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HAPPILY EVER ANCIENT

VISIONS OF ANTIQUITY FOR CHILDREN IN VISUAL MEDIA



HAPPILY EVER ANCIENT

Visions of Antiquity for children in visual media

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ONCE UPON A TIME IN MACEDON. ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN MEDIA FICTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT: Although there have been many studies of the different perspectives of Alexander the Great and the way that he is represented in films, there have not been any similar approaches to his portrayal in animated movies and other media addressed at children and young audiences. This is despite Alexander being a common resource in many different kinds of fictional film and TV narratives. Likewise, the impact of Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) and the ever-intense *Alexandermania* inspired a number of projects concerning his biography and history, including traditional TV programmes. The ultimate aim of this research is to analyse the way Alexander the Great is viewed and interpreted in contemporary popular culture, in the specific framework of media for children and young audiences.

KEY-WORDS: Alexander the Great, TV Shows, Media, Children, Young Audiences.

Any kind of approach to Classical Reception Studies concerning Alexander the Great is sure to offer an exciting experience, full of thrills and surprises. According to a 2004 study by the journal *Archaeology*²,

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² Briant 2016: 291.

a simple Google search for Alexander produces 1.12 million websites that mention his name. Such a long-standing obsession with Alexander includes such strange cases as the nicknames of people like the Olympic hero Aleksandr Aleksàndrovitx Karelin, alias “Alexander the Great”³, or his Russian comrade Alexander Ovechkin, the captain of the Washington Capitals hockey team and protagonist of the documentary film “Ovechkin, the Gr-8” (8 is his shirt number, but the play on the name of Alexander the Great is clear). Although this is not the place to analyse these examples of the use of Alexander and his relationship with pop culture⁴, they do show that Alexander is still a topical character, and how prominent he is in collective memory.

Given the scope of this chapter, it would be naïve to consider that any comprehensive study of Alexander’s presence in media fiction for children and young people is even possible. Some previous attempts have shown what an enormous number of possibilities for analysis exist in such fields as children’s literature, one example being the brilliant work by Julián Pelegrín Campo⁵. Thus, our purpose here, far from producing a comprehensive list, is to review the best known and most common representations of Alexander the Great in films, series and cartoons aimed at children and young people. Possibly the most frequent way in which Alexander appears in or is part of such fiction is through plays on his name, as is the case, for example, with the children’s book *Alexander the Great*, by Hans de Beer and Burny Bos, where a little mouse named Alexander discovers the power to be brave and leave his home to seek food for his family⁶. The same kind of play with Alexander’s name is used in Season 4,

3 Gold Medallist in Freestyle wrestling for the USSR at the Olympic Games in Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992), Atlanta (1996), and Silver Medallist in Sydney (2000).

4 A recent book explores most of these facets of Alexander’s Classical Reception: Moore 2018.

5 Pelegrín Campo 2008. Also, Briant 2016: 293-297. As we have been trying to stress, Alexander’s presence in contemporary pop culture is amazingly wide. Evidence for this can be found in Christian Djurslev’s study of the presence of Alexander in heavy metal music: Djurslev 2015.

6 Despite the fact that the title could be the result of some kind of unintentional coincidence, there are some elements in common between the historical Alexander and the little mouse Alexander: the mouse’s father has suffered some mutilations, as was the case with Philip of Macedon himself, or the fact that going out of the gate of his lair brings the mouse prosperity in the same way as the conquest of Asia did for Alexander and the Macedonians.

Episode 1 of *Babar*, the animated TV show from 1991, titled *Alexander the Great*, where this great Alexander is not the historical Macedonian king, but Babar's youngest son, who behaves here not as a small child but in a responsible way, showing that he is growing up. Another such example can be found in *The Adventures of Zack and Cody* (Season 2, Episode 25: *Loosely Ballroom*), where Alexander the Great is the nickname of a brilliant child dancer who actually serves as the villain in this episode.

