

I

Introduction

BRIAN BOSWORTH

The passionate popular interest in Alexander has never flagged. It may even be intensifying in this age of mass communication. Web sites proliferate on the Internet, where a plethora of aficionados advertise their fascination with the Macedonian conqueror. In the most powerful medium of all, television, there has been an enthusiastic response to Michael Wood's recent series with its striking visual images of the route of conquest, accompanied by a terse, energetic commentary on the more colourful episodes of the reign.¹ Translated into book form (Wood 1997) it has become a best-seller. Fact and fiction are here intertwined, and the result is a new Alexander Romance with all the fascination of the old. The object of the series is entertainment—in which it has succeeded admirably. It has also raised public interest in the charismatic figure of Alexander and challenged specialists to give new answers to old questions. That is the purpose of the present volume, to take new approaches, to analyse and explain some of the huge body of romance that has adhered to the historical Alexander and to address the perennial problems of kingship and imperialism. We cannot claim to be unveiling universal truth. Given the state of the evidence that is impossible. What is more feasible is to identify distortion and myth-making, to provide a general context of historical interpretation, and to clear the obstacles preventing a dispassionate and balanced assessment of the few questions which can be profitably discussed.

The besetting problem of Alexander scholarship is the dearth of contemporary sources. That has not changed in

I am grateful to Elizabeth Baynham, Michael Flower, and Olga Palagia for their advice and helpful criticism.

¹ One may also mention Antony Spawforth's BBC production, 'Alexander the Great: the God-King' (1996), with its ironically sceptical treatment of the newest piece of Alexander fiction, the supposed tomb at Siwah.

the last decades. There has been no influx of new documentary material like the marvellous bronze inscriptions from Spain which have so enriched our knowledge of early Imperial Rome.² The corpus of contemporary inscriptions has been increased by a handful of documents from Macedonia which raise interesting questions about Alexander's relations with his subjects in the distant homeland but leave us more perplexed than enlightened.³ The same applies to the study of Alexander's prolific and enigmatic coinage. New issues have been discovered, predominantly in the great Babylon hoard; we now have more (and more revealing) examples of the Porus decadrachms and a whole series of tetradrachms with Indian themes.⁴ However, the problems of dating and provenance remain as controversial and intractable as ever. There have been sensational archaeological discoveries, but again they are the subject of intense academic debate. More than twenty years after their discovery the contents of the Vergina Tombs are still incompletely documented, and there remains deep disagreement about their dating; the once conventional attribution of Tomb II to Philip II has come under increasing attack, and archaeological and historical arguments have combined in different patterns without any accepted dating peg emerging. That has been the stimulus for Olga Palagia's contribution⁵ in which iconographic analysis is combined with historical interpretation to secure a late dating (after the eastern campaigns of Alexander) for the hunting fresco on Tomb II. Such progress is, however, rare. The gaps in our knowledge are usually too extensive for us to resolve the problems presented by the material evidence.

The history of the period remains based on literary evidence. Here too there is a lack of contemporary material which has not been rectified by papyrological discoveries.

² In particular the *Lex Irnitana*, the *Tabula Siarensis*, and, above all, the great *Senatus Consultum* recording the condemnation of Cn. Piso. It has been observed by Miriam Griffin that 'The Spanish inscriptions on bronze are making a fair bid to rival the Egyptian papyri in their contribution to our knowledge of the ancient world'.

³ The definitive edition with full bibliography is Hatzopoulos 1996: 25–8, no. 6; 84–5, no. 62. See also Hatzopoulos 1997; Errington 1998: 77–90.

⁴ See Price 1982; 1991. For recent summaries and bibliography see Lane Fox 1996 and Le Rider 1995–96: 856.

⁵ Below, Ch. 6.

The one piece of evidence which has emerged (a fragmentary account of the Thracian campaign of 335 BC) is an enigma, elusive in genre and only explicable through extant literature.⁶ It adds little or nothing in its own right. The basic evidence is what it always has been: derivative writings from the Roman period which draw upon the lost contemporary historians of Alexander. There is general agreement that this source material falls into two families. On the one hand we have the history of Arrian which is explicitly based on Ptolemy, Aristobulus, and (to a lesser degree) Nearchus, and on the other a tradition common to Diodorus, Curtius Rufus, and Justin, which is thought to derive from the popular Hellenistic writer, Cleitarchus of Alexandria. There is also the biography of Plutarch, which drew upon a mosaic of sources, and the voluminous geography of Strabo, which adapted significant passages of major historians, predominantly Onesicritus, Nearchus, and Aristobulus. This canonical list now has an extra member in Polybius, whose references to Alexander are analysed (amazingly for the first time) by Richard Billows, who argues that he drew upon Hieronymus and ultimately Demetrius of Phalerum.⁷

It is one thing to put a name upon a lost source, quite another to identify how that source was adapted in its extant context. Paradoxically one of our most powerful research tools, Jacoby's monumental collection of the fragments of the lost historians, is responsible for many misapprehensions. Direct quotations are identified by Sperrdruck, but the vast majority of 'fragments' are paraphrases by secondary writers, and we have no indication how faithfully they reproduce the content of the original or even how much of the context is attributable to the named author.⁸ As a result

⁶ Published by Clarysse and Schepens 1985. The text has been interpreted as part of a history or, less probably, a fragment of Strattis' commentary on the Royal *Ephemerides* (Hammond 1987; 1993: 201–2). I suspect that the work was a very detailed campaign history, which gave a full account of the movements of Alexander and his lieutenants, correlating the invasion of Triballian territory with simultaneous actions in Eordaea and Elimeia, in Macedonia proper. Unfortunately Arrian's account (1. 2. 1) is compressed to the last degree, and the papyrus is too defective to reconstruct any continuous narrative. All that remains is a tantalizing miscellany of familiar names without a meaningful historical context.

