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1 – The Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje at the time of its construction. Photo by Maja Gori, 2008.  
2 – Roman gladiator. Part of a statuary group in Rruga Taulantia, Durrës, Albania. Photo by Filippo Carlà-Uhink, September 2019.

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ERAN ALMAGOR

**Review of Kenneth Royce Moore (ed.):  
*Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander  
the Great***

Brill (Leiden/Boston 2018) = Brill's Companions to  
Classical Reception, volume 14. 856 p. ISBN 9789004285071,  
€ 189.00

Moore's volume is a real attempt to answer the great need for a book which would cover the history of the reception of Alexander the Great. It assembles impressive young and senior scholars, with a wide array of topics, and is divided into three periods: ancient (3–376), modern/post-modern (543–843) and “Later Receptions in the Near- and Far-East and the Romance Tradition” (377–542)—which mostly overlaps with “medieval”.

Since Alexander the Great is one of the most renowned persons of antiquity, any attempt to encompass all the ways his image has been received from ancient to modern times, will, almost by definition, not be successfully fulfilled;

it would be doomed as too ambitious a project, similar to that of Alexander. Moore may have entertained this parallelism himself, since his volume contains thirty-three chapters, ostensibly matching the number of years of Alexander's short life span, betraying his wish for an *imitatio Alexandri* (cf. xi: “to have our names ... connected with his”). As so often with edited volumes, the chapters are not even in terms of depth, length, ideas, originality, relevance, presentation, readability and number of typos. Generally, the chapters survey broad topics but given the vast scope of each, are seemingly cut abruptly at their end. In this manner, both editor and contrib-

utors match their subject matter beautifully, and as Mairs describes 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries adventurers (577), they all aim not only “to find Alexander” but also “to be Alexander”.

The preface (ix–xi) and Moore’s own chapter (3–40) give no rationale for the inclusion of these specific topics and why other, interesting ones, are excluded. One noticeable thing in the volume is the prominent place of Plutarch in the history of reception of Alexander. For instance, Plutarch’s biography and the relevant *Moralia* works were widely copied in Byzantium (Jouanno, 449–50, 466). Alexander’s dispute with the Elders of the South in the Talmud (Tamid tractate) is compared (Klęczar, 380) to Plutarch’s presentation of Alexander’s argument with the Gymnosophists (*Alex.* 64–65). For Basil of Caesarea, Alexander as portrayed by Plutarch (*Alex.* 42.2) was a royal model of listening to the accused (Peltonen, 491–2). The fact that British adventurers kept copies of the Classical texts while exploring South and Central Asia is compared (Mairs, 589) to the practice of Alexander to keep Homer’s *Iliad*, as told by Plutarch (*Alex.* 8.2). The figure of Bagoas, so important for Mary Renault’s *The Persian Boy* (1972) and Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* (2004), appears more respectable in Plutarch (*Alex.* 67.7–8) (Baynham and Ryan, 616, 625). Napoleon was influenced by Plutarch’s picture of Alexander (and Caesar), and even was perceived in this manner

during his own lifetime (Fulińska, 545–6, 554, 557–8, 561–2, 572). Plutarch (*Alex.* 2) is mentioned as an inspiration for an obscure patriotic Modern Greek rap song (Taietti, 805–6). Plutarch is the only one among the extant five ancient sources on Alexander who receives a chapter of his own (Asirvatham, 355–76), and for this both contributor and editor should be highly commended.

Moore himself seems to be influenced by Plutarch’s *Alexander* throughout.

This appears not only in the inclusion of the last chapter on the disabled (Morris, 823–843), parallel to the depiction of Arrhidaeus’ calamity at the very end of the biography (*Alex.* 77), but also in Moore’s initial admission of the succinctness of his treatment of historical questions, since “others ... will address these far better in their chapters” (Moore, 8), perfectly matching the ironic beginning of the *Life* (*Alex.* 1.4). Unlike Plutarch, however, Moore seems to be expecting his readers to call him to account for his “own errors” (36). Indeed, this reviewer is surprised at the exceedingly positive image of Alexander that comes out in Moore’s discussion (5–35) absolving Alexander of any (or significant) responsibility in three historical episodes: the assassination of Philip II, the razing of Thebes and the death of Callisthenes.