Along similar lines, albeit with some notable differences, we must mention an Alexander themed episode of the TV show *Walter Melon* (the English translation of the adaptation for TV of the Belgian comic books *Achille Talon* – another play with names, now concerning the vulnerable part of Achilles' anatomy, the heel!). When Alexander finds himself in trouble, facing the revolt of his soldiers in India, he calls for Walter Melon to help him out by taking his place. In the typical vein of this show, where Alexander suffered, the ordinary man Walter Melon succeeds. This view of Alexander leads us on to two of the most common topics in fiction about Alexander: first, the conflict between him and his soldiers, and secondly, the appearance, due to the presence of Porus and the Indian context, of many animals, a usual feature of children's fiction.

Regarding biographical approaches, i.e. those that depict the life and history of Alexander on the screen for children and young audiences, the first example is the *Alexander the Great* (2006) project, directed by Daehong Kim⁷, an animated film produced in Italy by Difarm Inc. The film specifically aims to explain the history of Alexander to a child audience, probably linked in some way to the *Alexandermania* unleashed by Oliver Stone's 2004 film⁸, but also to the obsession with Alexander due to the conflicts in the Middle East, a scenario marked by the US-led military operations, with major European involvement, following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Kim's film was made using infographic techniques that fail to achieve the purpose of appealing entertainment, even despite the

⁷ A few years later, in 2007, Kim directed a new biopic for children, this time about the life of Saint Anthony.

⁸ Antela-Bernárdez & Prieto 2008; Berti & García Morcillo 2008; Wieber 2008; Chaniotis 2008; Petrovic 2008; Cartledge & Greenland 2010; Briant 2016: 312-324.

unquestionable value of the history that has been told so many times told since the fourth century BC, namely the life of the conqueror Alexander. The historical adaptation also leaves much to be desired. Several details are not treated with the expected accuracy. Certain care is taken with the costumes worn by Alexander and most of the main characters, such the Persian King Darius III, including the common feature of the *linothorax*, following here the famous mosaic of the Battle of Issus⁹, but these recurring elements are probably the only real attempts at historical accuracy. The other aesthetics of the characters and sets reflect the typically clichéd image of the world of the ancient Greek world, as is the case of the use of Corinthian helmets by Alexander's Macedonian soldiers. We could also note here the influence of the comic *300* (1998) by Frank Miller¹⁰ on the Macedonian Army attack in a rugby scrum formation¹¹, or the closed phalanx of the Roman turtle formation (*testudo*) of Miller's comic book drawings that would later be filmed by Zack Snyder in the famous movie *300* (2007) about the invincible Spartans led by King Leonidas.

Otherwise, the basic plot of Kim's film seems to find its support in the information (and historiographical conception) recorded by Plutarch, with his anecdotes and *exempla* about Bucephalus and the glorifying perspective whereby Alexander is conceived as a model, while silencing the darkest parts of the story; parts that are so present, despite the attempts at justification, in the ancient sources about Alexander, and the horrors and violence of the conquest. Meanwhile, Alexander's enemies are shown as if they were only Persians, a method used to avoid the complexities of the opposition to Alexander among many peoples subdued during the campaign, or the difficult relationships between Alexander and the Greek *poleis*. To summarise, the movie has much in common with that of Oliver Stone, though this animated version had suffered a clear and systematic process of oversimplification.

A second example of a biopic is the strange *Young Alexander the Great*. Directed by Martial Arts specialist Jalal Mehri, and produced by the