⁷ See below, Ch. 10.

⁸ See the cautionary remarks of Brunt 1980 and Flower 1997: 4–9.

there has been a strong tendency to take what Jacoby prints as the work of the cited author, not the actual writer. The extant intermediary tends to be forgotten, and it is assumed that the text of Arrian, say, is a reflecting mirror for Ptolemy. That tendency has now been obviated by studies dedicated to the literature that has survived. Detailed commentaries on Arrian and Curtius have shown how complex and sophisticated their composition was.⁹

Arrian, for instance, does not merely transpose material from his sources. He engages in an allusive dialogue with the great historical masters of the past: Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon. There are subtle echoes of vocabulary; familiar themes from earlier periods are reworked in the context of Alexander's campaigns. There is also explicit literary rivalry. As a self-conscious stylist, by his own claim the equal of Alexander in the field of literature, he surpasses the writers of the past—in his own eyes at least. Consequently he subjects his source material to a counterpoint of allusive commentary. His description of the aftermath of Alexander's wounding at the Malli town is a good example. He drew on Nearchus for the vivid scene of the king's generals reproaching him for his excessive recklessness, but he dresses the scene in terminology that recalls Xenophon: Alexander's soldiers are made to represent their plight if their king died in language reminiscent of the Ten Thousand after the execution of their generals.¹⁰ The implicit comment leads to an explicit statement of opinion by Arrian (6. 13. 4), that the criticism was justified: Alexander's thirst for glory drove him to embrace danger. That in turn looks forward to the complex passage at the beginning of book 7, in which Alexander's insatiate desire for glory is treated from several aspects. His ambition for further conquest is represented as inherently plausible, because of the underlying passion for glory; if there were no one else to surpass, he would compete with himself.¹¹

⁹ Bosworth 1980a, 1995 on Arrian; Atkinson 1980, 1994 on Curtius.

¹⁰ Arr. 6. 12. 1–3; Xen. *Anab.* 3. 1. 2–3; for detailed discussion see Bosworth 1996a, 54–6.

¹¹ Arr. 7. 1. 4. The general sentiment was expressed by Aristobulus (Strabo 16. 1. 11 (741) = *FGrH* 139 F 56), and Arrian (7. 19. 6) duly records it as his own view (ὡς γέ μοι δοκεῖ). However, Arrian sharpens the comment, and expresses himself in

The theme is then illustrated by three vignettes from different sources: the criticisms by the Indian gymnosophists, the meeting with Diogenes, and finally Megasthenes' account of Alexander's conversation with the Indian sage, Dandamis.¹² This last scene is also reported by Strabo, who gives essentially the same substance but places it in a different context, a formal contrast between Dandamis and his rival, Calanus.¹³ The contrast is brought out by Arrian, but it is subordinate to the main theme, Alexander's failure to overcome his desire for fame. Dandamis' admonitions are an explicit commentary on the king's imperial ambitions, and form a bridge to the next episode in the history, the suicide of Calanus, who is portrayed as unconquerable (*ἀνίκητον*) in his resolution to die, as much so as Alexander in his determination to achieve world empire (Arr. 7. 3. 4). Here Arrian uses his sources with considerable sophistication. He does not misrepresent them, but he uses them discriminately to illustrate and underpin his view of Alexander. What is more, the material is not chosen with an eye solely for historical veracity. It is selected because it gives the most vivid illustration of his theme, and allows him to express his judgements both implicitly and explicitly. One cannot use his exposition as a primary source without taking account of his narrative perspective and indeed the tastes and expectations of his audience in the second century AD.

The same is true of the other extant writers. There is now a flourishing industry devoted to research on Plutarch, and

Thucydidean style (Högemann 1985: 130); where Strabo merely states that Alexander 'desired to be lord of all things', Arrian has a more vivid turn of phrase: Alexander 'was for ever insatiate of conquest'. The phrase is probably a deliberate reminiscence of Herodotus' Cyrus, who was 'insatiable of blood' (Hdt. 1. 212. 2-4; cf. 1. 187. 5), and implicitly compares the two conquerors (note also the warning against insatiable exploitation of good fortune in Xen. *Cyrop.* 4. 1. 15). The terminology recurs in the final summation of Alexander, where Arrian insists that his hero was most continent with respect to bodily pleasures and when it came to the pleasures of the mind he was completely insatiate—of fame alone (*ἐπαίνου μόνου ἀπληστότατος*). The lust for conquest was central in Arrian's picture of Alexander; it fascinated him, and despite himself a note of admiration underlies his moral censure.

¹² Arr. 7. 1. 5-2. 1 (gymnosophists); 7. 2. 1 (Diogenes); 7. 2. 2-4 = *FGrH* 715 F 34b (Dandamis).

¹³ Strabo 15. 1. 68 (718) = *FGrH* 715 F 34a. On this episode see Bosworth 1998: 181-90.

the richness and diversity of his biographical method are widely recognized. The *Life of Alexander* has played an important role in that evaluation. It was the subject of one of the earliest and best modern commentaries (Hamilton 1969), and the programmatic utterance in its preface ('we are not writing histories but Lives') with its insistence on the value of the illustrative anecdote and apophthegm has been widely recognized as the key to the interpretation of the biographies.¹⁴ Now there is less of a tendency to see a strict chronological sequence, more appreciation of the generic construction and the huge range of sources that Plutarch draws upon to illustrate Alexander's character. There is more to be done, of course. We still await a formal cross-comparison between the *Alexander* and its companion biography, the *Caesar*, to determine the degree of parallelism and the extent to which the interpretation of the one character has affected that of the other. However, there is probably more appreciation of the complexity of Plutarch than of any other source, and it is to be hoped that his rhetorical extravaganza in the first treatise, *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, will no longer be taken as the basic explanatory text for Alexander's treatment of his subject peoples.¹⁵

There are related problems in tackling the rest of the tradition. It is agreed (as, with rare exceptions, it has been for the last two centuries) that there is a common source which is drawn upon selectively by Diodorus, Curtius Rufus, Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, and miscellaneous late sources, the most important of which is probably the so-called *Metz Epitome*.¹⁶ This tradition,

¹⁴ Plut. *Alex.* 1. 1–2. On the comparable passage in the *Nicias* (1. 5) see Pelling 1992: 10–11, an essay in a collection which repeatedly invokes the opening of the *Alexander* (pp. 56, 109). On Plutarch's literary presentation of Alexander see Mossman 1988.

