

HIST229x

“Was Alexander Great?”

Essay on ancient sources

The lost Alexander library

Before the construction of the famous Library of Alexandria (in Egypt), there once was a library of books about Alexander. The original collection of the library was made up of works written by authors during and just after Alexander's lifetime.

Unfortunately, all of the original works in the library of Alexander have disappeared; or they were taken out and never returned by writers of the Roman era, who cut and pasted quotations and information from the original works into their own books about Alexander - leaving us to figure out what the original works really said. The task is difficult but crucial.

To understand why the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah revealed that a twenty-five year old Macedonian king would reach the ends of the world, we have to identify the major ancient sources for Alexander's life. We need to know who those sources are; when they lived; what they wrote; for whom they wrote or created objects; and why they wrote or made what they did. Only when we have understood the viewpoint of our sources can we assess the value of the information they have provided about Alexander.

This is true whether our information comes from literary accounts or from material evidence such as inscriptions, coins, or archaeological artifacts. We only can infer who the real Alexander the Great was from what our sources have chosen to record about Alexander and his deeds. Without our sources, there simply is no

Alexander, real or otherwise.

Our ancient sources for Alexander's life can be divided up broadly into three groups: a handful of literary compositions and material evidence produced during Alexander's lifetime; about a dozen literary works belonging to the period from c. 323 into the late second century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era); and, finally, about half a dozen narrative accounts written between the middle of the first century B.C.E. and the fourth century C.E. (The Common Era).

Contemporary sources

The most important contemporary literary source for Alexander's deeds is Callisthenes. Callisthenes was probably a nephew of the great philosopher Aristotle. He was selected to accompany Alexander on his campaign against the Persians and to write an account of it, which was entitled *The Deeds of Alexander*.¹ Although the work has not survived, from the parts used by later writers (and sometimes directly quoted) we know that Callisthenes' book was eulogistic, glorifying Alexander's military achievements and his claims to divine parentage.² When later authors quote from Callisthenes' work, it is important to remember that Callisthenes did not give us just the "facts", but rather what Alexander himself wanted to be known or believed about what had happened. Callisthenes was Alexander's official mouthpiece during the campaigns and we can infer that

¹ For the fragments of Callisthenes' lost work quoted by other writers, see Jacoby (1962) no. 124 pp. 631-657 in the bibliography on the course wiki. The rest of the modern articles and books cited in this essay also can be found in the bibliography unless otherwise noted.

² For Callisthenes in general see Brown, T. "Callisthenes and Alexander," *AJP* 70 (1949) pp. 225-48; Pearson, (1960) pp. 22-49; and Prandi, (1985).

Alexander must at least have approved in general of what Callisthenes wrote about the campaigns. For that very reason his perspective is absolutely invaluable.

Other works composed during Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire are nearly impossible to evaluate. A certain Anaximenes wrote two books "On Alexander" dealing with events down to the battle of the Issos (333), but only a few fragments of his work survive.³ Somewhat more substantial are the fragments of Alexander's land-surveyors, who went along on the expedition to measure the "stages" (distances) the Macedonians traveled.⁴

The historical value of another contemporary "document", the so-called *Ephemerides* or *Royal Diaries*, is difficult to assess.⁵ Purportedly a diary of Alexander's reign kept by his royal secretary, Eumenes of Cardia,⁶ and Diodotus of Erythrae,⁷ what has survived and is quoted by later authors largely focuses upon Alexander's last days and appears to confirm that he died of a fever.⁸ The evidence of the *Royal Diaries*, however, only can be used with caution, for reasons we will discuss later on in the course.⁹

³ For the collected fragments see Jacoby (1961) no. 72 F, 15-17, 29, pp. 123, 125; and in general Bosworth (1988) p. 296.

⁴ Men named Baeton, Diognetus, and Amyntas, whose work is used by Pliny, *Natural History* 6.21.44-45; 61-63.

⁵ For the fragments, see Jacoby (1962) no. 117, pp. 618-622.

⁶ Arrian, 7.4.6.

⁷ Athenaeus, 10.434.b.

⁸ Plutarch, 76.1; Arrian, 7.25.1-26.3.