9 Plut. *Alex.* 32, 8-12. Moreno 2001; Antela-Bernárdez & Prieto 2008: 276; Antela-Bernárdez 2018.

10 Levene 2007; Lillo 2008; Beigel 2012; Lauwers & Huybrecht 2012.

11 Goldsworthy 1997; Echeverría Rey 2011.

famous Ilya Salkind (involved in major film projects like Richard Donner's *Superman*, among many others), this film is a dark product, shrouded in mystery, and after much effort, I still only know a few details, and cannot be too certain about those either, for only a trailer is available. In fact, no one seems to really know whether it is a film or a television pilot (although the Internet Movie Database dates the production to 2010, the movie was actually announced in 2005, in a similar status then to what can be found today)¹². It may never have been fully recorded, and what exists, the trailer and the footage, is just a collection of scenes from a proposed television series for Eastern Mediterranean TV channels. Anyway, the original idea behind this production is a common one in shows for children, i.e. to take some character, from history or fiction, and present them in their younger years. Similar examples to this teenage view of Alexander are *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones*, or even more child-like products like *A Pup Named Scooby Doo*, or *The Flintstone Kids*. What such products tend to provide is, in fact, a traditional element of the genre of ancient biography¹³, where a part of the account would commonly describe some childhood examples of the greatness of the person whose life was being described¹⁴. Going back to *Young Alexander the Great*, what we have here, as far as it is possible to know, given such misinformation, is a plot based on a kind of teenage adventure involving Alexander, especially focusing on his complex family relationships, and on the period of succession to Philip II. However, the staging and ambience of the fiction is, to put it mildly, “arguable”, with the set and costume design painting a picture that is very far removed from what the Macedonian court probably looked like. Once such example is the cuirass that Philip wears, with enormous shoulder pads decorated with a sun/star (the sun was the symbol of the Argead dynasty) that seems to connect him with the traditional costumes of American comic-book superheroes. This is not just a mistake but also a pity when we note that a cuirass that probably belonged to Philip was one of the archaeological findings from the royal tombs of Vergina¹⁵. Anyway, I

12 “IMDB *Young Alexander the Great*” <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0390197/> (08/04/2018).

13 Momigliano 1971; Petrovic 2008.

14 For example, Cohen & Rutter. On Alexander's case and cinema, see Nisbet 2010.

15 Moreno Hernández 2012: 80-84.

guess this is a warning that historical truth was not a priority of this movie/production, and it was merely designed for light entertainment with just a minor hint of historical accuracy, although the result is, at best, dubious, and the quality is unfathomable. This is especially so when it comes to Alexander's companion in the film, a female character named Leto. Her presence is worthy of some attention: first, Leto is an invention for this show; second, judging by her appearance and costumes, it would seem that she was supposed to be an Amazon, which links well with Alexander's stories¹⁶; and third, and finally, the coincidence between the name, Leto, a mythical figure who can probably be related with Alexander the Great in antiquity¹⁷, and the name of the actor Jared Leto, who in Oliver Stone's film played Hephaestion, Alexander's close comrade and friend, seems to reflect a clear intention to connect the two of them. This is the only reason I can think of for this weird connection, as Jared Leto's Hephaestion is the sexual element in Alexander's life in Stone's film, something that aroused such criticism in Greece and probably much of the Eastern Mediterranean too, as well as among some Western audiences¹⁸. Here, the dangerously attractive Hephaestion, and his implications for the audience, is replaced by a girl, and like Amazons featured in the ancient histories of Alexander, the character of Leto was a good way to solve the whole problem.

We know that this film was shot in Egypt, and the funding was probably also Egyptian. The poster stresses this Egyptian element, showing the pyramids, even though we know Alexander did not set foot in Egypt until long after his teenage years, i.e. much later than the period covered by the movie. Also, the image of Olympia shown in the available footage from the film shows her dressed in a fashion that seems more Egyptian than anything of Epirote or even of Greek origin. Despite such objections, it is a shame that a project like this did not see the light, even though the

16 Baynham 2001.

17 On Alexander and the gods, vid. Antela-Bernárdez.

18 An anecdote recorded by Daniel Ogden in his chapter on the (homo) sexuality of Alexander the Great during a Meeting of the Ancient Macedonia's Symposiums clearly shows how current the problem with Alexander's sexuality is, and how his possible homosexuality disturbs people who identify their own world with the one Alexander built through his campaigns. On this, see Ogden 2011. On Alexander Sexuality, see Ogden 2009. Finally, Alexander became a kind of symbol for the gay community: Briant 2016: 290.

historical accuracy and quality of the movie are less than what a critical audience would desire. The poor plot, with this teenage Alexander, removes a large part of the interest, not to mention the lack of care for historical fact in what seems to be a sub-standard product that is lacking in content or the possibility to offer real entertainment. After all, the worst thing one can say about a movie is that it seems boring.