¹⁵ On this Badian 1958a: 433–40 remains primary. For the continuing influence of Plutarch's rhetoric see Bosworth 1996a: 2–5.

¹⁶ On the history of this discovery, perhaps the single most important contribution to the source criticism of Alexander's reign, see Bosworth 1976. There have been protests against the use of the label 'vulgate' (particularly Hammond 1983: 1–3; the term is defended by Bosworth 1988b: 8–9), but even the most confirmed critics of the terminology accept that there is a common tradition, used selectively and in different ways by a large proportion of our extant sources.

usually labelled the Alexander Vulgate, is plausibly ascribed to Cleitarchus of Alexandria, writing towards the end of the fourth century BC.¹⁷ Large segments can be identified, when we have parallel narratives in two or more extant accounts, but there remain intractable problems in assessing the degree to which the material is adapted and embellished. Diodorus has traditionally been treated as the most authentic conduit for the vulgate, since elsewhere he can be shown to have relied on a single source, sometimes over several books. But even he imposes his own style. Throughout his *Universal History* his vocabulary is uniform and recurrent; he has a preference for specific types of episode, which he describes in remarkably similar terms. Material from completely different sources is presented with the same terminology, and no distinctive stylistic fingerprints survive from the original works.¹⁸ He is also capricious in his selection. Known fragments of Cleitarchus are often not included in his work, and that has encouraged speculation that Cleitarchus was at best one of several sources. But we do not know Diodorus' reasons for choosing his material. It should be remembered that he wrote at a politically volatile period, during the Triumvirate, and there were episodes which he would treat with caution. Cleitarchus mentioned that Alexander received a Roman embassy shortly before his death in 323,¹⁹ but that incident was best omitted by Diodorus, who was writing in the Roman west at a time when the last of the Ptolemaic dynasty was threatening to hold sway in Rome itself (or so Octavian's propaganda asserted).²⁰ The omission

¹⁷ This seems now agreed: cf. Badian 1965; Schachermeyr 1970: 211–24; Hammond 1983: 84–5; Prandi 1996: 66–71.

¹⁸ See the detailed analysis in J. Hornblower 1981: 263–79. Perhaps the best example is his penchant for describing fighting in relays (*ἐκ διαδοχῆς*) in siege warfare throughout his history. It seems to have been his personal imposition upon his source material (cf. Sinclair 1966). On Diodorus' literary shaping of his sources see particularly Sacks 1994.

¹⁹ Pliny, *NH* 3. 57–8 = *FGrH* 137 F 31, on which see Bosworth 1988a: 85–91. The Romans are not named in the list of foreign embassies reported in Diod. 17. 113. 1–2 and Just 12. 13. 1 (the corresponding passage in Curtius is not extant).

²⁰ So, memorably, Hor. *Od.* 1. 37. 5–8 (cf. Prop. 3. 11. 45–6; Ovid, *Met.* 15. 827–8). Cleopatra's favourite prayer was allegedly to dispense justice on the Capitol (Dio 50. 5. 4; cf. Florus 2. 21. 2). In those circumstances it would have been an effective gibe to point out that the Romans had in effect offered submission to Alexander. In the context of the Triumviral period the only options were to rebut

cannot be shown to prove that Diodorus did not use Cleitarchus at this point of his narrative.

What matters is the material that Diodorus shares with Curtius and Justin. But here too there is a tendency to divide the tradition into what is favourable or unfavourable to Alexander; the campaign narrative can be precise, detailed, and informative or sensational and slapdash. This variation in narrative tone encourages the inference that there are two distinct sources at issue, a slovenly, romanticizing scandal-monger (Cleitarchus) and a much more scrupulous and impartial historian, who has been variously identified as Diyllus of Athens or Duris of Samos.²¹ But most of these peculiarities can be explained by Diodorus' own style and practice. He tends to abbreviate drastically and capriciously, and he has a marked taste for the sensational. What is more, sober fact and sensationalism can coexist in the same work; the same Cleitarchus could write a vivid and compelling account of the siege of Tyre and an equally vivid description of the visit of Thalestris, the supposed Amazon queen. One could find an inexhaustible hoard of such anomalies in Herodotus or even Polybius. The record of 'great and marvellous deeds' (*ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά*) embraced the plausible and implausible alike.

The most enigmatic and frustrating of all the extant authors is Curtius Rufus, who has probably been more excoriated by modern scholars than any writer on Alexander.²² His work is shockingly transmitted. The first the tradition with indignation, as Livy was to rebut the insinuations that Rome would have been conquered by Alexander, or to pass over the detail silently; since Cleitarchus merely mentioned the Romans without elaborating on their presence, it was easy merely to omit the embarrassing detail.

²¹ See particularly Hammond 1983 (conclusions 160–5). This has the corollary that Diodorus and Curtius were using the same pair of sources, in which case one must assume that Cleitarchus and Diyllus were a canonical pair in the early Empire. Tarn 1948: ii. 116–22 had used similar arguments to reach the conclusion that Curtius drew directly upon Diodorus. In contrast Prandi, who believes that Diodorus supplemented Cleitarchus with Duris, takes it as axiomatic that Curtius cannot have used exactly the same pair of sources as Diodorus. She argues that Curtius did not use Duris, and consequently uses disagreements between Diodorus and Curtius as a tool to identify passages where Diodorus is supposedly dependent upon Duris (Prandi 1996: 125–6, 138–40).

