

ALEXANDER AND THE EAST

The Tragedy of Triumph

A. B. BOSWORTH



CLARENDON PRESS OXFORD

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Preface

THE origins of this book are of some interest. In 1993 I was invited to give the Sixth Broadhead Lecture at the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch, New Zealand. For the occasion it seemed appropriate to give a general lecture on Alexander, developing many of the ideas I had only been able to adumbrate in my *Historical Commentary* on Arrian. It also gave me the opportunity to rebut some misapprehensions of my concept of Alexander's reign, which have become common currency. My work is not 'revisionist' (it goes back in fact to Niebuhr and Grote, before Droysen produced his classic encomiastic interpretation of the period), nor is it 'unromantic'. However, the romance is not the trivial picture of the wild-eyed, visionary Alexander. It is a much darker conception, its perspective that of the victims, the eggs in Alexander's ecumenical omelette. Before I came to the lecture, I had spent some years working through the text of Arrian. It was a depressing experience, cumulatively so, as the record of slaughter went on, apparently without an end. The slaughter was what Arrian primarily saw as the achievement of Alexander, and, for all his humanity, Arrian shares the Roman mentality which measured glory in terms of enemy casualties—with a lower limit of 5,000 enemy dead, the body count for a triumph. Alexander's most sympathetic chronicler in ancient times describes the reign as more or less continuous fighting, at times verging on massacre for its own sake, and his emphasis is certainly correct. Alexander spent much of his time killing and directing killing, and, arguably, killing was what he did best. That brute fact needed emphasis, and it was central to the Broadhead Lecture.

The Broadhead Trust stipulates publication of its lectures, and it seemed to me that 'The Shield of Achilles' would appear at best advantage as a thematic introduction to a set of studies exploring the background to Alexander's actions in the east of his empire, with particular emphasis on the period 329-325 BC, which I have come to consider of central importance for the entire Hellenistic Age. I

already had an unpublished general lecture ('Alexander and the Desert'), which investigated Alexander's motives for conquest and the human cost of his passage through the Makran. The two pieces had a unity, and could be tied together by a series of detailed studies of the period. The result is the four central chapters of the book, in which I explore various overarching themes. I begin with the extant sources, with the problems of assessing variant traditions, and draw attention to the pervasive phenomenon of literary elaboration in the primary and secondary sources. The study of the sources leads naturally to investigation of their origins, the local informants exploited by Alexander and the accuracy of the information they imparted (Chapter 3, Information and Misinformation). In particular I was attracted by the remarkable complicity between questioner and informant which has bedevilled modern anthropological research. Alexander and his men had their prejudices and expectations about the lands they invaded. They expected to find Amazons when they believed themselves close to the Black Sea, and there were fabulous stories in circulation about the Indian lands, which they were eager to verify. Their informants duly obliged with a medley of material, both true and *ben trovato*, which was designed to satisfy the curiosity of their new masters. The most remarkable development, the evolution of the myths of Dionysus' and Heracles' conquests in India, is analysed in Chapter 4 (The Creation of Belief). Here I attempt to document how Alexander bolstered his conviction of divinity by evidence provided by his staff from their interrogation of the natives. At the same time I investigate the circumstances of the campaigning, when Alexander was isolated in the recesses of Sogdiana or Gandhara, engaged in vicious siege warfare, often with a mere handful of senior officers. The isolation encouraged the most extravagant concepts of his person and monarchy, and the absolutism of his last years is, to my mind, starkly foreshadowed as early as the Sogdian Revolt of 329. The circle is closed in Chapter 5 (The Justification of Terror), where I examine what conquest meant for its victims and how its atrocity could be justified in Alexander's eyes. His demands for sovereignty were absolute, and all peoples who had ever come under the sway of the Persians (or the mythical Dionysus) were automatically his subjects. Resistance was *ipso facto* rebellion, and it was treated as such, with indiscriminate massacre and enslavement.