In terms of historical analysis, a proper interpretation of Plutarch is important. Asirvatham makes an interesting strategic choice to glide over recent scholarly progress in the study



of Plutarch, thus presenting a fresh image of the biographer. Her chapter also begins with a promising approach to view Alexander “as the most ‘Roman’ of the Hellenes” (357). But sadly this does not go further than the rehashing of old stereotypes, such as Greek “self-control” and Roman militarism (356, 360, 365–6, 368). Plutarch was much more sophisticated than that. His usual play with ethnic labels reached its apex with the man who broke all political and cultural boundaries. Thus, there is irony in displaying Alexander’s mock “self-restraint” in his treatment of the captive Persian women (in *Alex.* 30.1 Darius’ wife Stateira died in childbirth, almost two years after being taken prisoner; the error of attributing restraint to Alexander here is also in Peltonen, 493, Warren, 742, cf. Jouanno, 466; but accurate in Erickson, 266 n. 49)—which is also brilliantly set against a Herodotean allusion (*Alex.* 21.10 ~ Hdt. 5.18.4), forcing the Macedonian to act like a Persian.

Plutarch’s story is not a tale of degeneration because of the movement eastward (*pace* Erickson, 262), but one of internal conflict and self-destructive ambition, traits which had been there before and a tale that challenges the very concepts of ‘Greek’ and ‘barbarian’. Perhaps there is a point in making Alexander a Roman in that through his own medizing/barbarization (see Nabel, 219, Gilley, 307 and the stereotypes in Mullen, 236–9) he prefigured (as well as caused) the impossible combination that

typified the status of Greek *paideia* in Rome, with detrimental effects to both cultures, as readers can repeatedly glean from Plutarch’s *Lives* (cf. Antony’s case as in Erickson, 269). In other words, similar to the way occupied Media conquered Alexander (and note Renault’s choice of telling his story through a “Persian Version”: Baynham and Ryan, 630), occupied Greece (and Alexander imagery) conquered Rome. Incidentally, the debate concerning Alexander’s barbarism/Greekness is still relevant as evidenced in the contemporary political dispute concerning Macedonia (Taietti, 817).

Plutarch’s attitude towards Alexander was not laudatory or idealizing (*pace* Jouanno, 452, 467; Peltonen, 480, 483–4). His ambivalent approach to the king as well as to Greek *paideia* is visible also in his two essays on Alexander (*On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*), where one of the arguments sets him as a “Great Civilizer” of the barbarians, who, for instance, makes them stop their practices of incest and parricide and instead introduces them to Greek literature like ... Euripides and Sophocles (328de). The subtle irony of this and other depictions was lost on many readers (Asirvatham, 369), rendering them highly influential in following generations, from the French enlightenment (Charles Rollin: Fulińska, 549–50), to Gustav Droysen (Wiesehöfer, 602–5) via Ulrich Wilken, Victor Ehrenberg or Frederick Wright, Georges Radet and

others (Bichler, 644, 647, 657–8, 660–1, 664), British imperialistic notions (Mairs, 583, Butler, 699), modern Greek images (Cohen, 783) and songs (Taietti, 808, 818)—and to Moore himself. It was even extended to Philip establishing rule and order over barbarous Macedonia and the chaos in Greece (Müller, 87–9 [Thomas Leland]). Yet, the *naïveté* is clearly not of (young) Plutarch (*pace* Moore, 35), but rather of the inattentive readers of his sophistic(ated) works.