²² On Curtius see now the detailed bibliographical survey by Atkinson (Atkinson 1998). See too his commentaries (Atkinson 1980, 1994), and in brief the useful Penguin translation by John Yardley and Waldemar Heckel (1984).

two books are missing; there are numerous lengthy lacunae, and corruptions abound in the truncated corpus that remains. We lack any statement of the historian's aims and methods, and there are only two passages where sources are cited by name: Cleitarchus, Timagenes, and (perhaps indirectly) Ptolemy.²³ Since nothing outside Curtius is known of Timagenes' account of Alexander, this is not particularly helpful.²⁴ There is no way to isolate his contribution or even to determine whether Curtius used him at all outside the context of Ptolemy and the Malli town. It can be shown that Curtius' narrative follows sources identical or akin to those used by Ptolemy and Arrian, but it is well-nigh impossible to show how they have been adapted and transformed. It is agreed that he had a political agenda of his own, and interpreted the events of Alexander's reign, in particular the disturbances after his death, against the context of his own time under the Roman Empire. Unfortunately Curtius' own date is a notorious crux: practically every emperor from Augustus to Septimius Severus has been suggested at some time as the recipient of Curtius' eulogy in book 10 (some scholars have gone even later, suggesting Constantine or even Theodosius),²⁵ and it is difficult to give a precise political motivation if one cannot relate the text to any specific period. There is also Curtius' demonstrable penchant for rhetorical exaggeration, his punctuation of the narrative with rhetorical, moralizing comment, and his love of set speeches, long and short. What cannot be denied is that he has used every device at his disposal to make his narrative vivid and sensational. He also has recurrent themes which determine his choice and shaping of material. A recent study by Baynham has shed light on his treatment of prevailing motifs: the omnipresent influence of *fortuna*; kingship and its corollary, the autonomy of the individual in a despotism.²⁶ The overriding ideas explain the choice of material and much of the

²³ Curt. 9. 5. 21 = *FGrH* 137 F 24 (Cleitarchus) and 88 F 3 (Timagenes); Curt. 9. 8. 15 = *FGrH* 137 F 25. See Atkinson 1998: 3458–65 for traditional approaches to source identification.

²⁴ On the general character of Timagenes' work see Yardley and Heckel 1997, 30–4 and the discussion in Atkinson's essay, Ch. 11 below.

²⁵ For summaries of the manifold suggestions see Atkinson 1980: 19–57; 1998: 3451–6; Baynham 1998a: 201–19.

²⁶ Baynham 1998a,

emphasis. That and the traditional historians' preoccupation with dramatic narrative account for many of the apparent anomalies of his account. In Baynham's view Curtius tailors the source material at his disposal to create a wider interpretative pattern, but does not fabricate pseudo-historical material. Others have been less charitable, and Curtius has been credited with deliberate invention to improve his story.²⁷ Much has still to be done in this area. One needs more of the sober, systematic comparison with Diodorus that Hamilton used in his discussion of the Indian narrative, to determine what Curtius may have added and why.²⁸ As it is, approaches to Curtius have varied sharply, and the variation is reflected in the differing treatment in several of the essays in this collection.

Other sources too have received rather more attention in recent scholarship. Justin's *Epitome* has been intensively studied, and it has been established that even Justin makes his own editorial contribution; he does not merely transcribe at random, but imposes his own vocabulary and perhaps at times his own ideas.²⁹ Consequently, his original, Pompeius Trogus, becomes even more elusive. What we have is a partial, distorted echo of his text, which makes it desperately difficult to establish the sources he used for his account of Alexander (other than the vulgate) and the contemporary pressures which might have determined his treatment of Alexander. Once we take into account the contribution of the intermediary, the problems of historical analysis become sharper and more complex. In the past the tendency was to isolate, or purport to isolate, the original authority for an assertion in the extant sources. One identified the authority, and judged the material on the basis of the authority's reputation—and the reputation was often based upon its attitude to Alexander, favourable or unfavourable. Arrian, based as he was on Ptolemy and Aristobulus, would automatically gain preference if he disagreed with other sources. But this principle ruled out much of the available source tradition.

²⁷ Some instances are given by Atkinson 1998: 3475; see also Baynham 1998a: 5–6.

²⁸ Hamilton 1977: 129–35; cf. Bosworth 1988a: 9.

²⁹ Yardley and Heckel 1997: 8–19, 333–43.

With some episodes, notably the arrest, trial, and execution of Philotas, there is a gross imbalance: Arrian's report (3. 26. 1-2), explicitly based on Ptolemy and Aristobulus, is perfunctory and unilluminating, little more than a dogmatic statement of Philotas' guilt. What he deals with in a dozen lines is the subject of a very extended narrative in Curtius which engrosses over twenty pages of Budé text.³⁰ It is a story of conspiracy and betrayal, replete with names and detail and housing a series of direct speeches which contain material otherwise unattested in the tradition of the reign.³¹ This is an extreme case where one cannot simply accept the evidence of the 'good' sources, because it is practically non-existent, and, whatever one may think of individual details in Curtius, one can hardly reject the entire account as fiction.

The most suspect of sources may on occasion record unique and authentic data. One particularly intriguing detail comes from the so-called *Metz Epitome*, a late (tenth-century) manuscript, which preserves part of an epitome of a history of Alexander's reign. The style of the *Epitome* is late, best attributed to the fourth or early fifth century AD, but its unknown author was digesting a much earlier history which largely followed the vulgate tradition common to Diodorus, Curtius, and Justin.³² On occasion it records details which are not attested elsewhere. For instance, it states that Alexander lost a son borne by Rhoxane while his river fleet was being built on the Hydaspes.³³ This is not attested elsewhere, but it is plausible enough. The incident is placed late

³⁰ Curt. 6. 7. 1-11. 40. Other sources are less detailed, though in most cases more informative than Arrian (Diod. 17. 79-80; Plut. *Alex.* 48. 1-49. 13; Justin 12. 5. 2-3 (garbled)).

