

Richard Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), ISBN 9780300112030

The legends concerning Alexander are as numerous as they are varied. Richard Stoneman, one of the world's leading experts on these legends, has integrated the tales that sprung forth about the conqueror following his death (323 BC) and analyses how each culture and era is able to transform the king into a model for its own preconceptions about the world. This work brings together the various legends concerning Alexander in a new way for the English reading audience. Stoneman focuses rightly on the *Alexander Romance* as the model through which the legend spread throughout Egyptian, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures, with the King represented as everything from world conqueror with limitless desire to an intellectual, inventor and sage.

Stoneman divides his work into twelve roughly chronological chapters which trace the king's development through the various cultures that utilize his legend. The first two chapters deal with the legends concerning Alexander's birth, specifically with the Egyptian and Persian attempts to legitimise Alexander's rule as a native rather than as a foreign conqueror. The *Romance* may provide evidence for Alexander having been crowned Pharaoh, although none of the historical sources do so. Stoneman also carefully lays out the case for the origin of the work in the Hellenistic period rather than later. The second chapter focuses on the relationship between Alexander and Darius, both as brothers (in the *Shahnameh*) and as legitimate successors. This concept is extended by the false version of Darius' death where the dying Persian King speaks to Alexander and gives him his daughter Roxane (not in actuality his daughter) in marriage. This version closely follows the Greek *Romance*, except for the notable Zoroastrian tone.

The third chapter picks up the theme of Alexander as a native rather than a foreigner. This Jewish version of Alexander is presented as admirable, pious and pro-Jewish which is radically different from other Jewish traditions such as the First Book of Maccabees and the third book of Sibylline Oracles from the reign of Nero. Stoneman attributes the differences in the *Romance* to a split in Jewish opinion between the Alexandrian Jews and those in Jerusalem, allowing him to focus on the development of Alexander's greatest city. Alexandria is represented in the legends both as Alexander's greatest achievement and a point of resistance to the Macedonians. Both views are intimately tied to Jewish and Egyptian views of the king.

Chapters four and five detail Alexander's time in India and demonstrate a different side of the hero. Here we meet Alexander as a stranger in a foreign land, rather than as kin or kindred spirit. Chapter four acquaints the reader with the ancient western views on India as a poorly understood land of monstrous races and fierce creatures. The key text is the Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about India which passed into the Middle Ages and became the first text translated into English. It starts with the defeat of the Indian King Porus (July 326 BC) after which Alexander continues to the Caspian gates then past the sandy wastes to the land of the Indians surrounded by hippopotamuses (half-man and half horse) and then to the land of Night Terrors with its host of monstrous creatures. The letter climaxes in Alexander's visit to the temple of the Sun and the Moon (which also is the climax of the Romance). This text and the Romance form most of the knowledge about India during the Middle Ages, and is beautifully illustrated by the maps included in the text.

While chapter four deals with monsters, chapter five forms the 'moral heart of the Romance'. Stoneman focuses first on the nature of the interchange between the sages and Alexander and demonstrates the story's roots both in the Greek philosophical tradition as well within Indian philosophy. Stoneman then continues to analyse the relationship between the Brahmans and the various utopias in which different Brahmans (Indian, Jewish, or Christian) offer Alexander a chance at moral salvation which his insatiable *pothos* does not allow him to accept.

Chapter six focuses on Alexander's development as an intellectual figure with a longing to understand all things in the world. It begins with Alexander's cleverness in military affairs and his skill with speaking and interpreting omens (all features of the historical versions of Alexander) and then moves on to Alexander's great adventures in the Romance, the diving bell and the flight. In both Stoneman carefully compares the legends of Aesop. The moral of these two quests is that Alexander has pushed the bounds of human ability and can go no further nor should he desire to do so. This theme is returned to in chapters eight and nine.

Chapter seven focuses on the astonishing lack of sex in the Romance. Little mention is made in the Romance of Roxane, Barsine, Bagoas or even Hephaestion. Instead, the focus is on women who Alexander conquers peacefully and on motherly figures Olympias, Ada of Caria and most importantly Candace of Meroe. These women take the place of Alexander's love interests and truly set the work aside from other romances.

Chapters eight and nine move Alexander from the pagan world to the monotheistic world by highlighting his pursuit for the impossible. Alexander pursues both immortality and Paradise both which he will never obtain. Chapter nine has Alexander enclose the Unclean Nations who will be released at the end of times. This ties the Alexander whose morals have been developed into Christian theology which allows for his adoption into the medieval world.

The final chapters describe the development of Alexander in the West and his death in Babylon. Alexander develops from a pagan symbol of resistance to the ideal chivalric knight until he finally returns to where he began in the Romance, comparing his life of conquest with the quiet of the Indian philosopher, a frustrated seeker of the grace of God.

The modern Greek Alexander rightly closes the work as the hero of modern folklore who still lives and is the keeper of storms. Stoneman carefully weaves through the fraught territory of Alexander's role as a Macedonian or a Greek hero and is able to return in the epilogue to the Klaus Mann's *Alexander: Roman der Utopie* which features the failed utopian seeking Alexander. Stoneman has clearly demonstrated how the Alexander of legend offers something for everyone and every age.

The work is clearly designed for someone familiar with the Alexander Romance, although is easily readable, and each chapter begins with a selection of relevant passages. The lavish illustrations are well incorporated into Stoneman's meticulous argument. The bibliography is extensive and an essential starting point for anyone interested in the Alexander Legend. The two appendices are well ordered overview of the various recensions of the text. This volume provides an excellent overview of the development of the Alexander legend which is accessible and useful to both the specialist and non-specialist.

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