In fact, Plutarch's essays are just one example, according to Moore, of the "overarching debate" between Alexander the "Lucky Tyrant" or the beneficent "Civilizer" (5, 24, 34–5), or, more precisely put, the debate whether fortune or virtue were responsible for Alexander's successes. These two receptions of Alexander appeared already in his lifetime, respectively in Demosthenes and Aeschines (Koulakiotis, 54–6, 60–1, although Ps.-Demosthenes may be a much later rhetorical exercise, *pace* 43–5) and have a long history (cf. Müller, 81, Palagia, 154, Muccioli, 292, 294, Celotto, 337, Klęczar, 393; Jouanno, 462; Peltonen, 480; Fulińska, 557; Wiesehöfer, 605–6). The volume's missing overview could have related how these approaches transformed over time. Thus, from a positive image of Alexander as spreading Greek *paideia*, he became among the Christians a derided symbol of a pagan king (Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 432–3; Peltonen, 480–2, 490). Conversely, the negative image of Alexander as a lucky

tyrant controlled by Fortune was transformed into a positive depiction of him among Jews and Christians as a tool at the hands of God (Klęczar, 384–5, 391, 394; Ben Shahar, 418; Peltonen, 494–7, 499–500; cf. already Aeschines in Koulakiotis, 55), or at the hands of history (Droysen: Wiesehöfer, 604).

Yet, there could be a third form of reception, and this is Alexander as a complete failure (morally, politically, administratively, in not providing an heir and in historical/cultural perspective), where neither fortune/divinity nor virtue play a role. This theme does come out in the ancient texts and occasionally appears in the volume (cf. Erickson, 267; Gilley, 305, 307, 313–4; Klęczar, 394 [Tamid tractate]; Peltonen, 486–7 [Eusebius], 489 [Orosius]; Wiesehöfer, 599, 607; Bichler, 641, 644, 648, 662, 666; McAuley, 717, 724), thereby causing Philip II's image to be recovered (Müller, 79, 81–2, 90; Muccioli, 291). Parenthetically, the discussion on Afghanistan implicitly proves that Alexander was not successful even militarily in that area (Warren, 741, 747–8: "he chose to focus outward from Afghanistan, not inward", 752). Naturally, Alexander's imitators fail as well (Erickson, 258–9, 271; Gilley, 320; Celotto, 333, 337–45). This theme ties in with failed attempts to tell Alexander's story (Robert Rossen's movie from 1956: Blanshard, 675–91, but this is equally true of many lost ancient accounts and Stone's movie, which failed in critics' reviews, if not financially, and

which actually addressed “failure”). It should have been given a much greater place in the book (John Grainger’s study [*Alexander the Great Failure*, London, 2007], for instance, does not appear in the bibliographic lists).

Another approach visible in the volume is that all forms of reception resemble each other, resulting in conflation of fiction and reality. This actually fits in with the known reception of Alexander (in particular in the *Alexander Romance*; the way locals at Kalash, Pakistan (the Kafirs) became descendants of Alexander’s soldiers: Mairs, 592, Butler, 698, 706; or the way a biblical text formed the basis for imaginative creation related to the Samaritans in Josephus’ account of Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem: Ben Shahr, 407–8, 417, 420–1). Thus, Lucan’s fictional story of Caesar coming to Alexander’s tomb (accurately in Celotto, 335–7, Asirvatham, 372 n. 39) becomes reality in Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 429–30; Statius’ fiction of Caesar replacing Alexander’s head on Lysippus’ equestrian statue with his own (doubted in Asirvatham, 372) becomes reality in Cohen, 779; Cleitarchus’ sarcastic portrayal (Athen. 13.576e) of Thais as responsible for the burning of Persepolis palace becomes reality in McAuley (721, 724). With respect to details in ancient historical works (like the group of mutilated Greeks encountered by Alexander in Persia and his ensuing compassion), Morris (832) sums up this approach: “why the incident was men-

tioned at all by the ancient historians if it wasn’t true”. Squillace (130–3) claims that because of his connection with the Peripatetic school, Ptolemy had to relate the truth about the death of Callisthenes in his work in order to protect his reliability; this claim, very close to Arrian’s belief in Ptolemy’s reliability *qua* king (*Anab.* Proem. 1–2), is not necessary, since it is equally plausible that Ptolemy conveyed some fiction in order to flatter the Peripatos. Indeed, this frame of mind is the same that made Mary Renault’s invention that Bagoas inspired Alexander to adopt the policy of racial fusion into a Wikipedia “fact” (Baynham and Ryan, 632, 636); it is thus no wonder that Renault, an author of fiction, is included by Moore in a historiographic debate (9, 11, 20–21, 32, 37).