³¹ In particular the detail that Philotas gave his sister in marriage to Attalus, Alexander's bitter enemy (Curt. 6. 9. 17). This is accepted in standard reference works (e.g. Berve 1926: ii. 94, 298; Heckel 1992, 23). On the political implications see Badian, Ch. 3 below, p. 63, who rightly accepts the evidence of Curtius while conceding (n. 24) that the context is highly suspect. 'That the speeches at Philotas' trial are not authentic does not need to be argued.'

³² See particularly Baynham 1995, with references to earlier literature. The Teubner text, by P. H. Thomas, is unfortunately prone to adventurous emendation. A translation and commentary is being prepared by J. C. Yardley and E. J. Baynham.

³³ *Metz Epit.* 70. The incident is usually ignored in histories of the reign, but it was picked up and accepted as fact by Berve 1926: ii. 347, no. 688.

in 326 BC, about eighteen months after the marriage, and it comes at a juncture where the rest of the source tradition is very thin. Alexander was stationary around the Hydaspes between September and November, but Arrian has no record of anything between Alexander's arrival at the Hydaspes and the departure of the fleet.³⁴ In contrast the Vulgate account, common to Curtius, Diodorus, and the *Epitome*, has a series of events; the arrival of reinforcements from the west, the building of the fleet (with rough agreement on numbers), and the reconciliation of the Indian kings, Porus and Taxiles.³⁵ The details are consistent, but not every episode is recorded in every source; Diodorus, for instance, has nothing about the reconciliation. Now, the *Metz Epitome* places the death of Alexander's son between the completion of the fleet and the reconciliation, and it seems that it was part of the so-called vulgate, an authentic detail passed over by Diodorus and Curtius. There is no obvious reason for the invention of a fictitious son of Alexander at this stage, and the death of a child in infancy or at birth may have seemed too unimportant to warrant notice in Curtius and Diodorus, in an age of high infant mortality.

Our most effective tool is critical cross-comparison. If we cannot accept or reject material on the basis of the reputation of its supposed source, we are faced with a much more complex exercise, examining the whole range of evidence in detail, assessing the extent of agreement, isolating the disagreements, and looking for explanations of the rejected variant traditions. Such explanations are rarely simple; we may be faced with deliberate distortion in the primary, contemporary tradition, misunderstanding by a secondary writer, adaptation and modification for purely literary purposes—or most often a combination. One of the most complex problems (and one which surfaces repeatedly in these

³⁴ Alexander arrives at the Hydaspes towards the end of the monsoon season, and can repair the rain-damaged buildings at Bucephala and Nicaea (Arr. 5. 29. 5); this was around the rising of Arcturus (Strabo 15. 1. 17 (691) = Aristobulus *FGvH* 139 F 35). Arrian then digresses to describe Alexander's earlier investigations on the course of the Indus, and then moves directly to the start of the Ocean voyage. Apart from the funeral of Coenus (6. 2. 1) there is no reference to any event by the Hydaspes.

³⁵ Diod. 17. 95. 4–5; Curt. 9. 3. 21–2; *Metz Epit.* 70.

essays)³⁶ is Alexander's burning of Persepolis. As is well known, there are two conflicting traditions, one regarding the conflagration as an act of policy, vengeance for the sack of Athens in 480,³⁷ and the other as a virtual accident, the culmination of a drinking party in which the Athenian courtesan Thais led the Macedonian revellers in an orgy of impromptu arson.³⁸ There are two main directions in which the argument can be directed. The first is to accept the role of Thais,³⁹ which is explicitly attributed to Cleitarchus, and can be interpreted as in part a tribute to Thais herself. She was one of the more powerful figures in the early Ptolemaic court; her children by Ptolemy were important pieces in the dynastic game by 308 BC.⁴⁰ She was present at the conflagration, and Cleitarchus could make her the chief agent, avenging the injuries of her city.⁴¹ In that case the other tradition must be interpreted as apologetic. The wanton destruction was seen as an embarrassment,⁴² and Ptolemy may not have welcomed Thais' association with it. Instead he (and Aristobulus) represented the destruction as a conscious plan, one which provoked dissent with Parmenio, who is shown presenting rational arguments to counter the king's dogmatic insistence upon vengeance, an insistence which even Arrian (3. 18. 12) finds irrational. The second approach is to accept that Alexander did indeed destroy Persepolis out of policy, and that the exchange with Parmenio represents genuine disagreement on the Macedonian staff. In that case Cleitarchus' account of Thais'

³⁶ Flower, Ch. 4, pp. 113–15; Fredricksmeier, Ch. 5, pp. 145–50; Carney, Ch. 9, p. 265.

³⁷ Arr. 3. 18. 12; Strabo 15. 3. 6 (730).

³⁸ Athen. 13. 576d = Cleitarchus, *FGrH* 137 F 11; Plut. *Alex.* 38; Diod. 17. 72; Curt. 5. 7. 2–11.

³⁹ So, for instance, Schachermeyr 1973: 289–90, and most recently Bloedow 1995.

⁴⁰ According to Athenaeus (13. 576e) she was actually married (*ἐγαμήθη*) to Ptolemy (Plut. *Alex.* 38. 2 describes her simply as his *hetaira*). At all events her children by Ptolemy were figures of distinction. A daughter, Eirene, was married to Eunostus, king of Cypriot Soli (Athen. 576e; cf. Seibert 1967: 77–8); one son, Leontiscus, ranked alongside Ptolemy's brother, Menelaus, among the Ptolemaic captives who fell into Demetrius' hands after the battle of Salamis (Justin 15. 2. 7), and the other, Lagus, won the chariot race at the Arcadian Lycaea while his father held court at Corinth in the summer of 308 (*SIG*³ 314, B V, lines 8–10).

