
Alex Rowson, *The young Alexander. The Making of Alexander the Great*, London, William Collins Press, 2023, 494 pp [ISBN 978-00-08284-39-8].

There is a kind of obsession in our culture concerning Alexander the Great. My very dear prof. F. J. Gómez Espelosín titled his review on the afterlife of Alexander's stories and history with a clever subtitle: "History of an Obsession"¹. I use to remember here the words by R. Lane Fox in the very beginning of his Prologue to the first edition of his best-seller book on Alexander in 1975, where he mentions he had to read more than a thousand documents to write that lines. And there is a long road from 1975 to our own days².

This obsession, traced back now in different studies³, has a high peak in the age of Oliver Stone's film on Alexander, and if the worst predictions become reality, we will probably be talking again on how Hollywood's fiction disregards Alexander and his extremely rich legacy, with the phantom menace of a film by Zack Snyder becoming film in a near, unexpected and frightening future. So, we have here what we can guess a complex enigma: the darkly riddle of why if Scholarship is working hard and very carefully, in rich and wide perspectives, on Alexander, his time, and the many faces of historical and cultural realities, and despite this unaffordable yearly amount of research and publications those in charge of making these things arriving to common audiences prefer to simply choose clichés and non-sense oversimplistic explanations, sometimes even faking history in what they claim to be in benefit of Box Office. But please, do not misunderstood me here: I am not a purist, I prefer a good film rather than a very well historical accuracy in a bad film. Maybe, however, I'd like to guess Alexander deserves more than simply to try to hit the bell looking for a terrific Box Office.

On the other hand, those who disagree with my point of view can easily make an argument on the fact that general audiences are not concerned with History. History in capital letters, of course. They will say History is boring, and nobody in a cinema is trying to look for what exactly *was*. I can hardly avoid here to hear my consciousness quoting on the heavy words, so full of content but also so difficult to charge, of Ranke, who guess the Historians shall tell the History *as it really was* ("wie es eigentlich gewesen ist"), confronting the deeply wise knowledge of my analphabet *granma*, Josefa Lorenzo, who uses to warn me: "Things are not as it is, but as it seems to be". I always say these words from my grandmother shall be written in the gates of every Faculty of History worldwide.

A great answer to those who defence the very poor argument that History is boring can be find in this new book by Alex Rowson. When I noticed someone have written a book on the early life and 'forge' of the great Alexander, I firstly became surprised. I

¹ F. J. GÓMEZ ESPELOSÍN (2016): *En busca de Alejandro. Historia de una obsesión*, Alcalá de Henares.

² R. LANE FOX (1975): *Alexander the Great*, London: 11.

³ To GÓMEZ ESPELOSÍN 2016, already quoted (*supra*, n. 1), we must add here some recent books: P. BRIANT (2016): *Alexandre: Exégèse des lieux communs*, Paris; K. MOORE (ed.) (2018): *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*, Leiden; K. NAWOTKA *et al.* (eds.) (2019): *The Historiography of Alexander the Great*, Wiesbaden; O. LAPENA – B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ (2020): *Alejandro Magno en las pantallas*, Bellaterra; B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ – M. MENDOZA (eds.) (2023): *Historiographical Alexander. Alexander the Great and the Historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Coimbra.

did it myself this year too! What a coincidence. Also, I became even more surprised by the fact that the book by Rowson was also oriented to a general audience (as my own, too!), and it was not a scholar's monography nor a research in Classics. My curiosity lead me quickly to contact the author, while I also run to purchase the book. And when I can open it and read it, my surprise was huge.

As a scholar in Alexander the Great, since 1998 I have been observant of any kind of papers, books, interpretations, media, products and so of this fieldwork. And I use to review the usual books for general audience on Alexander, but I shall confess I know no other book like that of Rowson. First, the early surprise of beginning the book not attending to Alexander's deeds and glory, but to the discovering of his father's tomb. What a start! The reader who seeks to find a way to Antiquity and is introduced to facts far in time to Ancient Mediterranean and transported to November 8th 1977, following the steps on Manolis Andronikos to one of the most amazing archaeological discoveries of the last decades. Actually, Alex Rowson writes clearly, easily, but also with some kind of care for the details. One can 'feels' the expectation of Andronikos and his team that day. This clue results in an excuse for the author to guide the reader, not just to an usual, many times told, account of Alexander as a hero world-conqueror, but to other way of intellectual play. The links and descriptions between ancient times and modern days are a usual tool in the writing of Rowson's book and allows the reader to travel beyond time and landscapes. Also, Rowson dedicates a lot of lines to describe places and sites, regions, and I must confess this can probably be a great reading for those tourists trying to find their own path in Greece among the many wonders of the Classical past.

There are many goals in Rowson's book. Let me say I envy his ability to write plain, clear, and adding beautiful descriptions of the places and the facts. I have tried to find him in errors, and of course, there are topics and explanations I do not agree, but he has been very able to avoid unconfutable explanations, and my feelings are that each reader can find here the thread of interests that later can pursue further with other readings. Rowson shows how a very well documented book can also be powerfully popular. Many others try to describe Alexander in easy-reading way, and I am one of them. But Rowson does not oversimplifies: his book has almost 500 pages, a terrific extension for a book oriented to popular readers, with a probable lack of previous knowledge on the topic. But those who already know a lot on Alexander will also find a tasty reading: maybe not in the details and the facts, but in the way Rowson drives the narrative, from geography and modernity to ancient history. I like so much the inclusions of parts of the memories of archaeological excavations and even personal stories by the archaeologists and historians, during the book's many different scenarios.

Shall I say I did not know Alex Rowson before? I must confess it. With no other link that the joy for knowledge (and the knowledge on Alexander, to be concrete), I admire what Alex Rowson offers here: a very beautiful, enjoyable and nice trip for Alexander's life and times, and a bridge between what scholarship tries to figure out with constant research and the good will and expectation a common reader who loves to read can find in the pleasure of knowledge.

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