

## Introduction

Given the title of this *Companion*, it seems appropriate to begin in a Socratic manner by querying just what constitutes a “reception” of Alexander the Great. The answer to that could potentially end up being as divisive as the varied interpretations of the Conqueror himself. Would, for example, the instance of anyone being named Alexander (or Alexandra), in whatever form, after 323 BC, amount to some kind of reception of the Macedonian monarch? It might if those who named them had our Alexander in mind at the time. Josephus famously tells us that the Jews named all new-born males in honour of him in the year that he peacefully annexed their territory from the Persian Empire, with some form of his name being quite popular in Jewish culture up to the present day. That was clearly an intentional “reception” of some description. In terms of academic scholarship, which occupies a major portion of this *Companion*, traditional reception theory might be inclined to somewhat relocate primary sources to a lesser role, treating them as having only served in the shaping of later receptions. But, in Alexander Studies, we are often painfully aware that all of our extant primary sources are themselves receptions of earlier sources that are no longer available. To that end, it only seems appropriate to include the likes of Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus and Rufus &c. as themselves being specific, albeit profoundly influential, receptions of Alexander the Great. Each author was the product of his own era and cultural/historical context. Each “received” Alexander, based on the scholarship and evidence available to them, in their own unique ways and according to their individual characters and inclinations.

A considerable number of the contributions to this *Companion* deal, quite understandably, with a wide range of scholarly receptions, especially those from the *circa* AD 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. And that is highly appropriate. But receptions of Alexander the Great go much further beyond these. In seeking authors and topics, the editor has cast his nets far and wide in an attempt to encompass the vastness of such receptions. They include, for example, the history of art (ancient and modern) and areas of “popular culture” in which the Macedonian Conqueror has fired the imagination and continues to do so. He has been, since his own era, the subject of countless paintings, sculptures and other works of art. These have, in most instances, been deployed for political or other specific purposes by their creators and patrons, with some having been re-claimed by a more democratic audience. They are clearly identifiable as valid receptions worthy of study. He also finds his way into popular music and poetry as well—not to mention, in the modern era, all sorts of media including drama, films, television, the internet and computer games. His image has been utilised by religious groups, both eastern and western, ancient and modern, for various ends. Ownership of his legacy is still fought over in his native land. Alexander’s *Nachleben*, or “afterlife”, through such receptions has been at least as active, and definitively longer-lived, as his brief but spectacular career as a world conqueror. And he continues to live on through these revised images in often strange and surprising ways.

In order to address such an extensive array of receptions, this *Companion* has turned out to be quite a sizeable and lengthy piece of scholarship. It is by no means comprehensive as it would take a whole library of considerable capacity to contain all possible receptions of Alexander. Even so, the contributors were chosen to reflect the breadth of the subject as well as to provide sufficiently varied material as to appeal to a wide range of scholarly interests. Hopefully there will be something for everyone here—from Classicists and Ancient Historians to Medievalists and Art Historians, from Media Studies to Political Science and Military History, and many others still beyond these.

However as editor, my rationale in selecting these topics and contributors, was not merely to canvass Alexander Studies generally and without any structured purpose. I teach Alexander at university and have devoted quite a bit of time and effort to research and

publication in this area. And I have shaped this volume with the express intent of supplementing the needs of those who want to advance their research and understanding of the subject. There is still much to be done on Alexander and this *Companion* cannot hope to amount to the “be all and end all” of the matter. That would, I think, be impossible for any such work. We, the editor and contributors, have at best here added something further of interest to the ongoing “conversation” about Alexander. As such, it will go a significant way towards enhancing our understanding and will provide new tools and resources for others to utilise in their own researches in the future. I have to that end sought out a mixed group of academics to produce the chapters in this volume. Some are well-known, established scholars whose continuing work on Alexander represents the culmination of years of research and effort. Their productions are most welcome and very necessary. But I have also quite deliberately pursued a number of up-and-coming authors, often just having completed their PhDs, in order to provide a “fresh” perspective, which I believe the subject greatly needs and from which we may all reap considerable benefits. I have also been especially keen that the contributors be as broadly international in origin as possible, within reason. This too I maintain is necessary in order to represent both the diversity of the receptions as well as to serve as an illustration of just how immense and far-reaching is the subject being considered. I only regret that more could not have been included; but, a two-volume *Companion* already approaches Colossus as it stands.

Let me add in closing that working on Brill’s *Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great* has been an honour and a privilege. Just editing all of these chapters alone has enhanced my own knowledge of the subject more than I could have hoped. I have met and corresponded with such an amazing group of extraordinary individuals, all unified by the common thread of Alexander, that I have felt grateful, humbled and occasionally awestruck. What follows represents, I maintain, examples of the best and brightest in their attempts to tackle this complex and immense subject in their own unique ways. I also assert that both those who wrote these chapters as well as those who may read them, whatever their view of the Conqueror, are all in some sense latter-day Companions of Alexander. All of us here bear that burden with grace and poise. Some are clearly still fighting over his incorruptible corpse, much as did his original Companions after his early demise. For others, he is very much still living, reigning and ruling the cosmos and will continue to do so through the efforts of those who carry him, so to speak, to this very day and beyond. I also feel the need to offer one final caveat for anyone who finds themselves caught up in Alexander’s retinue. He will always remain, in some sense, forever young, filled with boundless energy and driven by his divine *pothos* to perpetually outdo himself, albeit vicariously now, through the imaginations and efforts of others. Working on this *Companion* has taught me (as if I did not already suspect it) that Alexander the Great is immortal through his constant re-invention and reception by each generation. But while he never grows old or perishes, being an idea more so than a man, the rest of us are indeed highly subject to those corporeal defects. And he has a way of wearing out mere mortals such as ourselves. In particular, I should like to give honourable mention to the late Professor A. B. Bosworth, with whom I originally spoke about writing this forward, and who had been keen to do it, but who has since, to the greatest sadness of the scholarly community, joined the subject of much of his excellent scholarship in the great beyond. So, reader beware. You have been duly warned. Even so, most of us consider it the greatest of honours to partake of Alexander’s superlative legacy, if only in a small way, clutching our own little speck of his vast fortune, to have our names, albeit fleetingly, connected with his. There are far worse ways to spend one’s time. Though, I can predict I think with some accuracy that, if there is anyone around in another twenty three centuries hence, they will even then likely be talking about, and disputing over, Alexander. The rest of us can only hope to be so fortunate.

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