⁴¹ So Plut. *Alex.* 38. 2–4; Diod. 17. 72. 2; Curt. 5. 7. 3.

⁴² As suggested by Curt. 5. 7. 10–11 (so Plut. *Alex.* 38. 8; see also Arr. 6. 30. 1).

actions could be seen as a colourful fabrication.⁴³ Whichever line of argument one takes there are secondary arguments to be deployed. If the burning was policy, what was behind it? Was Alexander symbolizing the end of the Persian Empire or declaring to the world at large that vengeance was a serious issue, not to be compromised?⁴⁴ And why would Cleitarchus give Thais a role that she never played? On the other hand, if one accepts Cleitarchus' version, one has to explain why the burning was still an embarrassment some thirty years after the event, and why the fictitious debate between Alexander and Parmenion arose. The problem is the lack of a firm starting point, the difficulty of excluding anything as a priori impossible; could Cleitarchus, writing under Ptolemy, have given a totally false report about Thais, and could Ptolemy (if he is the source of Arrian) have retailed a debate which he and many others knew was unhistorical? One is faced with an intricate balance of probability, and not surprisingly judgements about what is possible and probable vary dramatically. There is no simple key to interpretation, and as a result there is no consensus. Indeed, given the state of the evidence, it is unlikely that a satisfactory resolution of the problem will ever be achieved.

There is another important point, often overlooked in traditional scholarship. Alexander's death does not form an absolute divide. His reign cannot be studied in isolation from what follows. That is clearly the case with the Lamian War, where the disturbances created by Alexander's decree restoring Greek exiles escalated at the news of his death and led to full-scale war within a matter of weeks. Similarly the tensions and rivalries generated by the court intrigues under Alexander erupted into open conflict, first during the turbulent political settlement at Babylon and then during the first civil war, when Perdiccas' extravagant dynastic ambitions drove Craterus and Antipater to war. One is constantly looking back to Alexander's reign to explain what happened after his death and conversely interpreting his reign by reference to later events. It is the main weakness of Helmut Berve's

⁴³ So, for instance, Wilcken 1932: 145; Tarn 1948: ii. 48; Pearson 1960: 218–19; Hammond 1992: 363.

⁴⁴ For the various suggestions see Bosworth 1980a: 331–2; Atkinson 1994: 120–4; Chapters 4 and 5 by Flower and Fredricksmeier.

still indispensable prosopography that it closes with Alexander and has the briefest of references to events after his death, and the strength of Waldemar Heckel's study of Alexander's marshals (Heckel 1992) is that it pays particular attention to the period of transition, the years between 323 and 319, when the dynastic struggle was at its height. It can be argued that the enmities that determined the wars of the period also affected the historical tradition. Service under Alexander was a potent element in dynastic propaganda. Alexander's generals had helped acquire world empire, and they considered themselves entitled to a share in it, the share commensurate with their achievements.⁴⁵ If we examine the historical record, it is not surprising that Ptolemy bulks so large; Cleitarchus, the source of the vulgate tradition, wrote under his regime, and Ptolemy himself was the main source of Arrian. It is not surprising that there is a constant stress on his exploits, a consistent insinuation that many of the great successes of the reign were directly due to his efforts.⁴⁶ On the other hand his enemies in the civil wars, notably Perdiccas, receive very grudging mention, and there are strong indications that some of the rare military setbacks of the reign were laid at his door.⁴⁷ Such animus is not easy to detect, and the evidence is far from uncontroversial. However, it is a striking fact that the figures who are most prominent in the military narrative (apart from Ptolemy himself) are men who were dead within a few years of Alexander himself: Hephaestion, Craterus, and Leonnatus. Practically nothing is recorded of Ptolemy's contemporaries and rivals, Lysimachus and Seleucus,⁴⁸ despite the fact that one was a

⁴⁵ The classic instance is Seleucus' declaration to Antigonus that Babylonia was his by right in return for his services to the Macedonians during Alexander's lifetime (Diod. 19. 55. 4). Shortly before Antigonus had had problems removing Peithon from Media 'for it was no easy matter to arrest a man by force who had gained preferment while serving under Alexander' (Diod. 19. 46. 3). Cassander, who like Antigonus, played no role in the conquest of Asia, faced the same dilemma in removing Aristonous, 'seeing that he was respected because of the preferment he had received from Alexander' (Diod. 19. 51. 1). Both Peithon and Aristonous had been Bodyguards under Alexander, and it gave them dangerous prestige.

⁴⁶ See the recent discussion in Bosworth 1996a: 41–53.

⁴⁷ The fundamental discussion is Errington 1969; see also Bosworth 1976: 9–14. For more sceptical views see Roisman 1984; Hammond and Walbank 1988: 29, 61; Hammond 1993: 166–9.

⁴⁸ Lysimachus is mentioned at the crossing of the Hydaspes and, shortly after, at

royal Bodyguard and the other a hypaspist commander, both holding positions which would keep them constantly in the front. This is deliberately selective treatment by a royal author who was not disposed to publicize the achievements of competing dynasts, even dynasts who were for many years his allies against Antigonus.