In the course of these central chapters I make use of analogies

from the Spanish conquest of Mexico, in particular the years 1519 to 1522, when Cortés moved inland from the coast of Yucatan to discover and ultimately destroy the Mexican capital of Tenochtitlan. I was attracted to the period because I felt that Alexander's mental development in the isolation of Sogdiana and India might have its counterpart among the Conquistadors in America. That proved a dead end. The analogies were relatively trivial, precisely because Cortés never experienced the intellectual isolation of Alexander. There was always a representative of the Church to remind the conquerors of their religious duties, and the enmity of Diego Velázquez (the governor of Cuba) meant that Cortés was always acutely conscious of the need to operate in the political contexts of Spain and the Indies. However, if the analogy did not work in macrocosm, it certainly did in microcosm. The interaction of the Conquistadors with their new subjects paralleled that of Alexander with the Indians in many ways. The use of interpreters was startlingly similar, as was the interpreters' transformation of their subject-matter to accommodate the interests of their employers—and Doña Marina must have fulfilled for Cortés the role which men such as Calanus assumed for Alexander. Similarly the source tradition of the Mexican conquest, rich and abundant, is strongly reminiscent of the first generation of Alexander historians. It provides a working model with all the precise compositional dates and autobiographical detail which are lacking for the reign of Alexander.

One caveat must be lodged. I am not adducing the Mexican material as a general explanatory matrix. The differences between the two periods are profound, and the scale is quite disproportionate. Cortés took an army of a few hundred Spaniards (and several thousand Indian auxiliaries) to conquer the Valley of Mexico, a region densely populated but no more than 10,000 sq. km. in area, whereas Alexander headed the greatest expedition ever to leave Greek shores, and overran the eastern world as far as the border between modern Pakistan and India. The political settings, as we have seen, are totally different, as are the conceptual horizons. Alexander never entered a totally unknown world. At the Hyphasis he came closest to Cortés, the Cortés at Cempoala (August 1519), who had heard of the great inland empire of Montezuma and was eager to conquer it. That was Alexander's reaction to the reports of the Nanda kingdom of the Ganges, but his army notoriously failed to support his ambitions. Otherwise the two situations are distinct,

and we cannot call upon Cortés to explain Alexander. However, the similarities of detail cannot be discounted, and, in my opinion, they may be considered parallel manifestations of universal phenomena, all the more impressive in that they are so separated in time and cultural context. Onesicritus' conversation with Calanus through his three interpreters does match Cortés' interviews with Montezuma via Doña Marina and Aguilar, and the distortions produced by the interpreting are remarkably similar. Even the justification of conquest is comparable. Alexander did not have or need a *Requerimiento*, but he conceived himself as justified as Cortés in the territorial claims he made, and saw his victims as insubordinate vassals. Similar modes of thought evoked similar responses. For all the differences of scale the Mexican conquest supplies a host of small-scale analogies which can illuminate the reign of Alexander.

As usual, there are many debts to acknowledge. To Kate Adshead and Charles Manning I owe the invitation to give the Broadhead Lecture, generous hospitality while I was a visitor at Christchurch, and, indeed, the primary inspiration for this book. Elizabeth Baynham discussed the subject-matter with me while she was in Perth on study leave, and read the entire work in draft, making a large number of very helpful comments and criticisms. At a late stage I had the advantage of the detailed observations of Simon Hornblower and Sir John Elliott, which materially improved my presentation of Chapter 2. I have also benefited from the acute eye of Norman Ashton, who has read and criticized much of the book. My department and university gave generous material support, in particular a Time Release Award for the first semester of 1995, which enabled me to do most of the writing in ideal conditions; and a subvention from the Australian Research Council's Large Grants Scheme gave me the opportunity to work on the Indian material at Oxford in 1994 and 1995. Finally, and most importantly, I should thank my wife, Jo, for her encouragement and understanding throughout the gestation of this work.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, who was embroiled in a war he detested, witnessed some of the worst that man can do, and acquitted himself with dignity.

October 1995

A.B.B.

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Abbreviations

<i>AFLM</i>	<i>Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Macerata (Padua)</i>
Agrawala	V. S. Agrawala, <i>India as Known to Pāṇini</i> (Lucknow 1958)
<i>AHB</i>	<i>Ancient History Bulletin</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AncSoc</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i> (Louvain)
<i>AncW</i>	<i>The Ancient World</i> (Chicago)
<i>ASNP*</i>	<i>Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa</i> > serie III
Atkinson	J. E. Atkinson, <i>A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni</i> (Amsterdam and Uithoorn 1980-)
<i>BABesch</i>	<i>Bulletin Antieke Beschaving</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
Bellinger, <i>Essays</i>	A. R. Bellinger, <i>Essays on the Coinage of Alexander the Greats</i> Numismatic Studies 11 (New York, 1963)
Berve	H. Berve, <i>Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage</i> (2 vols.: Munich 1926)
Billows	R. A. Billows, <i>Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990)
<i>BJ</i>	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher</i>
Bosworth, <i>HCA</i>	A. B. Bosworth, <i>A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander, i—</i> (Oxford 1980-)