⁹ Samuel, A. "Alexander's royal journals," *Historia* 14 (1965) pp. 1-12; Badian, E. "A king's notebooks," *HSCP* 72 (1968) pp. 183-204.

We also possess contemporary inscriptions,¹⁰ papyri,¹¹ coins,¹² sculpture,¹³ and archaeological artifacts, which help cast light on Alexander's reign and personality. These material artifacts, however, cannot be taken at face value. Object does not mean objective. Objects such as inscriptions need to be analyzed with respect to their form and content just as carefully as literary sources before we can use them as evidence for what happened.

Near-contemporary sources

After Alexander's death a number of participants in the campaign wrote accounts of aspects of the expedition or histories of Alexander's reign. Included among these was Onesicritus of Astypalaea, the helmsman of the royal galley.¹⁴ The title of Onesicritus' lost work remains uncertain: in some sources it is called

¹⁰ Heisserer, A. *Alexander the Great and the Greeks* (Norman 1980).

¹¹ The most important papyrus is Oxyrhynchus XV 1798 (text in Jacoby [1962] no. 148, pp. 816-818) which probably was copied sometime during the second century B.C.E. The five preserved columns of this papyrus probably belonged to a lost history. The surviving fragments refer to the assassination of Philip, the destruction of Thebes, the story of Alexander's illness at Tarsus, the battle at the Issos, and the prelude to the battle at Gaugamela. In some instances the papyrus provides details about these events which cannot be found in any other sources. Scholars differ widely on the value of the details provided, as well as on the general skill and competence of the author. For a very negative assessment see L. Pearson (1960) pp. 255-257.

¹² Price, M. *The coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* (2 volumes) (London 1991); and most recently see Holt, F. *Alexander the Great and the Mystery of the Elephant Medallions* (Berkeley 2003) for a study of the victory medallions created after the battle of the Hydaspes.

¹³ Ridgway, B. *Hellenistic Sculpture I* (Madison 1980) p. 108 ff; Stewart, A. *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley 1993).

¹⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 6.84; Arrian, *Indike* 18.9; *Anabasis* 7.5.6. For Onesicritus in general see Brown, T. *Onesicritus: a Study in Hellenistic Historiography* (Berkeley 1949); Pearson (1960) pp. 83-111; and Bosworth (1988) p. 296.

The Education of Alexander;¹⁵ in others, a history of Alexander.¹⁶ In antiquity Onesicritus was known as a spinner of tall tales, but he nevertheless provides intriguing evidence about the Macedonians' encounters with the so-called "Gymnosophists" of India,¹⁷ and for Alexander's conquests in India.¹⁸

Nearchus, the son of Androtimus from the island of Crete, was one of Alexander's friends banished from Macedon by Philip II after the Pixodarus affair.¹⁹ Recalled after Philip's death, Nearchus commanded Alexander's fleet when it sailed down the Indus River and from the mouth of the Indus River along the coast to the mouth of the Euphrates.²⁰

Nearchus' memoirs of the campaign have not survived.²¹ Based upon the fragments that appear in later accounts, though, we know that Nearchus emphasized the difficulties of the fleet's voyage along the sea, perhaps to enhance his own reputation at the expense of his rival Onesicritus.²²

Another vital source of information from the near-contemporary period is

¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.84.

¹⁶ Lucian, *Octogenarians* 14.

¹⁷ Strabo, 15.1.63-65.

¹⁸ E.g. in Pliny, *Natural History* 6.26.96-100.

¹⁹ Arrian, 3.6.5-6. For Nearchus in general see Pearson (1960) pp. 112-149.

²⁰ Arrian, *Indike* 18.10; 20.1; Diodorus, 17.104.3.

²¹ Although they were used both by Arrian and Strabo. For Strabo and Arrian as sources for Alexander's life and campaigns see below.

²² E.g. as seen in Arrian, *Indike* 32.9-13; or 7.20.9.