In a similar state of production “in progress” we also find the animated TV movie titled *Alexander and Porus*, an Indian Project (produced by Shethia Audio Video Private Limited), with the clear aim of narrating a key aspect of the history of India, namely the meeting between King Porus and Alexander. Directed by Rakesh Prasad, who was also in charge of an earlier animated movie about the twelfth century king Prithviraj Chauhan¹⁹, who was similar in many ways to Alexander, the main character in this film is not Alexander, but Porus. The king is pictured here as a kind of beast-master, a close friend to all the animal kingdom (with a special relationship with his elephant), connected with nature and, for that reason, maybe also with the divine. Here, the movie is following a cinematic tradition that started with the classic movie *Sikhandar* (1941), which Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* frequently recalls, by presenting the meeting with Porus as the final moment of Alexander’s campaign and hence the essential episode of the whole conquest of the East. The appearance of the cartoon could be defined as “vintage”, at least judging from the available footage. As far as we can tell, the basis of the story probably came from sources that have nothing in common with the ancient authors’ accounts of Alexander, but I must confess that the result seems more enjoyable and casual than the other movies examined thus far.

But these three examples come nowhere near to eclipsing the greatness of the classic masterpiece *Reign: The Conqueror*, the famous anime (13 episodes) originally released in Japan in 1999²⁰, and which definitively appeared in Western markets from 2003. Based on a novel by Hiroshi Aramata, this

¹⁹ “IMDB Veer Yodha Prithviraj Chauhan, 2008” <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1552010> (8/04/2018).

²⁰ The title of this first version is *Alexande Senki*. The movie clearly changed after the 5th chapter, thanks to the management of Peter Chung, the man behind the successful MTV animated fiction *Aeon-Flux*, who faced the challenge of making the film interesting for the American audience. For sure, we Peter Chung’s work to have been a major success, despite the complexity of the final result.

anime produced by Madhouse Productions is an excellent, and absolutely fascinating, series about the relationship between mankind and power shown through the example of Alexander's story, transferring the action from his history to a futuristic context, in the purest spirit of postmodern science-fiction²¹. From this starting point, *Reign: The Conqueror* shows once again how the plasticity of the most powerful elements of Alexander's history is multiplied when translated and re-elaborated by new re-readings. Here, Alexander does not ride a horse but a spaceship, but the key elements of his history are presented in an unalterable manner. However, we should not be misled by the typical atmosphere and visual language of anime, because we are probably talking about the best-ever adaptation of the information in our ancient sources about Alexander to fiction. This reinterpretation is a challenging, and highly personal, proposal, but against all odds it has survived the passage of time perfectly, perhaps precisely due to its strong link with the most traditional anime, which means it is as attractive today as it was at the time of its first release.

Beyond these monographic attempts to introduce Alexander to young audiences, among others, Alexander has also featured prominently in many different animated series and television programmes. The most memorable might be the Alexander of *Once Upon a Time... Man*, a TV show that enjoyed enormous success, with different sequels (*Once Upon a Time...Space*, *Once Upon a Time...Life*, etc.), that from 1978 and throughout most of the 80's established a successful formula for presenting historical knowledge and popular science to the young audiences of the era. The historical character of Alexander appears in Episode 5, titled *The First Empires*, where his conquest appears alongside those of other empires in the East, following the evolutionary theory of empires that is so linked to the Hegelian influence, and which had had so much impact on our understanding of Alexander²². It is surprising to note that the following episode, however, is dedicated to *The Age of Pericles*, which is a somewhat

21 According to data on the Italian website "terrediconfine.eu" <http://www.terrediconfine.eu/alexander/> (07/01/2017), a kind of semantic connection can be found between the stage of evolution provoked by the monolith in 2001. *A Space Odyssey* (S. Kubrick dir., 1969) and a similar process in *Reign: The Conqueror* by the Platonic Solid.