Brunt, <i>Arrian</i>	P. A. Brunt, <i>Arrian</i> (2 vols.: Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, Mass., 1976-83)
<i>CAR</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
<i>CHIran</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Iran</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i>
Droysen	J. G. Droysen, <i>Geschichte des Hellenismus</i> (2nd edn.: 3 vols.: Gotha 1877-8)
DS	C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, <i>Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines d'après les textes et les monuments</i> (Paris 1877-1919)
<i>Edson Studies</i>	<i>Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles E Edson</i> , ed. H. J. Dell (Thessaloniki 1981)
Engels	D. W. Engels, <i>Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army</i> (Berkeley 1978)
<i>Entretiens Hardt</i>	<i>Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique</i> (Fondation Hardt: Vandoeuvres-Geneva)
<i>FGrH</i>	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Berlin and Leiden 1923-)
GJ	<i>Geographical Journal</i>
Goukowsky	<i>Essai sur les origines du mythe d'Alexandre</i> (2 vols.: Nancy 1978-81)
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>Greece & the E. Med.</i>	<i>Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in History and Prehistory</i> , ed. K. Kinzl (Berlin and New York 1977)
Green	P. Green, <i>Alexander of Macedon</i> (London 1974)

- Hamilton, *Plut. AI.* J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch Alexander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1969)
- Hammond, *KCS*² N. G. L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (2nd edn.: Bristol 1989).
- Hammond, *Sources* N. G. L. Hammond, *Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's Life and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandrou* (Cambridge 1993)
- Hammond, *Three Historians* N. G. L. Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great: The So-Called Vulgate Authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius* (Cambridge 1983)
- Heckel W. Heckel, *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire* (London 1992)
- Hoplites* *Hoplites. The Classical Greek Battle Experience*, ed. V. D. Hanson (London 1991)
- Hornblower, *Hieronymus* J. Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford 1981)
- IBK* *Innsbrucker Beitrage zur Kulturgeschichte*
- IG* *Inscriptiones graecae* (1st edn.: Berlin 1873-)
- JDAI* *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archdologischen Instituts*
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
- JRAS* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
- JS* *Journal des Savants*
- Kornemann E. Kornemann, *Die Alexander-geschichte des Ko'nigs Ptolemaios I von Aegypten* (Leipzig 1935)
- MH* *Museum Helveticum*
- Moretti, *ISE* I. Moretti, *Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche* (Florence 1967-)
- Niese B. Niese, *Geschichte der griechischen und makedonischen Staaten seit der Schlacht bei Chaeronea* (3 vols.: Gotha 1893-1903)

<i>Orientalia Tucci</i>	<i>Orientalia Iosephi Tucci memoriae dicata</i> , ed. G. Gnoli and L. Landotti (2 vols.: Rome 1985)
PACA	<i>Proceedings of the African Classical Association</i>
Pearson, <i>LHA</i>	L. Pearson, <i>The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great</i> (Philological Monographs 20: Am. Phil. Ass. 1960)
Pédech, <i>Historians compagnons</i>	P. Pédech, <i>Historiens compagnons d'Alexandre</i> (Paris 1984)
POxy	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
Price, <i>Coinage</i>	M. J. Price, <i>The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus</i> (2 vols.: Zurich and London 1991)
PSI	<i>Papiri greci e latini</i> (Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto)
RE	<i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften</i> ed. Pauly, Wissowa, Kroll (Stuttgart 1893-)
Robert, <i>OMS</i>	L. Robert, <i>Opera Minora Selecta</i> , vols. i- Paris 1969-)
Schachermeyr, <i>AI</i> . ²	F. Schachermeyr, <i>Alexander der Große: das Problem seiner Persönlichkeit und seines Wirkens</i> (Sitzungsberichte der österr. Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Kl., 285 (1973)
Siddiqi	M. I. Siddiqi, <i>The Fishermen's Settlements on the Coast of West Pakistan</i> , Schriften des geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel XVI 2 (Kiel 1956)
SNR	<i>Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau: Revue suisse de numismatique</i>
Stewart	A. Stewart, <i>Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993)