Ptolemy I, the son of Lagos (c. 367/6-283 B.C.E.).²³ Ptolemy was made one of Alexander's personal bodyguards in the fall of 330,²⁴ and subsequently was given many important commands.²⁵ After Alexander's death Ptolemy hijacked Alexander's body to Egypt, and established himself as satrap there. He later took on the titles of King and Pharaoh and founded the Ptolemaic dynasty, which ruled Egypt until the death of Kleopatra VII, in 30.²⁶

Ptolemy wrote a history of Alexander's reign, although it has not survived.

²⁷ Among other later authors, Arrian used Ptolemy extensively. We know that Ptolemy's history or memoir covered the period from at least 335 until Alexander's death. His narrative perhaps focused upon military matters.²⁸

But Ptolemy also did not simply present the "facts". Rather, Ptolemy had his own point of view and agenda. He emphasized his own contributions to Alexander's success and denigrated or ignored the achievements of his rivals.²⁹ In

²³ For Ptolemy's dates and career see Heckel, W. *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire* (London 1992) pp. 222-227. For Ptolemy as a source, see Bosworth (1988) p. 297.

²⁴ Arrian, 3.27.5.

²⁵ E.g. bringing in the regicide Bessos in 329 B.C.E. as described in Arrian, 3.29.7-30.5.

²⁶ For Ptolemy and the period after the death of Alexander, see the useful summary of Bosworth (1988) pp. 174-181.

²⁷ For the collection of the fragments embedded in other authors see Jacoby (1962) no. 138, pp. 752-769.

²⁸ Bosworth (1988) p. 297.

²⁹ E.g. in the case of Perdiccas. In his description of Alexander's assault on the city of Thebes in 335 B.C.E., Arrian (1.8.1) quotes Ptolemy, who says that Perdiccas, who had been posted in the advance guard of the camp with his own brigade, and was not far from the enemy's stockade, did not wait for Alexander's signal to commence the battle; but of his own accord was the first to assault the stockade. On the general point, see Welles, C. "The reliability of Ptolemy as an historian," *Miscellanea di studi*

this way Ptolemy justified own political position after Alexander's death.³⁰

Another near-contemporary source of great importance is Aristobulus of Cassandreia,³¹ who took part in Alexander's expedition, perhaps in some minor capacity.³² Aristobulus wrote a history of Alexander's reign sometime after 301 B.C.E. – begun when its author was eighty-four years old.³³ Only fragments of his lost history remain.

In antiquity Aristobulus was considered a flatterer, who claimed (for instance) that Alexander only drank heavily to be sociable.³⁴ Nevertheless, Aristobulus' history is a vital source of information for Alexander's campaigns in India and for the details he provides about geography,³⁵ botany,³⁶ and local customs.³⁷

Alexander's court chamberlain, Chares of Mytilene,³⁸ also wrote (lost)

alessandri in memoria di A. Rostagni (Turin 1963) pp. 101-116; Errington, R. "Bias in Ptolemy's History of Alexander," *CQ* 19 (1969) pp. 233-242; and Roisman, J. "Ptolemy and his rivals in his history of Alexander the Great," *CQ* 34 (1984) pp. 373-385.

³⁰ Especially significant is Ptolemy's description of how Alexander was led to the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah, as quoted by Arrian, 3.3.5.

³¹ Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes* 23.4.

³² Arrian, Preface 1.2; Bosworth (1988) p. 297.

³³ Lucian, *Octogenarians* 22.

³⁴ Arrian, 7.29.4.

³⁵ E.g. as quoted by Strabo, 11.11.5 on the River Polytimetus in Sogdiana.

³⁶ Arrian, 6.22.4 on the myrrh trees Aristobulus saw in Gedrosia.

³⁷ E.g. Strabo, 15.1.62 on the marriage customs in Taxila described by Aristobulus.

³⁸ Plutarch, 46.1.