22 Antela-Bernárdez 2000; Antela-Bernárdez in press.

dubious and decontextualized chronology, given that Alexander's time should be explained after that of Pericles, so the aim seems to be to attach Alexander's conquest not to Greek history, and indeed to what it means for an understanding of the progress of mankind (the historical purpose of the series), but to the empires of the Ancient Near East. Likewise, the portrayal of Alexander here is a clichéd one, and to the very brief summary of his conquest (Cleitus saving his life in Granicus included) the narrative adds the typical criticisms of his behaviour, with descriptions that stress his worst side. Alexander's personality is also explained here as being the result of his parents, with a heavily drinking father who succumbed to violent and terrible passions, and a *mythomaniac* mother who constantly humiliates her husband by telling him that Alexander's real father was actually a god²³. Stressing Alexander's dark side, such as his impetuosity, depressive tendencies, weak character, alcoholism and violence (showing the killing of Cleitus, a scene to be expected after the earlier depiction of Granicus), he is presented as a character between genius and madness, so strange yet thrilling that he is simply impossible to completely understand. He is viewed, once again, on the simple premise of considering his conquest a mere precedent for the Roman Empire, which leads the audience to assume the implicit idea that the sole and authentic destiny of the Near East region was actually to be submitted to an occidental authority.

This figure of Alexander in *Once Upon a Time... Man* has a kind of sequel in the later *Once Upon a Time... The Explorers*, released in France in October 1996. Despite the lapse in time between the first perspective of Alexander in the 1978 series and the new one of 1996, the conclusion about Alexander is much the same. Here, each of the greatest moments in Alexander's life is depicted in detail, but the result is the same. It is actually embarrassing to observe the limited impact of the new perspectives on Alexander, and especially the extensive developments in our knowledge about the continuity and change between Alexander and the Achaemenid Empire, have had on this show's screenplay and ideas, especially considering that most of these advances came from French scholars like Pierre Briant²⁴.

23 On the topic of Alexander's difficult relationship with his parents, see Antela-Bernárdez in press b, with bibliography.

24 Briant 2009; Imanpour 2013; Imanpour 2015; Antela-Bernárdez & Zaragoza 2019.

The information society has created more modern products about Alexander, although the aim seems to be the same as that of *Once Upon a Time...Man*, which is available now via online video channels and repositories. One that should be highlighted here is the episode that *World Ahoy* dedicated to him. Made with animations that closely resemble the ones created by Terry Gilliam for *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *World Ahoy* is a series of short online films about history and historical characters directed by Vicente Monsonís, produced by Terra a la Vista (Valencia) and distributed by Neptuno Films (a Catalonia-based Company created in 1991). Monsonís often directs both fiction and non-fiction productions for television. *World Ahoy* is a wide-ranging series, with 40 episodes on a variety of different historical characters, ages and topics. The result is interesting and especially notable for its didactical and pedagogical values, showing how learning and fun can be seamlessly combined. The third episode deals with Alexander, in which the aesthetic setting makes little attempt at historical reliability, which is sacrificed for the good of a better understanding of the historical process. Concessions are commonplace here, and bearing in mind what is being explained, they are not disturbing at all (with the exception of the typical depiction of the Ancient Persians as monsters: the Immortals are shown here as horrible lizard-men), because the final product is a genuine lesson in how Ancient History can be taught in an easy and enjoyable way.

Despite the difficulties for understanding it, I could not miss the chance here to mention the delightful *Genikids History*, a production from South Korea that shares the same aim as *World Ahoy*. These are an enormous number of short online videos, of which we are particularly interested in those dedicated to the history of Eastern Asia, although there are others related to many other common topics of universal history of interest to all audiences, such as those on Tutankhamun and even Alexander himself. In the case that interests us here, the episode entitled *Dream of Alexander the Great*²⁵ (2016) is extremely significant, since the attention that the episode dedicates to the campaign and military affairs, and even to the biographical portrait, is minimal, in order to focus its interest instead on

25 <https://youtu.be/QsaBhwNwojE> (04/08/2018). Although I know there are more videos on the channel dedicated to Alexander, I only was able to analyse this one.

the impact of the conquest during the Hellenistic age. The phantom of Alexander is used to follow the different cultural changes of Hellenism (break from the tradition of movement and space in Hellenistic Greek sculpture, major urbanisation of the population, the spread of museums, the library of Alexandria, and so on). So, the focus of these explanations is the realm of Ptolemaic Egypt, presented as the diffusor and heir of all these changing traditions.

