

THE ROLE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

DEGEN (J.) *Alexander III. zwischen Ost und West. Indigene Traditionen und Herrschaftsinszenierung im makedonischen Weltimperium.* (Oriens et Occidens 39.) Pp. 489. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2022. Cased, €86. ISBN: 978-3-515-13283-1.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X24001161

Biographies of Alexander have run their course. Little that is new can be said of his personality based on the surviving ancient sources, though new finds can contribute to our understanding of Alexander's actions and the events of his reign. Significant contributions have been made in the field of reception studies, which has dealt with Alexander in the Medieval world, the British Raj, Iberia, south-east Asia, the 'Great Game' and other regions and periods. Particularly notable has been the increased focus on our understanding of Alexander within, and as a product of, the Roman world, with recent monographs by J. Finn (*A Determinist History of Alexander the Great in the Roman Empire* [2022]) and J. Peltonen (*Alexander the Great in the Roman Empire, 150 BC to AD 600* [2019]) standing out. The organisation of Alexander's empire, the relationship with subject communities and its place within Near Eastern history are areas where the study of Alexander in his own time requires further work. Spanning the Adriatic to the Indus valley, Egypt to Turkey, and encompassing Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian and Achaemenid literary, numismatic, epigraphic, archaeological and art-historical sources the field is enormous. Producing a synthetic treatment of Alexander's empire, institutions and monarchic ideology that places the Macedonian ruler within the *longue durée* of Afro-Eurasian empires is no easy task and would require expertise in Egyptology, Assyriology and Achaemenid studies, not to mention knowledge of Hieroglyphics, Aramaic as well as Assyrian, Babylonian and Old Persian among other languages in cuneiform script. One wonders whether something like this is possible. In recent years the trend has been towards edited volumes focusing on specific aspects of Alexander's strategies of legitimation (K. Trampedach and A. Meeus [edd.], *The Legitimation of Conquest* [2020]), his rule in Egypt (V. Grieb, K. Nawotka and A. Wojciechowska [edd.], *Alexander the Great and Egypt* [2014]) or the east more generally (K. Nawotka and A. Wojciechowska [edd.], *Alexander the Great and the East* [2016]).

The volume under review is D.'s revised and published version of his 2020 doctoral dissertation. D.'s goal is to study the creation and nature of Alexander's Macedonian 'Weltimperium' by examining his interaction with certain indigenous groups, namely Greeks, Babylonians and Persians, as well as the influence of indigenous traditions of rulership on Alexander. I admit that I was sceptical when I first opened the book. The scope is huge, the bibliography immense and the expertise in non-Greek sources required for such analysis enviable to traditional Classicists such as myself. That D.'s project was undertaken as a Ph.D. seemed to me to be madness. It is impossible to do justice to a work of this scope within the short space of this review; so I will outline the structure and sketch out some of the salient conclusions of D.'s impressive and convincing work.

After a long 'Einleitung' the body of the volume focuses on three case study chapters of varying length: 'Alexander als Hegemon des Korinthischen Bundes', 'Alexander und das babylonische Königtum' and 'Alexander und das achaimenidische Imperium'. A succinct 'Zusammenfassung' and comprehensive 'Bibliographie' round out the volume. The detailed indexes are useful, though I missed the inclusion of an *index locorum* and lamented the lack of maps and images. Five categories structure D.'s analysis and

offer unifying themes across the different chapters (pp. 29–32): ‘Herrschaftsverständnis’; ‘Symbolhandlungen’; ‘Rollenverständnis’; ‘Positionierungsstrategien’; and ‘Außendarstellung, Herrschaftssprache, offizielle Sprache und “Propaganda”’.