Histories of Alexander. His work is a vital source of information about Alexander's attempted introduction of prostration at his court and about the mass marriage of his officers to Persian noblewomen at Susa in 324 B.C.E.³⁹

Cleitarchus of Alexandria, who did not accompany Alexander into Asia,⁴⁰ wrote a history of Alexander's reign in at least twelve books, dated as early as 310 B.C.E..⁴¹ Cleitarchus' lost work was used extensively by authors of the late Roman Republican and imperial periods. Cleitarchus' history probably formed the core of the so-called Vulgate tradition, from which Justin's epitome (or abridgement) of Pompeius Trogus and the so-called *Metz Epitome* (a compilation dated to the late antique period which followed the same tradition as Curtius) were derived.⁴²

Cleitarchus was criticized in antiquity for inaccuracy and over-embellishment.⁴³ At the same time, precisely because Cleitarchus did not go along on the expedition itself, his history was not subject to the influences of the Macedonian court, and the information he provides should be seen as an

³⁹ As found in Plutarch, 54.3 and Athenaeus, 12.539.a.

⁴⁰ Diodorus, 2.7.3-4.

⁴¹ For Cleitarchus in general see Pearson (1960) pp. 212-242. The fragments of his lost history of Alexander's reign can be found in Jacoby (1962) no. 137, pp. 741-752; and Hamilton, J. "Cleitarchus and Aristobulus," *Historia* 10 (1961) pp. 448-458; and Hamilton, J. "Cleitarchus and Diodorus 17," *Greece and the Ancient Mediterranean in History and Prehistory* (studies presented to Fritz Schachermeyr, ed. K. Kinzl) (Berlin 1977) pp. 126-146.

⁴² For the Vulgate tradition see Bosworth, A. "Arrian and the Alexander Vulgate," *EnteHardt* 22 (1976) pp. 1-46; and Bosworth (1988) pp. 297-298.

⁴³ E.g. Quintilian, *Institutes* 10.1.74; Cicero, *Brutus* 42.

important, independent perspective.⁴⁴

At one time there also existed various pamphlets written by contemporaries of Alexander such as Ephippus of Olynthus and Nicobule. What we know about Ephippus' pamphlet "On the death (or funeral) of Alexander and Hephaestion" is based upon five passages found in the *Deipnosophistae* ("Learned Banqueteers") of Athenaeus.⁴⁵ Even taking into account the likelihood that Athenaeus' selection of passages from Ephippus concerns his own literary interests, we can surmise that Ephippus represented Alexander as bibulous, devoted to luxurious living, violent, and solicitous of flattery. Ephippus clearly was hostile to Alexander.

The theme of Alexander's excessive drinking, right up to his very last banquet, also was taken up in the pamphlet of another writer, a woman named Nicobule, if the name, which means "the victorious in council" or "the councilor of victory," is not a pseudonym.⁴⁶

Alexander's drinking habits also were discussed in the *Histories* of Polycleitus, a Thessalian from the city of Larissa.⁴⁷ Polycleitus, who probably accompanied Alexander's expedition, provided important geographical details

⁴⁴ For instance, his view that the Athenian courtesan Thais initiated the burning of the royal palaces of Persepolis, as reported in Athenaeus, 13.576.d-e.

⁴⁵ 3.120.c-d; 4.146.c-d; 10.434.a-b; 12.537.d-; 12.537.e-538.b.

⁴⁶ For the fragments, see Jacoby (1962) no. 127, p. 667; and on what can be known about the writer see Pearson (1960) pp. 67-68.

⁴⁷ For the fragments, see Jacoby (1962) no. 128, p. 667-670; and Pearson (1960) pp. 70-77.

about Alexander's campaigns, especially the rivers of Asia.⁴⁸ Based upon one of the fragments of Polycleitus cited by Strabo, it is clear that Polycleitus played a role in the creation of the myth that Alexander reached the boundary of Asia.⁴⁹

Grouped among the flatterers of Alexander by some ancient writers⁵⁰ was Medius of Larissa.⁵¹ Medius accompanied Alexander on the expedition to Asia and served as one of the trierarchs of Alexander's fleet on the Indus River.⁵² Most importantly, however, Medius was famous for hosting the drinking party at which Alexander either came down with the fever that killed him or was poisoned.⁵³

Hieronymos of Cardia did not take part in Alexander's expedition to Asia, and his now-lost history began at Alexander's death and continued to at least the death of King Pyrrhus of Epirus (272 B.C.E.).⁵⁴ But his work was a particularly important source for Diodorus Siculus, who apparently duplicates Hieronymus' verbatim citation of the so-called Exiles' decree, which Alexander issued in 324, and also gives us some invaluable information about its reception.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ E.g., 16.1.13 on the Euphrates River; 15.3.4 on the Choaspes, Eulaeus, and the Tigris.