Ptolemy has deeply affected both the history and the historical tradition of the period. He was also, it seems, influential in devising the propaganda which evolved over the centuries into the Alexander Romance. The inspiration was the gossip and slander which circulated in the aftermath of Alexander's death. The prolonged fever which took him off after ten days was unsurprisingly attributed to poison administered by the family of Antipater, which was in deep disfavour during the last months of the reign, and the rumours were later exploited to discredit the regent and his sons. Olympias was to desecrate the grave of Iolaus, who had been Alexander's cupbearer and, as such, was the prime target of the calumny.⁴⁹ In the vulgate these stories are recounted with some reserve, as though Cleitarchus was unwilling to present them as fact but wished them to be known and to circulate.⁵⁰ The most elaborate treatment of the scandal is in the so-called *Liber de Morte*, an extensive account of Alexander's last days with a full reproduction of his purported testament.⁵¹ This story ends all versions of the Alexander Romance, and despite the deeply corrupt textual

the siege of Sangala (Arr. 5. 13. 1, 24. 5), while Seleucus only figures at the Hydaspes, where he is attested close to Alexander (Arr. 5. 13. 1, 4; 16. 3). I would not agree with a recent biographer 'that Lysimachus only reached military prominence in the latter years of the expedition' (Lund 1992: 5; so Heckel 1992: 274: 'Lysimachos attained his rank before Alexander's accession, his fame and power after, and as a result of, Alexander's death.')

⁴⁹ Diod. 19. 11. 8; Plut. *Alex.* 77. 2. The orator Hyperides had earlier voted honours for him at Athens for his part in the alleged poisoning ([Plut.] *Vit. X Orat.* 849f).

⁵⁰ Diod. 17. 118. 1 (*φασὶ γάρ*); Curt. 10. 10. 14 ('credidere plerique'); Justin 12. 13. 10–14. 8 has the same story, but he chooses to present it as fact, suppressed by the affected parties (so Curt. 10. 10. 18). Onesicritus had already written that Alexander died of poison, but he shrank from naming the conspirators (*Metz Epit.* 97 = *FGrH* 134 F 37).

⁵¹ The document was preserved on the same manuscript as the *Metz Epitome*, and standard editions run them together with sequential paragraphing. However, there has never been any doubt that two separate and unrelated documents are at issue (cf. Merkelbach 1977: 122; Baynham 1995: 62–3).

transmission there is substantial agreement in detail.⁵² Although our extant texts come from late antiquity, there is little doubt that the nucleus of what became the *Liber de Morte* originated close to Alexander's death. Some of the material recurs on Egyptian papyri of a relatively early date,⁵³ and the narrative contains traces of the propaganda war which followed Alexander's death. Unfortunately the details are controversial, and it has hitherto proved impossible to anchor the document in any one historical context. However, Ptolemy appears in an extraordinarily favourable light, and the provisions of the testament can be shown to favour his interests and damage those of his dynastic enemies. Two of the contributions to this volume⁵⁴ examine the premiss that the propaganda that resulted in the *Liber de Morte* originated in Ptolemy's court around 309 BC, and that it was designed simultaneously to present him as the champion of the deceased Alexander and his family and to denigrate his enemies at that time, Antigonus and Cassander. Ptolemy, then, was circulating material which presented as fact what Cleitarchus had retailed as rumour—and which in his history (written in a different political context) he was to ignore or reject. For good and ill, in fact and fiction, our view of Alexander has been primarily determined by material emanating from him or his court.

The contributions to this volume represent almost all the approaches which have been described. They form a sequence, beginning with political analysis, progressing to the historical interpretation of iconography and literary propaganda, and ending with issues of historiography. Bosworth's essay on Alexander and Cortés sets the scene. It presents an interpretative model, arguing that the historical tradition of the conquest of Mexico in the early sixteenth century can shed light on the actions of Alexander in the far east (and vice versa), and also introduces some basic issues of

⁵² The text is printed in composite form by Merkelbach 1977: 253–83, and the separate versions are presented sequentially in Heckel 1988: 96–107. Stoneman 1991: 148–55 supplies an English translation.

⁵³ *P. Vindob.* 31954 (first cent. BC) contains the same material as *Mets Epit.* 116 (Merkelbach 1977: 151, 166; Baynham 1998b: 113–14).

⁵⁴ Bosworth, Ch. 7, and Baynham, Ch. 8.

imperial ideology—attitudes towards the subject peoples and justification of conquest. The dark side of monarchy is further explored in Badian's detailed examination of conspiracies at the Macedonian and Persian courts. The conflicting source material is analysed on the basis of cumulative probability, and a pattern gradually emerges: Alexander systematically exploited the tensions at his court, using conspiracies, both genuine and fictitious, to suppress opposition (in a manner only too reminiscent of the present century), while Darius was acutely conscious of the ever-present and real danger of conspiracy. He ultimately fell victim to a plot by his own nobles which he had virtually created by the very measures he had taken to prevent such intrigues (the noble hostages whom he had taken with him on campaign fell into Alexander's hands with disastrous consequences). Alexander, on the other hand, survived and prospered, the supreme political puppet master.

From political manœuvring we progress to ideology. Flower's contribution examines the political impact of panhellenism, the principle that Greek *poleis* should reconcile their differences and turn their united forces against Persia. A new examination of the evidence presents the case that panhellenism was a more potent ideal than has been recognized, and that it was far more than a pretext for war in the eyes of both Philip and Alexander. It was the ultimate justification for the burning of Persepolis, and, contrary to what is usually thought, it continued to be an element of policy throughout Alexander's reign, not incompatible with the promotion of selected Iranian nobles. Panhellenism and 'Verschmelzungspolitik'⁵⁵ could coexist, even in the political philosophy of Isocrates, and parallels could be drawn with the actions of Agesilaus earlier in the century. Fredricks-meyer by contrast provides us with a deep analysis of Alexander's concept of kingship. He attacks a firmly held view that Alexander assumed the Achaemenid monarchy and presented himself as Darius' successor. On the contrary, he aimed at something higher and more ecumenical, a

⁵⁵ Meaning literally 'Policy of Fusion', a term invented to encapsulate Alexander's supposed plan of blending together Macedonians and Persians as a ruling elite (cf. Bosworth 1980b).

kingdom of Asia which transcended the boundaries of the old Persian Empire. On this reading Alexander had evolved the concept as early as 332. He consistently promoted himself as King of all Asia, both replacing and superseding the Great King, and his destruction of Persepolis gave a clear signal that he considered the Persian Empire to be extinct.⁵⁶ Once again the orientalizing traits at Alexander's court can be reconciled with the larger picture. It was necessary that the Persians felt some affinity with the new regime, and so Alexander adopted dress and ceremonial which would appeal to them, but the orientalism stopped short of the full assumption of Persian court ceremonial. It was part of the larger picture, the absolute and unrestricted Kingship of Asia.

