all Persian possessions; on the other, it was in Egypt that he founded the most famous Alexandria and was confirmed in his godhead by the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah. *Alexander in Africa*, the latest in a series of volumes based on conferences about Alexander and his legacy,¹ is designed to unpack these 'activities of great political and symbolic significance' (p. vii). The conference was held in Grahamstown, South Africa in 2011 as part of the biennial Classical Association of South Africa Conference; the resultant volume has four main areas of inquiry: the history and historical record for Alexander in Africa, the role of the diadochic period in constructing Alexander's African legacy, the African variations on Alexander's legend, and 20th-century conceptions of Alexander as mediated by African contexts (p. viii). The nine contributions tend to deal with issues and controversies common to scholarship about Alexander and are arranged in rough chronological order. While the topics are not formally represented by section headings, all but one of the contributions may be grouped into pairs about each of the core areas of inquiry.

In the first topic, Alexander's Egyptian interlude, we have D. Ogden's essay 'Alexander and Africa (332-331 BC and beyond): The facts, the traditions and the problems' (pp. 1-37), and H. Bowden's essay, 'Alexander in Egypt: considering the Egyptian evidence' (pp. 38-55). Ogden provides a survey of the standard Greek and Roman accounts of Alexander's time in Egypt, foundation of Alexandria, and visit to Siwah. He concludes by examining Alexander's administration in Egypt, complete with the ascendance of the 'mere bourgeois' Cleomenes of Naucratis (p. 15), and briefly lays out Alexander's cultural legacy in Africa. In contrast, Bowden focuses on Alexander's possible coronation as pharaoh (pp. 38-42) and the visit to Siwah (p. 43-53), arguing that Egyptian traditions dictated the pattern of Alexander's behaviour. He does this by laying out the evidence for Egyptian traditions (including excavations at Siwah) and the way in which Greek authors wrote about Egypt, and then tests this evidence against the narratives for Alexander's visit. Bowden stands in opposition to the modern consensus that Alexander did become pharaoh. He cites, but does not directly address Burstein's argument against Alexander's coronation,² attributing the orthodox opinion to an argument from silence. However, Bowden's correlation of Alexander's itinerary and the Egyptian rituals aligns Alexander's behaviour in Egypt with comparable ritual performances in Persia and Babylon and is therefore difficult to ignore.

The next pair, F. Pownall's 'Callisthenes in Africa: the historian's role at Siwah and the *proskynēsis* controversy' (pp. 56-71) and T. Howe's 'Founding Alexandria: Alexander the Great and the politics of memory' (pp. 72-91), focus on the intersection of the historical tradition and Egypt. Pownall argues that Alexander's court historian Callisthenes crafted the appearance of a *volte-face* in Alexander's 'divinity'. The contribution is linked to Africa in that the story begins with the trip to Siwah, but the climax is in the *proskynēsis* affair in central Asia, which Pownall argues Callisthenes manufactured by overwriting a politically unifying ceremony with divine connotations (p. 64). Callisthenes hellenized the narrative of both the Siwah and *proskynēsis* episodes, but to make one palatable, the other alien. Rather than using the two events to make a case for or against Alexander's conviction in his own divinity, Pownall's contribution is to show the historian's hand in manipulating how Greeks and Macedonians interpreted Alexander's actions.³ Howe contends that modern scholars give undue weight to Alexander's Egyptian foray because Ptolemy promoted the connection (p. 72). Alexander,

¹ Baynham, E. and Bosworth, A.B. (edd.) 2001. *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*. Oxford; Heckel, W. and Tritle, L.A. (edd.) 2002. *Crossroads of History: the Age of Alexander*. Claremont CA; Wheatley, P. and Hannah, R. (edd.) 2009. *Alexander and his Successors: Essays from the Antipodes*. Claremont CA; Ogden, D. and Carney, E.D. (edd.) 2010. *Philip II and Alexander the Great: Lives and Afterlives*. Oxford; Anson, E.M. and Troncoso, V.A. (edd.) 2013. *After Alexander: The Time of the Diadochi*. Oxford.

² Burstein, S. 1991. 'Pharaoh Alexander: a Scholarly Myth', *Anc. Soc.* 22:139-45.

³ On the common debate about the divine connotations of *proskynēsis*, see Heckel, W. 2008. *The Conquests of Alexander the Great*. Cambridge, pp.106-11 and Worthington, I. 2014. *By the Spear*. Oxford, pp. 233-35.

he points out, intended Alexandria to be a trading post and, when Ptolemy stole Alexander's funeral cortege, he took it to Memphis (p. 81). Thus Howe argues that it was Ptolemaic dynastic propaganda that linked Alexander's body and legacy with Alexandria. Both essays make valuable contributions while covering familiar material.