⁴⁹ Strabo, 15.3.4; and Pearson (1960) p. 75.

⁵⁰ Especially Plutarch, in his essay *How to know a flatterer from a friend* 24.CD, who calls Medius the leader and skilled master of the choir of flatterers that danced attendance on Alexander.

⁵¹ For the fragments, see Jacoby (1962) no. 129, p. 670-672; and Pearson (1960) pp. 68-70.

⁵² Strabo, 11.14.12; Arrian, *Indike* 18.7.

⁵³ Arrian, 7.25.1.

⁵⁴ For the fragments of his work, see Jacoby (1962) no. 154, pp. 829-835; Pearson (1960) p. 262; and generally Hornblower, J. *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford 1981).

⁵⁵ Diodorus, 18.8.1-7; and see Bosworth (1988) p. 298.

Finally, two writers of the third or second century B.C.E., Hegesias of Magnesia and Aristus of Salamis, should be mentioned.⁵⁶ Hegesias was roundly criticized by writers such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cicero for his bad taste in the use of rhymes, as well as for his “matter,” which Cicero thought was just as absurd as his manner of speech.⁵⁷ His work was also included among those books which were filled with “marvelous tales, things unheard of, incredible.”⁵⁸

Aristus perhaps came from the city of Salamis on Cyprus and dates to the mid-second century B.C.E.⁵⁹ Aristus also was interested in the drinking habits of the Macedonians and in Alexander’s habit of dressing up like the god Hermes.⁶⁰

Later narrative accounts

Books 17 and 18 of Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliothēke*, or Library, a universal history from mythological times to 60 B.C.E., was composed closest in time to the contemporary or near-contemporary sources.⁶¹ The *Bibliothēke* was perhaps completed around 30 B.C.E.. Cleitarchus was certainly one of Diodorus’ most

⁵⁶ For the fragments of their works, see Jacoby (1962) nos. 142 and 143, pp. 804-813; and Pearson (1960) pp. 246-248; 254-255.

⁵⁷ Dionysios of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition*, 18 p. 120 ff.; Cicero, *Orator* 226.

⁵⁸ Gellius, *Attic Nights* 9.4.3.

⁵⁹ For the fragments of his lost history see Jacoby (1962) no. 143, pp. 812-813; and Pearson (1960) pp. 254-255.

⁶⁰ Athenaeus, 10.486.e; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus ad Graecos* 4.54.3.

⁶¹ Goukowsky, P. *Diodore de Sicile XVII* (Paris 1976); and Hamilton, J. “Cleitarchus and Diodorus 17,” *Greece and the Ancient Mediterranean in History and Prehistory* (studies presented to Fritz Schachermeyr, ed. K. Kinzl) (Berlin 1977) pp. 126-146.

important sources for his information about Alexander.

Diodorus was especially interested in issues of individual and collective morality; throughout his vast work he judges individuals and nations by how benevolently they acted while enjoying good fortune.⁶² Diodorus' picture of Alexander must be understood within the framework of his history's program for moral living.⁶³

Diodorus' closest chronological contemporary, Strabo of Amaseia (Pontus) (born around 64 B.C.E., survived until after 21 C.E.), wrote a *Geographia* in 17 books, using Aristobulus and Nearchus as his sources from among the contemporary historians of Alexander.⁶⁴ Book 15 of Strabo's work relies on the accounts those Alexander historians who visited the northern parts of India.⁶⁵

The way Strabo interpreted Alexander's deeds reveals some Stoic overtones;⁶⁶ Strabo also "strongly criticized historians of Alexander who distorted facts for the sake of flattery and betrayed the truth for propaganda purposes by 'moving' whole regions, such as the Caucasus, to the end of the world in order to create the impression that Alexander had reached the boundaries of the

⁶² For Diodorus and his methodology see Sacks, K. *Diodorus and the First Century* (Princeton 1990) especially pp. 204-206.