Finally, we must also mention the fictions where Alexander plays a secondary role, as a kind of background or anecdotal figure, that serves (in my opinion, in a more useful way than biographical or historical fiction) to better understand the place and value of Alexander in popular culture aimed at children and young audiences. Here, the fictitious anime *Yatterman* deserves commentary. Although there were three, each with its own style and different graphic art, each season of *Yatterman* includes a chapter where Alexander is depicted, namely *Time Bokan Series I* (*Yatterman*, 1975-1976), *Time Bokan Series II* (*Yatterman*, 1977-1979, episode 101) and *Time Bokan Series III* (*Yattodetaman*, 1981-1982). In the first two (*Series I* and *II*), Alexander appears as an older, bearded²⁶ general in a way that (at least in *Series II*) recalls some early depictions of Cyrus (as in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, from 1916²⁷), but his appearance in the third, *Yattodetaman*, is closer to the historical character. Nevertheless, and despite these differences, the idea of each appearance by Alexander in *Time Bokan Series* is the same: the heroes travel back in time and space to escape from the baddies and take advantage of some kind of mighty object of power related with Alexander. This idea is repeated over and over again in such fiction about our Macedonian conqueror.

Other than the brief appearance of Alexander in *Gulliver's Travels* (1996), a TV Mini-Series in which he is depicted as an alcoholic troublemaker, there are two main examples of Alexander appearing as a fictitious secondary character. The first is Alan Moore's comic masterpiece *Watchmen* (with Dave Gibbons as illustrator and John Higgins as

26 The usual beardless appearance of Alexander has received full academic attention: Alonso-Troncoso 2010.

27 On this episode of "The Fall of Babylon" in *Intolerance*, cf. Vidal 2013.

colourist) published between 1986 and 1987 and which has also been filmed by Zack Snyder, who has come to be something of a specialist in adaptations of comics to the big screen using the infographic technique of *chroma* keying, as in the case of *300*. In Moore's brilliant treatise about superheroes, we find the villain Adrian (Alexander) Veidt, alias Ozymandias, a character inspired by the life of Alexander²⁸, whose impact over humanity Veidt tries to emulate²⁹. By looking to unite mankind as a way to solve the conflicts that threaten us, Veidt seems very close to W. W. Tarn's view of Alexander. Tarn still casts his long shadow across our contemporary culture, despite the efforts of the last fifty years to dismantle his ideas by leading scholars like Badian and even whole historiographical tendencies (such as those led by P. Briant and A. B. Bosworth in recent decades). Nevertheless, *Watchmen's* Alexander the Great, in the form of his alter-ego Adrian Veidt, takes the old-fashioned perspective.

In a similar way, although with several differences, we find the figure of Alexander, recovered as a villain, at least from our first impression, in the (digital) animated film *TMNT* (2007). Directed by Kevin Munroe, this new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles adventure portrays Alexander as an immortal named Yaotl (whose alter-ego is the dark millionaire Max Winters) that 3,000 years ago had activated a kind of gate to a parallel world to gain a power to allow him to rule the Earth. The plot clearly means nothing more than the usual fare of the Ninja Turtles' fictitious universe, although this time the bad guys are not Oruko Saki (the dangerous masked enemy called *Schredder*) or the multi-dimensional traveller Krang, but this Max Winters, who in his many years as an immortal had incarnated various great generals and kings of the past, Alexander the Great among them, as well as Ramses, Caesar and Napoleon. However, despite his apparently devastating aims, Max Winters/Alexander's real desire is to put an end to his immortality, which drives his magical generals (mighty stone statues that come to life) to betray him in order to obtain his immortality for themselves. Luckily, Max Winters/Alexander is helped by the Ninja Turtles in the fight against these evil enemies in an amusing adventure

28 This part of the story did not appear in Snyder's movie, although the set of Veidt's polar lair maintained the Egyptian style. On Veidt and Alexander, see Taylor 2016.

29 Alexander himself was a kind of emulator with his own referential heroes: Antela-Bernárdez 2007.

that, as tends to happen with the world's most famous foursome of large-muscled reptiles, beats to the rhythm of rap, pizza and *cowabungas*.