The third pair of essays on the theme of the Alexander legends in the Middle Ages, consists of S. Asirvatham's 'The *Alexander romance* tradition from Egypt to Ethiopia' (pp. 109-27) and C. Juoannos' 'The fate of African material in the Greek and Byzantine tradition of the *Alexander Romance*' (pp. 128-42). Asirvatham argues that the entire corpus of the Ethiopic Alexander-Romance tradition, rather than only the texts that date from after the thirteenth century, was determined by the relationship between the Alexandrian Coptic and the Ethiopic Orthodox Churches (p. 110). She notes the distinct lack of information in this tradition that is unique to Ethiopia (p. 117), despite stories about Alexander meeting the Queen of Meroe. Juoanno lays out the manuscript tradition for the Byzantine *Alexander Romance* and teases out how the stories about Alexander in Africa gradually disappear or become dissociated from Africa (pp. 133-5). In contrast, he says, these developments continued to influence the Ethiopic tradition, but that there was no reciprocity to be found (p. 139).

The fourth set, A. Tronson's 'From Jerusalem to Timbuktu: the appropriation of Alexander the Great by national narratives' (pp. 143-69) and J. Atkinson's 'Alexander and the unity of mankind: some Cape Town perspectives' (pp. 170-84), examine examples of Alexander's legacy in 20th-century Africa and constitutes the most novel pair of essays because they deal with topics unfamiliar to Alexander scholarship. Tronson focuses on the Malian national epic about legendary Mandinke king Sunjata. More precisely, he scrutinizes one single version, transcribed from the oral history of Kouyate into French in the 1960s, shortly after Malian independence. In this 'official' version, unlike every other version of the epic, Sunjata's life contains additional passages that are directly modeled on the Alexander histories that formed part of the syllabus of the French colonial education system, rather than anything belonging to Malian folklore. Tronson convincingly argues that the passages were added by the transcriber as a means of supporting President Modibo Keito's pan-Mandinke agenda and to give the newly independent Mali a heritage that resonated with a western audience (148-9). Atkinson concludes the collection with a short chapter about Benjamin Farrington, Harold Baldry, and Mary Renault, three Classicists who lived in South Africa and wrote about 'The Unity of Mankind', the old standby of Tarn's Alexander, while living in a segregated society.

One contribution fits the collection thematically, but does not fit in the schema laid out above. P. Wheatley's 'Demetrius the Besieger on the Nile' (pp. 92-108) takes on the modest task of rehabilitating Demetrius Poliorcetes' reputation for bungling Antigonus' invasion of Egypt in 306. In addition to Demetrius' inability to control the weather, Wheatley argues that Antigonus' inability to observe Alexander's tactical and logistical innovation, combined with his over-large expedition, doomed his ambition to isolate and defeat all of the rival dynasts and thus blame lay with father, not son (pp. 102-5). The point is well made, but is, in many respects, rather obvious, as it was always Antigonus who gave the orders to invade.

As is often the case with this sort of collection, the coherence and utility of *Alexander in Africa* is highly variable and, frequently, limited. The chronological range means scholars with a wide range of interests adjacent to Alexander will find something of use, but the contributions are only loosely linked. This is not to diminish each individual chapter or the premise of the book. It is possible to dismiss the contributions as merely rehashing old questions, but the conclusions are not limited to consensus views about Alexander. There are forays along well-trodden paths in scholarship about Alexander, but no author dwells on the unanswerable strategic questions concerning Alexander and Egypt. This topic lends itself to studies of Alexander and the legacy of Alexander as cultural constructs that shifted over time, both of which are current trends in the study of Alexander and are appropriately represented here.

Alexander in Africa needed a stronger editorial hand. Greek names are sometimes transliterated, other times Latinized, and for such a slim journal to have a bibliography at the conclusion of each essay rather than a general one at the end leads to a substantial number of redundancies. More than that, the essays are uneven in length and scope and some rework familiar territory for the contributors.

Alexander in Africa fills a niche, but more could have been done. As one reviewer noted in the formative stages of the book, there is an omission of studies about North Africa and modern Egypt (p. viii). I am also left wondering how the collection as a whole regards the relationship between the conqueror and the continent. In the end, how great was Alexander's legacy in Africa? Despite the

absence of modern North Africa in these studies, the answer as it concerns Egypt and Ethiopia is unequivocal. For sub-Saharan Africa, however, the implication is that Alexander's footprint was a residual legacy of European colonialism. There is a sense that one of the factors at play in *Alexander in Africa* is seeking the bounds of Alexander's cultural memory and, while there is no pretense of comprehensiveness, the collection seems to conclude that the cultural construct 'Alexander the Great' was a Eurasian phenomenon with limited penetration into Africa.

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