But Alexander was definitely not “a product of later ages”, as one of the contributors curiously asserts (162). He was a real person (*pace* Moore, 3: “if he may be said to exist anywhere at all”) and the proper subject of historical studies aiming at the truth, which should be completely separated from fiction and the manipulation of later generations—although these too are legitimate subjects to historical studies of another level. McAuley (719) correctly differentiates between the two levels.

Seemingly, like one famous interpretation of his subject matter’s plans (cf. Mullen, 240; Wiesehöfer, 602–4; Bichler, 656–60, 665–8), Moore’s aim in the volume was to mix all humanity in

a unified project (p. x: “as broadly international in origin as possible”), and in this Moore appears to be more successful than Alexander. This universality is obstructed, however, by some dubious political statements (Warren, 750: “... the West grapples with the likelihood of nuclear-armed Iran”), which may alienate some readers. Similarly, the Modern Greek perspective on clashes with its Slavic neighbours is repeatedly stressed (Cohen, 765–82; Taietti, 798–818), with hardly any space for other voices (of Bulgaria or FYROM, now North Macedonia). Over the centuries, reception of Alexander fell prey to questionable approaches, which outdid the Classical texts in terms of racism and sexism. For instance, German scholars blamed Alexander for the imagined policy of “racial fusion”/Europeanization of the Orient as impossible or as cosmopolitanism, susceptible to the “deadly grip” of the East, only justifiable as long as it comprised Aryan nations and not Semites or “Asian elements” (Bichler, 642–53); similarly, Thais’ destruction of Persepolis’ palace is justified in modern popular views (found on the Internet) not only against an orientalist vision of Persian oppression and absolutism, but also as “empowered femininity” (McAuley, 730–7). A clear editorial moral stance marking these approaches solely as opinions subject for research is missing.

Naturally, one would expect some repetition in such an enormous book,

and some themes and topics do resurface (e.g., Seneca and Lucan: Nabel: 217–8, Muccioli, 290–1, Gilley, 306–7, 309, 311, Celotto, 325–54, Peltonen, 488, 490; Octavian’s visit to Alexander’s tomb: Holton, 96, Muccioli, 277, Celotto, 335, Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 430; the Donations of Alexandria: Holton, 110, 114, Erickson, 267–71, Muccioli, 280; Alexander’s meeting with the Jewish high priest: Klęczar, 380; Ben Shahar, 403–426; Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 436, Jouanno, 465, Peltonen, 497; Parthians as Alexander’s heirs: Nabel, 204, 222, Muccioli, 286; Nectanebo as Alexander’s father: Müller, 83, Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 434, Blythe, 504, Nawotka, 534; Darab as Alexander’s father: Nabel, 201–2, 220, Nawotka, 537, cf. Müller, 84; Unclean Nations or Gog and Magog: Klęczar, 387–90, Jouanno, 468–70, Blythe, 505, 512, 515, 517–8, Nawotka, 538; Alexander the Roman [Rum]: Nabel, 205–8, 215, 223, Jouanno, 464, Nawotka, 529, 536; Alexander’s counterfactual clash with the Romans: Erickson, 257, Muccioli, 292–5, Blythe, 507, 513–4, 517; Alexander, Heracles and the Ptolemies: Erickson, 259–61, Holton, 101–2, 106–8; the adventurers Alexander Burnes, Charles Masson, Aurel Stein—and Rudyard Kipling: Mairs, 577, 579–81, 588, Butler, 700–4 etc.). The impact of reading these parallel stories is akin to a comparison of the synoptic accounts of our extant sources on Alexander. Yet, despite the recurring matters, there are only a handful of internal cross-refer-