Strasburger, <i>Studien</i>	H. Strasburger, <i>Studien zur Alten Geschichte</i> , ed. W. Schmitthenner and R. Zieppfel (3 vols.: Hildesheim 1982-90)
<i>Studia Naster</i>	<i>Studia Paulo Naster oblata</i> , ed. S. Scheers and J. Quaegebeur (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 12-13: Louvain 1982)
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i> , ed. H. von Arnim (4 vols.: Stuttgart 1903-24)
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
Tarn., <i>AI</i> .	W. W. Tarn, <i>Alexander the Great</i> (2 vols.: Cambridge 1948)
Tonnet	H. Tonnet, <i>Recherches sur Arrien. Sapersonnalité et ses écrits</i> (2 vols.: Amsterdam 1988)
<i>YCS</i>	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archdologie</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Morgenlndischen Gesellschaft</i> (Wiesbaden)
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZuAl d. Gr.</i>	<i>Zu Alexander dem Grofien: Festschrift G. Wirth</i> , ed. W. Will (2 vols.: Amsterdam 1988)

I

The Shield of Achilles: Myth and Reality in the Reign of Alexander the Great

ONE of the most attractive—and admirable—qualities of Henry Broadhead's commentary on the *Persae* is his ability to see beyond Aeschylus' 'patriotic enthusiasm' for the Greek victory and appreciate the tragic pathos of the defeated Persian monarch. I hope that he would have sympathized with my own approach to the history of Alexander the Great and the negative emphasis upon the costs of conquest. We should perhaps begin with a paradox. Imperialism is no longer in fashion, nor is aggression for its own sake. Yet a positively rose-tinted aura surrounds Alexander, the leader of one of the most successful wars of imperial aggrandizement, pursued wholly for gain and glory under the specious pretext of revenge. He has become divorced from history and elevated into a symbol, the type of military invincibility and the culture hero with a mission to propagate Hellenic values world-wide.

The tendency to idealize began in antiquity. Within a generation of Alexander's demise the rumours and slanders of poisoning gave impetus to full-blown fiction. A body of romance gradually accrued which had reached the dimensions of a novel by the Roman period and continued to develop in practically every language and culture from Scotland to Mongolia until the advent of the printing press. *The Alexander Romance* is overtly fictitious. However, the supposedly historical tradition of Alexander's reign poses serious problems. It has been seriously distorted by the practitioners of rhetoric and popular philosophy. The primary historians of Alexander tended not to be widely read in antiquity. They provided examples which seeped into the popular consciousness through the medium of derivative literature. Alexander could be invoked in negative ways, to provide instances of irascibility, intemperance, and divine pre-

tensions.¹ There were also more positive examples, actions of generosity, magnanimity, and sexual restraint.² But the constant factor in this exemplary use of Alexander is that the details are taken out of context, geared to the author's own rhetorical or moralizing purposes.³ The most famous and influential instance is Plutarch's ingenious treatise *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*.⁴ This followed the precedent of Alexander's contemporary, Onesicritus, who depicted the king in encomiastic vein and represented the Indian sage, Dandamis, acknowledging him as a philosopher in arms.⁵ For Onesicritus this was simply a tribute to Alexander's intellectual curiosity, which remained unstifled by his military calling. Plutarch, however, developed the conceit and constructed a bravura portrait of Alexander, the philosopher under arms, with a mission to impose civilization—on the Greek model—on the lesser breeds without the law; 'he sowed all Asia with Greek magistracies and so overcame its uncivilized and brutish manner of living' (*Mor.* 328e). He was sent by the gods as a mediator and conciliator for the whole world, and using force where reason was ineffective, he united all mankind in a single mixing jar, producing a cosmopolitan unity, in which all

¹ The prime example is Seneca, whose view of Alexander seems uniformly hostile. Cf. *De ira* 2. 17. 1-2; 3. 23. 1; *De clem.* 1. 25.1 (irascibility and cruelty); *De ben.* 1. 13. 1-2; 2. 16. 1 (*Ep. Mor.* 53. 10); 7. 2. 5-6; *Ep. Mor.* 94. 62-3 (grandiose ambition); 83. 19-23 (*ebrietas*). Not surprisingly, Seneca's judgements are echoed in a famous passage of his nephew Lucan's *Pharsalia* (10. 20-52), in which Alexander is stigmatized as the 'fortunate brigand' (*felixpmedo*), important only as an ominous example of universal monarchy (27-8). Yet even Seneca (*De ira* 2.23. 2-3) commends Alexander's trust in Philip the Acarnanian, which was all the more admirable given his general propensity to anger. See further A. HeuB, *Antike und Abendland* 4 (1954) 87-9.