⁶³ Sacks, K. *Diodorus and the First Century* (Princeton 1990) p. 206.

⁶⁴ Dueck, D. *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London 2000).

⁶⁵ For Strabo's contribution to our understanding of Alexander's campaigns see Dueck, D. *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London 2000).

⁶⁶ Dueck, D. *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London 2000) p. 64.

oikoumene.”⁶⁷

Quintus Curtius Rufus wrote during the first or early second century C.E. (probably during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius, 41-54).⁶⁸ The first two books of his ten-book history of Alexander (*Historiae Alexandri Magni*), which apparently covered events down to the distribution of satrapies after Alexander’s death, are lost. Curtius Rufus made extensive use of Cleitarchus and of Ptolemy.⁶⁹ His history, while not factually inaccurate, is filled with highly rhetorical speeches he could not possibly have heard and unverifiable attributions of motive.

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Next we have L. Mestrius Plutarchos, known today as Plutarch, from Chaeronea in Greece, born probably before 50 C.E. and died after 120.⁷¹ Among other works Plutarch wrote 23 (surviving) parallel lives of famous Greeks and Romans.⁷² At the beginning of his life of Alexander (paired with Julius Caesar), Plutarch tells us that his object was not to create continuous political history but

⁶⁷ Dueck, D. *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London 2000) p. 73.

⁶⁸ For scholarly analyses see Egge, R. *Untersuchungen zur Primärtradition bei Q. Curtius Rufus* (Freiburg 1978); Atkinson, J. *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus’ Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 & 4* (Amsterdam 1980); Gunderson, L. “Quintus Curtius Rufus,” in *Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage* (W. Adams and E. Borza ed.) (Washington 1982) pp. 177-196; Baynham, E. *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor 1998) pp. 7-8; 201-219.

⁶⁹ Baynham, E. *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor 1998) pp. 74-81; 139; 58; 74-76; 82; 84-85.

⁷⁰ Baynham, E. *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor 1998) pp. 46-56.

⁷¹ In general see Jones, C. *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford 1971).

⁷² Duff, T. *Plutarch’s Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford 1999) esp. pp. 14-22.

to exemplify virtue or vice in the careers of great men.⁷³ Plutarch's life of Alexander should be read, not as a factual account, but as a kind of moral biography, written from the point of view of a well-read, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan inhabitant of the Roman empire who was influenced by Stoic ideals.

⁷⁴ Plutarch's moral biography of Alexander is filled with gossip and salacious anecdotes, and is particularly valuable for its chapters on Alexander's childhood and upbringing (for which we have surprising little information from other sources).

Lucius Flavius Arrianus, Arrian for short, from Nicomedia in Bithynia, lived c. 86 - 160 C.E. and became a Roman consul (c. 129) and governor (legate) of Cappadocia (131 - 137).⁷⁵ The author of many important lost historical works, his *Anabasis* ("Journey up country") of Alexander, in seven books, begins with Alexander's accession and ends with his death in Babylon in 323. A shorter companion work, the *Indike*, recounts Nearchus' voyage from the mouth of the Indus River to Susa, based upon Eratosthenes, Megasthenes, and Nearchus. For the *Anabasis*, Arrian's primary sources were Ptolemy and Aristobulus, contemporaries and friends of Alexander who had a mostly favorable view of Alexander.⁷⁶ As a

⁷³ Plutarch, 1.2.

⁷⁴ For an historical commentary on Plutarch's life of Alexander see Hamilton, J. *Plutarch, Alexander, A Commentary* (Oxford 1969); Hammond, N. *Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's "Life" and Arrian's "Anabasis Alexandrou"* (Cambridge 1993); see also Mossman, J. (ed.) *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (London 1997).

⁷⁵ For Arrian's life and career, see Bosworth, A. *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford 1988) pp. 16-37.