ences in the volume, making the studies appear separate and autonomous. Using Alexander imagery again, one could say that a display of a unitarian approach to the overall volume may have been preferable. For instance, instead of dividing the reception of Alexander through Ptolemy I Soter, once via the reading of his lost text (Squillace, 121–134) and once as a king and via his image in Theocritus' *Idyll XVII* (Holton, 101–8; cf. Erickson, 254, 256), a single chapter would have been more focused. On the other hand, some chapters read as if they already form a *continuum* within the volume: e.g., the Arabic expression *Dhu al-Qarnayn* ("Two Horned") is not explained by Nawotka (539), but is assumed to be understood already from the previous reading of Wojciechowska/Nawotka (443–4), without any cross-reference.

The sheer amount of information presented in the volume is difficult to handle or follow, and in some cases this is further problematized by the absence of visual aids. While certain images are included and are extremely useful (Cohen: some modern monuments of John Steell, George Zlatanidis, Nikolaos Dogoulidis and Evangelos Moustakas shown from several angles; seven images in Palagia's chapter), others are only described but are not shown (e.g., the Azara herm, coins, the Alexander Sarcophagus, the Pella hunting mosaic, a colossal head from Pergamon, relief stele at Nemrud Dag: Palagia, 140, 143–5, 148–50, 153,

157–8; Alexander's and Antony's coinage and that of the moneyer Livineius Regulus: Erickson, 259–60, 263; silver Roman coins with the type of Aesillas, portraits of Mithridates VI: Muccioli, 278, 281; some iconographic types of Alexander's statues in Egypt: Palagia, 144, 154, Wojciechowska/Nawotka, 441–2; church mosaics or façades: Blythe, 505–6; Charles Le Brun's paintings and works inspired by them depicting Napoleon, the caricature "The Gallic Idol": Fulińska, 568, 571–2; Sodoma's painting of Alexander's wedding to Roxane: Baynham and Ryan, 620; Reynolds' *Thais of Athens with Torch* and Simoni's *Alexandre à Persepole*: McAuley, 730, 732; *Dying Alexander* in the Uffizi: Cohen, 760).

This is entirely within the tradition of the reception of Alexander—where *ekphrasis* of a (fictional) image is known (Blythe, 507, 510, 514–5), as well as depictions of lost works (the Hunting Group of Craterus: Palagia, 142–3, 150; a statue in the Altis at Olympia: Muccioli, 278; the *Granicus Monument*: Cohen, 781), but it makes the reading somewhat cumbersome. The only map in the volume, taken from Wikipedia, is helpful neither for its chapter (Warren, 753) nor the volume as a whole. Other maps of Alexander's world or that of the places visited by modern adventurers (Mairs, Butler) should have been incorporated. Also absent is a table delineating the different motifs between the various recensions of the *Alexander Romance* in

its key manifestations, as well as in its main translations and other Alexander texts/passages in Greek, Latin, Syrian, Hebrew, the Coptic fragments and New Persian. This would have made the reading of Klęczar (380–1, 387–93, 395–7), Jouanno (467–9), Blythe (502–24), Wojciechowska/Nawotka (438, 440) and Nawotka (525–539) much easier.

The volume offers “something for everyone”, as promised (p. x), even though admittedly not comprehensively. The book does not help us know the real Alexander, but that is not its aim (Moore, 37). The book does not manage to solve the riddle called “Alexander” or explain the reasons for his popularity (although some contributors do try: Cohen, 754–5), but it is certainly a step in that direction. For all Alexander scholars and students, and bearing in mind there is no other companion to the reception of Alexander in sight at the present, this is a very useful book. Indeed, it is a must-have volume.

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Review of Kenneth Royce Moore (ed.):

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Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great

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