² A crude but instructive sample is provided by Valerius Maximus' compilation of memorable sayings and deeds, published under Tiberius. Here Alexander is cited in a number of examples, evenly balanced between virtue and vice. On the credit side see 3. 8. ext. 6 (*constantia*); 4. 7. ext. 2 (*amicitia*); 5. 1. ext. 1 (*humanitas*); 6. 4. ext. 3 (*gravitas*). The negative examples are 8. 14. ext. 2 (desire for glory); 9. 3. ext. 1 (*iracundia*); 9. 5. ext. 1 (*superbia*).

³ There are interesting instances where the same episode can serve differing and even contradictory purposes. The marriage to Roxane is sometimes excoriated as a morganatic union, contracted through passion, sometimes commended as an act of reconciliation between east and west, or even adduced as an example of self-control—Alexander abjured a conqueror's recourse to violence. Cf. Bosworth, *HCA* ii. 131-3.

⁴ There is a convenient summary with pertinent discussion in Hamilton, *Plut. AI.* xxix-xxxiii. The most recent discussions are those by S. Schröder, *MH48* (1991) 151-7 and M. R. Cammarota, in *Ricerche plutarchee*, ed. I. Gallo (Naples 1992) 105-24, both of which correctly define the work as a piece of epideictic rhetoric, playing upon paradox for its own sake.

⁵ Strabo 15. 1. 64 (715) = *FGrH* 134 F 14a. Cf. Pedech, *Historiens compagnons* 108.

considered the world their nation, Alexander's camp their citadel, the good their kinsmen, and the bad aliens (*Mor.* 329b-c).

There is no denying the force of Plutarch's rhetoric, but it is rhetoric none the less, remarkably unsupported by corroborative detail. It is *assumed* that Alexander's foundations were intended to be centres of civilization,⁶ and *assumed* that he had a policy of unification; but no instances are given. Plutarch's influences here are literary rather than historical. The underlying concept was, as we have seen, suggested by Onesicritus; and something is also owed to the great Alexandrian scholar, Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who commended Alexander for ignoring any sharp distinction between Greek and barbarian but promoting men of ability and virtue whatever their racial background.⁷ Plutarch has broadened the picture. Eratosthenes' judicious selector of talent has become a visionary, supranational monarch, while Onesicritus' devotee of philosophy is transformed into a philosopher in action, achieving in reality what was only theory for Zeno and the Stoics. It cannot be stressed too strongly that this is a literary *jeu d'esprit*—a virtuoso juggling of standard themes to produce something strikingly novel and indeed paradoxical. Plutarch's Alexander is a creation of emotive rhetoric, its only contact with attested historical material a list of standard examples, not particularly apt to the theme.⁸ None

⁶ Plutarch simply lists Alexander's principal foundations (*Mor.* 328f), and states that they mitigated the primitive savagery (Τὸ ἄγριον) of the natives. This does scant justice to the culture of the Achaemenids, and overstates the sophistication of Alexander's cities. From Plutarch's encomium one would never guess that the first reaction to the news of Alexander's death was a mass movement by the new colonists back to Greece 'out of longing for Greek upbringing and culture' (Diod. 18. 7. 1).

⁷ Strabo 1. 4. 9 (66-7), towards the end of the Second Book of Eratosthenes' *Geography* (cf. 1. 4. 1; 2. 1.1). The context was clearly the propriety of the geographical and moral division of the world between Greek and barbarian. Eratosthenes made much of the phenomenon of virtuous barbarian societies such as the Romans and Carthaginians (cf. Andreotti, *Historia* 5 (1956) 267), and observed that Alexander, despite the advice of Aristotle, recognized merit irrespective of race. He may have been thinking of Alexander's benefactions to such specific communities as the Abii or the Euergetae (see below, pp. 151-2), rather than a general *integration* of Greeks and barbarians. All that is obviously shared by Eratosthenes/Strabo and Plutarch is Alexander's disregard of Aristotle's advice to discriminate between the races (see Badian's analysis, *Historia* 7 (1958) 434-5). That *may* have inspired Plutarch to develop his imagery of Alexander the unifier, but the picture he draws of universal reconciliation and cultural harmony is unique. At least it has no obvious parallel in Eratosthenes.

⁸ *Mor.* 332e-333f. Plutarch states that all Alexander's actions can be said to be those of a philosopher (<πδοοοϑ̄π̄ωγ), but he can only adduce the marriage to Roxane, the honour paid to Darius' corpse, and Alexander's trust in Hephaestion. These are