⁷⁶ Arrian also draws from the works of Nearchus and Eratosthenes as sources in his Book 6 on the

result, Arrian's account of Alexander's "Journey up country" focuses on military affairs and is largely sympathetic to Alexander.⁷⁷

Finally, of the main later narrative accounts we have Marcus Iunianus Iustinus, or Justin, the third or fourth century C.E. author of a Latin *epitome* (abridgement or summary) of the otherwise lost "Philippic Histories" (*Historiae Philippicae*) of Pompeius Trogus, a late-first-century B.C.E. Vocontian from Gallia Narbonensis (Vasio or Vaison-la-Romaine) who covered Macedon in books 7-12 of his histories.⁷⁸ Justin occasionally adds factual details about Alexander's life that no other sources report. Justin presented some of those details in a way which suggested that while Alexander got his taste for strong, unmixed wine from his father, it was to his Molossian mother Olympias that he owed his thirst for blood.⁷⁹

Important evidence is also to be found in the *Deipnosophistae* or "Learned Banqueteers" of Athenaeus from Naucratis in Egypt. This colorful work was completed in the years immediately following the death of the Roman emperor Commodus (c. 192 C.E.) and supposedly reports on discussions among guests about philosophy, literature, law, medicine, and many other topics at a banquet

Anabasis.

⁷⁷ For Arrian and his works see Bosworth, A. "Errors in Arrian," *CQ* 26 (1976) pp. 117-139; Stadter, P. *Arrian of Nicomedia* (Chapel Hill 1980); and Bosworth, A. *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford 1988), which is far and away the most sophisticated study of Arrian's methodology; Hammond, N. *Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's "Life" and Arrian's "Anabasis Alexandrou"* (Cambridge 1993).

⁷⁸ Yardley, J. (translation and appendices) and Heckel, W. (commentary), *Justin, Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus Volume I, Books 11-12: Alexander the Great* (Oxford 1997) pp. 1-41.

⁷⁹ See below especially his account of the aftermath of the assassination of Philip II.

over a number of days during which some important events and incidents related to Alexander's life were discussed.⁸⁰ At times Athenaeus provides valuable information about the ceremonial practices and luxury of the Macedonian royal court.⁸¹

Flacks, hacks, and historians

Such are the main ancient literary and material sources for Alexander's life and deeds. Among the writers who composed works while Alexander was alive or in the century after his death, there were perhaps no outright knaves. There were, however, various flacks, hacks, and party operatives, spinners of tall tales, flatterers and scandalmongers, self-aggrandizing Colonel Blimps and puritanical pamphleteers – along with one or two scientists and independent historians. In a modern bookstore the works of these writers would be shelved across many departments, from "Biography" to the magazine rack.

As a general rule, the closer the literary sources were composed in time and space to Alexander's lifetime, the more sympathetic they appear to be to Alexander – as far as we can judge. What is incontrovertible and has the greatest significance for our understanding of Alexander, however, is that none of the earliest works have survived in their original forms. Our understanding of these sources is based solely upon the excerpts or quotes of the sources used by later writers. Virtually everything we think we know about the substance of these lost

⁸⁰ For a rich collection of essays on different aspects of Athenaeus' works and world, see Braund, D. and Wilkins, J. *Athenaeus and his World* (Exeter 2000).

⁸¹ See esp. 12.537.d ff.

works, whether sympathetic or hostile to Alexander, derives from quotes or citations embedded in later accounts. Nor do we know *for certain* how or why those later writers selected the passages from the truly contemporary sources to quote or reference in their own works.

From the surviving volumes of what was once a larger collection of works about the life and accomplishments of Alexander, we now are left to craft an accurate, balanced, and convincing biography of the great king. Our modern biography inevitably has been created out of scattered references from lost contemporary or near-contemporary accounts of Alexander's deeds, written by authors who had their own agendas; from the fragments of material objects which have randomly survived from the great rubbish heap of Alexander's material world; and from later continuous narratives, composed by authors of the Roman imperial period, who often saw in Alexander reflected images of their own complex, and, at times, savage emperors. Alexander's Roman-era historians or biographers clearly were influenced by their own backgrounds, educations, contemporary literary traditions, and historical circumstances.

The science and art of creating an objective and persuasive representation of Alexander out of such a jumble of sources is not a job for the faint of heart. Indeed, simply reconstructing exactly what Alexander did (or did not do) only can be established plausibly on the basis of a careful sifting and weighing of the value of all the pieces of evidence provided by the sources for any given action of Alexander's.