Palagia's contribution marks a transition from purely literary evidence to the interpretation of visual propaganda. She begins by arguing for the basic authenticity of Diodorus' description of Hephaestion's pyre, which she compares with the late fourth-century funerary pyre at Cypriot Salamis. The description of the animal hunt frieze in Diodorus becomes the starting point for an investigation of hunting scenes in early Hellenistic art. Such scenes are not attested in the western Greek world before Alexander, and it is argued that they were inspired by the epic hunts which Alexander staged in the Persian game reserves. That leads in turn to a reinterpretation of the famous fresco on the façade of Tomb II at Vergina. The hunting scene there portrayed belongs to an Asian context and dates to the reign of Alexander. From that perspective it is compatible with the solemn reburial which Cassander accorded Philip Arrhidaeus, Eurydice, and Cynnane in 316 BC, and can be interpreted as a joint commemoration of Arrhidaeus himself and the family of Cassander. The point of reference has been changed. The lion hunt theme establishes a date for the fresco no earlier than Alexander's eastern conquests, and once that is accepted, the supporting evidence that Tomb II post-dates Alexander becomes irresistible. Bosworth's chap-

⁵⁶ This reading, it should be emphasized, is not in formal contradiction with Flower. Both interpretations can be accepted, and it could be argued that the conflagration was simultaneously the triumph of panhellenism and the end of the Achaemenid monarchy.

ter on the *Liber de Morte* adopts a similar method. Previous attempts to give a political context to the document (in 321 or 317 BC) had resulted in internal contradictions which could only be resolved on the assumption that it was heavily interpolated. However, these contradictions are largely resolved if we accept a precise dating to the year 309/8, when Ptolemy was paying court to Alexander's sister, Cleopatra, and championing the liberty of the Greeks against joint threats from Cassander and Antigonus. He is represented as the true heir of Alexander, the natural successor to the kingship after the murder of Alexander's son and the destined husband of Cleopatra. The propaganda can then be seen to promote Ptolemy's regal aspirations, which can be traced in literary and epigraphic evidence long before his formal assumption of the diadem. Baynham's chapter also addresses the *Liber de Morte*, and shows that the sensational portent with which it begins makes perfect political sense in the years after the death of Alexander IV but can be fitted to no other historical context. What is more, the portent fits nicely into the general tradition of the omens of Alexander's death and displays some knowledge of Babylonian mantic procedure. It comes in a literary context reminiscent of Xenophon's historical romance, the *Cyropaedia*, and the anonymous author can be seen to be working simultaneously in a literary and propagandist tradition, creating a novel with a strongly political purpose.

The remaining chapters tackle issues of source criticism. Carney deals with the complex relationship between fact and reported fact. She addresses two recurrent themes, the series of exchanges between Alexander and his senior general, Parmenio, and the three dramatic occasions when the king isolated himself from his troops. Here the analysis reaches contrasting conclusions, but in both cases there is an interplay between literature and life. The tradition of a hostile exchange between Alexander and Parmenio may have originated in the propagandist history of Callisthenes, who necessarily treated Parmenio as an opposition figure, but it has been elaborated by later writers who had their own propagandist objectives or were deliberately casting Parmenio in the Herodotean role of the warning adviser. The

whole tradition is fundamentally warped and poisoned, and it is dangerous to accept any of the episodes as historical. On the other hand, the interplay between Alexander and his troops may have been affected by literary models: he, the new Achilles, was sulking in his tent, and his men reacted in a hysterical mode which recalls the figure of the excluded lover. Here the sources underscore the Homeric parallels, but the literary embellishment is justifiable; it enlarges on traits which were actually present. Alexander acted as Achilles, and the sources supply a counterpoint of allusion and rhetoric. In contrast, Billows focuses on a single historian, Polybius, whose references to Alexander have received very cursory attention in the past. However, his treatment of the king is interesting in that it is sober, free from apologia, recognizing atrocities like the sack of Thebes while keeping a generally favourable view of Alexander's generalship and character. The perspective is totally different from that of the extant Alexander sources, and several possible influences may be traced: the view of Alexander as the favourite of fortune may go back to Demetrius of Phalerum and his treatise *Peri Tyches*, and some of the historical detail could be ascribed to Hieronymus of Cardia, whose monumental history of the Successors repeatedly reached back into the reign of Alexander.

The final contribution by Atkinson takes the spotlight away from Alexander and concentrates upon the concerns of the primary historians. No writer can reconstruct the past without being influenced by his or her contemporary environment. That was clearly the case in antiquity. Atkinson shows how the interpretation of Alexander's reign was influenced by the wisdom of hindsight and the classical theory of the transmission of Empire, which began with Herodotus and was extended as each successive imperial power (Mede, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman) bit the dust. The interpretation can be in macrocosm, as with the sequence of empires, or in microcosm, when the actions of dominant contemporary individuals can be seen to be foreshadowed. In particular Curtius' description of the roles of Arrhidaeus and Perdiccas at Babylon is highly coloured by his experience of political intrigue and judicial murder

in the early Empire. The past thereby becomes a vehicle for indirect and oblique comment upon the present. With that we come full circle. The history of Alexander remains anchored to the literary sources, and each student must establish his or her attitude to the extant tradition. The papers in this volume provide a rich variety of approaches and collectively, it is to be hoped, they make it more feasible to recapture something of that most elusive of figures, the historical Alexander.