A third example of a villainous Alexander in fiction for kids is the anime *Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monsters*, where Alexander the Great himself, thanks to a necklace of power (the Millennium Ring, very similar to the Masonic symbol related with Alexander in *The Man Who Would Be King*, the unforgettable masterpiece directed by John Houston in 1975) can dominate the world, although its power ends up corrupting Alexander's soul and turning him into a wicked character with magical abilities, such as separating his body from his spirit, who gains self-entity and receives the name of Yami Alexander, who is the main antagonist for the heroes of this adventure.

In these examples we can find some elements in common. The first is the stressing of Alexander as holder of a great power. Second, is the idea that his legacy is a kind of guidance for the present. This power that defines Alexander also seems to have been a recurrent theme in views of him as a historical character in pop culture. Perhaps due to the difficulties that historians have had explaining his unparalleled success for almost 24 centuries, Alexander is still linked with tools of power, magical artefacts that help to understand how he became the ruler of the known world in his age. One of these artefacts is actually the glowing orb hidden in one of Alexander's temples called the Luna Temple, and the starting point for the whole plot of *Tomb Raider II. The Cradle of Life* (2003), an action-adventure movie directed by Jan de Bont and based on the bestselling videogames featuring the bold and sexy archaeologist Lara Croft. The orb is the key to unleash an ancient mighty power: Pandora's Box. Explanations are unneeded when the skilful Lara Croft takes control of the screen, but what this plot reveals for our understanding of Alexander's portrayal in pop culture is very interesting. Alexander's powerful magical artefacts in *Tomb Raider II* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* are not alone. There is also the cuirass (with a kind of S-shaped serpent in the centre of the chest) attributed to have belonged to Alexander in Lex Luthor's speech to young Clark Kent in *Smallville* (Season 2, Episode 9, directed by David Carson; first aired 01/15/2002). Luthor explains that the S on the chest of the cuirass is an ancient symbol

for strength and courage, so again we find Alexander as an inspiration for all-time heroes, even when the hero in question is the young Superman. Another object viewed as a kind of relic in fiction is Alexander's sword, which as far as I know appears twice in different fictions: the first is the episode of *Burn Notice* called *Entry Point* (Season 4, Episode 6, directed by J. Hunt; first aired 15/07/2010); and the second is a sword that captures the attention of Bruce Wayne (Batman) and Princess Diana (Wonder woman) at a party in the recent *Batman Vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), again with Zack Snyder as director. Both relics were probably also linked with Alexander's power, insofar as fiction sometimes tries to explain Alexander's achievements as a result of his use of powerful objects, as was the case with Pandora's Box in *Tomb Raider 2*, we can also find examples of how Alexander's power, no matter where it came from, survived in objects related to him, such as his arms (cuirass, sword...) or even his tomb. In fact, as Alexander's tomb could be considered one of the most sought-after ancient sites (judging by the frequent fake news stories about it being discovered), it would be no surprise to find references in fiction to it being a hidden location where power and/or richness could be found. This is actually what we find in the TV movie *The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones: Treasure of the Peacock's Eye* (1995, directed by Carl Shulz), whose story draws on many ideas from John Huston's movie *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975), or in the episode entitled *Eye of Osiris* of the famous TV series *MacGyver* (Season 6, episode 14, directed by Michael Vejar, first aired 02/04/1991), where we find again somebody trying to locate Alexander's tomb, but what they find inside is an uncontrolled power that most humans can never hope to handle.

To conclude in summary, we have seen how Alexander is viewed as a kind of powerful symbol, as he has been along the Ages, both as a role model for human beings and as a victim of what the handling of uncontrollable powers can do to Mankind. Like a dream that can never be reached, Alexander is present in fiction for kids and young audiences in a manner that stresses both his unparalleled achievements and his vulnerability to being subdued by the mighty power of his success. Everyone pursues Alexander's goals, but no one feels capable of surviving what those goals would imply. The price of power, in the end, is the corruption of the most

prominent men. But ordinary people can also achieve Alexander's glory and victories, as in the cases of *Babar* or *Achille Talon*, simply by stepping outside of their comfort zone: self-improvement is the real key to greatness. This is the main lesson to be learned from Alexander's depiction in fiction for children and young people. And thus, as a poet might say, the conquest of Asia, or the likes of it, is just one step ahead of us.

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