pointer to Nazi Germany serves as a reminder that we are perfectly capable of a discerning perspective on a historical society that gives centre stage to the negatives that emerge from that society's historical record. The underlying interpretative balancing act is not dissimilar to that involved in weighing up the pros and cons of the toppling of statues of individuals whose record includes – besides actions and practices that helped to put them on a pedestal – involvement in actions and practices today deemed undesirable. But note that in this context, too, the issue is firmly over the removal of representations of the likes of the seventeenth century merchant, Tory politician and enslaver Edward Colston, not about the likes of the war-mongering, colonising and enslaving Alexander the Great: once again, the ancients get the better over the moderns. Nazi Germany apart, we seem to be struggling with finding a timely approach to dealing with complex historical phenomena that cannot easily be pinpointed on our moral compass. If the ancient Greeks could help us to figure out an answer to this conundrum, they would indeed have done us some good. But we should not be surprised if by the end of what is likely to be a long odyssey we come to the conclusion that there is less hope for us after all.

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HELLENISTIC

Richard Stoneman, Ursula Sims-Williams, Adrian S. Edwards and Peter Toth (eds) *Alexander the Great: the Making of a Myth*. pp. 302, with colour figures and maps. London: British Library, 2022. ISBN 978071235769, £40.

The reign of the Macedonian king Alexander III is marked by destruction: razing Thebes to the ground, the overthrow of the Persian empire, the burning of Persepolis, the murder and execution of his associates (Clitus, Parmenio, Callisthenes, etc.), and the killing of countless others who remain unnamed and unknown. Seven years after his final victory over the Persian king Darius, he was dead with no heir capable of taking his place. In his famous and no doubt apocryphal last words he envisaged the wars for his empire as his funeral games. The legacy of this short and violent reign was the establishment of Greco-Macedonian political and cultural dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean, albeit not as a unified Macedonian empire, but rather as a group of kingdoms ruled by rival Macedonian warlords. In spite of this, Alexander has emerged as one of the most well-known and heroic figures from antiquity. His story has been told in increasingly imagined versions across a range of traditions, both Western and Eastern, the positive outweighing the negative. He is an explorer, a visionary, a lover, a philosopher and a role model for rulers.

This book was published to accompany the British Library's 2022 exhibition of the same name and edited by Richard Stoneman in collaboration with the curators who organised the exhibition. It consists of essays by nine leading scholars and a catalogue of the exhibition itself. It is not about the historical Alexander but rather it focusses on the stories and myths that developed around him, a process which began in his lifetime and which has continued ever since (Moore 2018). As the record of a British Library exhibition the catalogue has an understandable emphasis on manuscripts of various forms, some beautifully illustrated. Particularly impressive is a double-page from the lavish edition of Nizami's *Khamsah* commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar in the late 16th century. It shows a priestess successfully pleading with an enthroned Alexander not to damage a precious golden statue (cat. 65). The catalogue's images are supplemented by the illustrations for individual essays, such as the striking 4th C. AD mosaic from Baalbek showing

Alexander's birth (fig. 1.1), which give the reader access to material not included in the exhibition.

Alexander was mythologised even while he was alive. The expedition's historian Callisthenes told of crows that had guided him through a dust storm to the oracle at Siwah (Strabo 17.1.43). Later, the expansionist Romans looked to Alexander as an example. Pompey was said to have worn the cloak of Alexander in his triumphal procession, Augustus visited his tomb in Alexandria, and Trajan made no secret of his admiration. Arrian wrote an account of Alexander's campaigns, Plutarch paired him with Caesar in his *Parallel Lives*, and Curtius Rufus told the story in Latin. These were relatively restrained historically grounded accounts, although not without some elaboration; Plutarch includes fanciful stories of the king's birth, Curtius gives an account of Alexander's encounter with the Amazon queen. These form the basis of the dominant Western tradition on Alexander that extends all the way through to Napoleon (cat. 72), Mary Renault (cat. 90-91) and Iron Maiden's 1986 song 'Alexander the Great' (the latter not included in the catalogue, but see Djurslev 2014).

But running alongside all this was another significant influence, the *Alexander Romance*, a popular and novelistic treatment of Alexander's life that allowed him to escape the confines of the Western Classical tradition. Its date is controversial and its history complex. Stoneman, who has written extensively on the *Alexander Romance*, dates the earliest version to the reign of Ptolemy II (283-246 BC) but many opt for the third century AD. Certainly there is no evidence for it, before its translation into Latin in the first half of the fourth century. The *Alexander Romance* included far more fantastical elements than authors such as Arrian, Plutarch and Curtius. Alexander, for instance, was now the son of the last Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebo, who had fled Egypt and settled in Macedon, where using a combination of magic and trickery he managed to impregnate Olympias under the guise of the god Ammon, an episode discussed in Krzysztof Nawotka's chapter here and depicted in illustrated manuscripts in the catalogue (nos. 14-15). But the impetus for the spread of Alexander's reputation in the East came from Armenian, Syriac and Arabic translations that made the *Alexander Romance* or parts of it accessible to a wider audience outside the Greek and Latin-speaking world. These also encouraged further elaborations of the Alexander story as it adapted to its new environment. Alexander's appearance in the *Iskandarnamah* that formed part of the *Khamsah* written by the Persian poet Nizami in the late 12th C. is testament to this process and to the extent of the Macedonian's posthumous reach (on Alexander's journey into Persian literature, Manteghi 2018)