In Chapter 2, ‘Alexander als Hegemon des Korinthischen Bundes’, D. argues that Alexander’s position as *Hegemon*, as inherited from his father, was one of the ways in which Alexander represented himself to one of the subject groups within his empire. Such is hardly contentious, but D. argues against the prevailing notion that, as Alexander’s power grew, he ceased to engage with the Greeks as *Hegemon* and instead gave orders as king, without the need to legitimise his position over the Greeks through any framework other than military might. D. suggests that the League of Corinth was still important for Alexander in 324/3 BCE since it was the means by which he interacted with the ruling elites of this Greek part of his empire. The chapter is too long, and I cannot say that I agree with all the arguments here, but they are well made and certainly demand attention.

Chapter 3, ‘Alexander und das babylonische Königtum’, provides a fruitful, focused case study of one of the few regions outside the Greek world where extensive written sources can be used to place Alexander’s actions within a *longue durée* of Persian, neo-Babylonian and Assyrian activity that focalised itself around local Babylonian traditions of rulership. D.’s discussion of Alexander’s policy with regard to Babylon is deep and engaging. The appearance of Xerxes as a foil within the sources documenting Alexander’s engagement with Greek, Egyptian and Babylonian elites is particularly noticeable and would offer a unifying theme for a thematic analysis stretching across at least three different subject groups.

P. Briant famously described Alexander as ‘the last Achaemenid’, a characterisation that has engendered much subsequent discourse. In Chapter 4, ‘Alexander und das achaimenidische Imperium’, D. examines Alexander’s actions in the eastern parts of his empire within the framework of Achaemenid precedent. The benefit of D.’s approach is that it brings together many of the case studies of Alexander’s campaigns in the Upper Satrapies – Aornos, Branchidai, Dionysos in India etc. – and examines them as individual examples of Alexander’s self-presentation to subject communities (‘Symbolhandlungen’). Here D. is careful to situate the influence of Achaemenid conceptions of rule on Alexander within a deeper context of Near Eastern monarchic ideology, particularly claims to universal rule.

One of the key features underlining D.’s analysis is an emphasis on understanding empire as negotiation and interaction between Alexander and indigenous subject communities. As a case study, Alexander’s reign is chronologically very short, but nonetheless dynamic in that copious Graeco-Roman literary sources, though with their own limitations, provide a solid historical foundation onto which contemporary non-Greek sources (mainly epigraphic) from Egypt and Babylonia can be mapped as case studies to embed the processes of interaction and legitimisation within specific subject communities. D. is sensitive throughout to the different audiences that Alexander found himself dealing with – Greek elite, Babylonian priests, Persian elite, Egyptian priests and temples –, and he argues lucidly that Alexander routinely presented himself within indigenous religious and monarchic traditions throughout his reign. While he suggests that these local interactions did not feed into or influence the ‘Gesamtkonzeption’ of Alexander’s rulership, which was influenced by traditional Near Eastern conceptions of oikoumenic rule, the long influence of Alexander’s example was to be felt in the pluralistic world of Hellenism that followed his death.

As D. suggests (pp. 29–32), it is unlikely that Alexander differentiated much between the individual local roles that he played and his general understanding of rulership. His

legitimising actions in Greece, Egypt, Babylonia and elsewhere were intelligent and opportunistic, and they reveal his keen sense of the importance of acceptance by local elites, but cumulatively they do not necessarily amount to a holistic ideology of rule. Indeed, if Alexander's disinterest in commemorating his victories through dedications at major Panhellenic Greek sanctuaries is anything to go by, it seems likely that he was mainly concerned with presenting himself and his actions to his army, which was the closest and most important audience for the peripatetic conqueror and the only power group that really mattered when it came to enforcing his rule.

D.'s book is an engaging, methodologically rigorous and constantly stimulating study of the strategies by which Alexander presented himself and sought to legitimise his rule among subject communities. If I were to fault the book, it would be in its length. It betrays its origins as a Ph.D. dissertation with a too long introduction and spends a lot of time, particularly in Chapter 2, providing long overviews of scholarly debates, though these do provide a useful *status quaestionis* for the subject at hand. All in all, D. should be commended for producing a significant original contribution to Alexander studies that opens new directions for future scholarship.

Trinity College Dublin

SHANE WALLACE
swallace@tcd.ie