The huge range of material collected in the catalogue vividly shows the extraordinary popularity of the Alexander story, although it is not easy to explain his widespread and enduring appeal. Why was the *Alexander Romance* translated, however loosely, into so many languages? Military leaders might identify with Alexander, but for others, especially those whose lands were conquered by Alexander, the attraction appears paradoxical. Not everyone, however, succumbed to the positive myth of Alexander; for the adherents of Zoroastrianism he was 'the accursed'. But the stories of the *Alexander Romance* are as much about Alexander's adventures as they are about his conquests. Exploits are added and developed over time, his search for the water of life, his experiments with flight and underwater exploration, his conversations with talking trees. The curators briefly address the question of Alexander's appeal in their preface, where they suggest that it is the very cross-cultural character of his story which made it attractive and so offered a narrative that could be shared (p. 4). Stoneman in his introduction appears to see Alexander's universal appeal as lying in the way he exemplifies the very human problem of the tension between ambition and what is possible (p. 21). The catalogue goes right up to the present day. Alongside the medieval there are contemporary images from cinema, television, anime and even a novel written from the perspective of Alexander's horse Bucephalus.

The nine short essays, themselves nicely illustrated, complement the catalogue. The visual traditions of East and West are treated in chapters by Barbara Brend and Scott McKendrick respectively. That philosophy is the subject of two chapters is indicative of the re-positioning of Alexander as a philosophical enquirer in search of enlightenment. Charles Burnett questions whether Alexander was even taught by Aristotle. His chapter discusses Aristotle's alleged advice to Alexander as related in the Arabic tradition, notably the *Secret of Secrets*, an influential work that provided guidance not only on how to rule but also on occult practices that might be useful for a ruler. Philip Bosman reviews Alexander's relationship with various philosophers, including Aristotle (but this time without the scepticism), Diogenes the Cynic, those who accompanied the campaign and those he met in India. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones explores Alexander's love-life, emphasising the limits of the ancient evidence. Alexander's adventures in remote parts of the world also led to his incorporation in medieval *mappae mundi*, such as the one in Hereford Cathedral

and the now-destroyed Ebstorf map. These are the subject of an absorbing chapter by Alessandro Scafi. Mario Casari examines religious views of Alexander (Zoroastrian, Jewish, Islamic and Christian), while the final chapter by Stoneman looks at the traditions on his death and burial.

The book is handsomely produced but structurally it tends to frustrate the reader. Instead of being divided into two halves, first the essays and then the catalogue, the editors have chosen to distribute selections of the catalogue entries among the essays and to precede each selection with an editors' introduction. This not only makes tracking the specific catalogue entries down more difficult than it needs to be, it also leads to repetition. Readers, however, will probably choose to dip into the fascinating catalogue of exhibition material rather than read the book from cover to cover.

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Djurslev, C. 2014. 'The Metal King: Alexander the Great in Heavy Metal Music', *Metal Music Studies* 1: 127-41.

Manteghi, H. 2018. *Alexander the Great in the Persian Tradition: History, Myth and Legend in Medieval Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Moore, K. (ed.) 2018. *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill.

Christelle Fischer-Bovet and Sitta von Reden (eds) *Comparing the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires: Integration, Communication, and Resistance*. pp. 440. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. ISBN 9781108479257, hardback £90.00.

This volume is a welcome addition to the comparative study of Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. In the introduction, the editors present the aims of the book, its structure and the approaches taken by the 10 contributions, most of which are co-authored. The volume is divided into three sections, which deal with the internal organization of the kingdoms, the forms of communication and exchange and the manifold relationship between the local elites and the kings.

The first part of the book 'Cities, Settlement and Integration', is devoted to the policies of Ptolemies and Seleucids regarding the formation of capital cities and settlements in their territories.

Von Reden and Strootman (Chapter 1: *Imperial metropoleis and Foundation Myths: Ptolemaic and Seleucid Capitals Compared*) deal with the formation of capital cities and discuss foundation legends associated with capital cities in both kingdoms. While Alexandria was indisputably the most important city of Egypt (the second city being Memphis, a religious centre), an administrative hub whose primacy no-one doubted, in the Seleucid kingdom the situation was completely different. The vast Seleucid empire, whose territory already contained numerous royal cities, needed a 'symbolical political center', a role initially fulfilled by Seleucia Piereia and subsequently by Antioch. The authors observe that the capitals of both kingdoms were symbolic and artificial constructs that therefore had to rest upon a number of conventions. In particular, they had to adapt themselves to existing administrative and religious traditions and their foundation tied to past, present and future. Such an endeavour involved propagating the idea that these capital cities enjoyed a privileged status and they were to be seen as universal entities. Thus the cities offered an arena in which rivalries between the Ptolemies and Seleucids could play out involving monumental space and architecture within the cities, the splendour of the ceremonies that the cities hosted and the fostering of Greek culture and of Greek literature in particular designed to promote royal ideologies.

Mairs and Fischer-Bovet (Chapter 2: *Reassessing Hellenistic Settlement Policies: The Seleucid Far East, Ptolemaic Red Sea Bassin and Egypt*) move beyond capital cities to deal with processes involved in the foundation, modification or renaming of existing cities and settlements in Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. Mairs employs historical and archaeological evidence to provide an account of early Seleucid military settlements in central Asia and, in particular, in Bactria. Although Mairs does not give an exhaustive survey of the process involved in foundation and re-foundation of cities in the Seleucid empire as a whole, she does make it clear that in the period in question the settlements of Bactria were strongly military in nature and indeed were established by military forces in important areas of the region in accordance with the settlement policy of the Seleucids (who followed Alexander's