

**JOSEPH ROISMAN***Colby College*

Interviewed by

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The Editorial Board is very pleased to count with the opportunity to show admiration and recognition to Joseph (Yossi) Roisman, who has influenced during the last decades' researchers within the Ancient Macedonian Studies. Roisman's research has contributed to our knowledge of Ancient Macedonia through many points of view and approaches. Beyond his usual interest in Argead Macedonia, he has also focused his efforts on topics that go from the Attic Orators to the Successors. Many of his books are now must-to works for anyone who wants to go in a deeper understanding of the complex cultural, political and social realities of the Greek world during the 4th and 3rd centuries. A great lover of his profession, Roisman is, among many other qualities, a kind fellow, always ready to help with useful and rich comments and advice to others, either students or colleagues.

A former student of W. Z. Rubensohn in Tel-Aviv, Roisman developed his research and teaching in Colby College until his recent retirement. Nevertheless, he is still tireless and very active, publishing new material and expressing his own perspective in a wide range of topics, an unusual characteristic nowadays, when a researcher usually focuses in deep in a very concrete, sometimes unique, aspect of Ancient History. He has also been involved in important projects, like the Blackwell's Companion to Ancient Macedonia (co-edited with Ian Worthington) that has challenged the research

of many scholars around the world and helped to give tools and resources to the Ancient Macedonian Studies.

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[INTERVIEWER]: Let us start this interview saying that we really thank you so much for accepting our proposal for this interview. It is a great pleasure, and an honor, to have the chance to know your opinion of some of the questions of this interview.

**How did you arrive to the Ancient Macedonian Studies?**

[ROISMAN]: I thank my late, dear professor, Wolfgang Zeev Rubinsohn at Tel-Aviv University for introducing me to the subject. His courses on Greek history and Alexander the Great still serve as my teaching models.

**Do you think yourself as an expert in Alexander and the time of the Diadochs?**

Yes. I have also dealt extensively with Athens in the age of the orators and Greek military history.

**In what aspects do you consider our fieldwork has gained more progress in recent years?**

We are steadily being provided with new epigraphic evidence, especially from Hellenistic and Roman times, and with new material evidence. I fear, however, that the old problem of long delays in publication of archaeological reports persists. Like everyone else I eagerly wait for the results of the excavation of the Amphipolis tomb.

**Arrian is one, among many others, of the topics you have focused your research. What is your opinion of the influence of Arrian on Modern Historiography of Alexander? Do you think Arrian has gained too much credibility in comparison to other sources?**

Fortunately, Alexander historiography moved away already in the previous century from the adoration of Arrian and his source Ptolemy, who were deemed first-rate “scientific” historians, and whose version was preferred to other sources as a matter of course. Prime examples of such admirers were Kornemann (1935) and Strasburger (1934) about Ptolemy, or Tarn regarding Arrian (1948, vol. 2). Yet the pendulum seems to have swung too far in the other direction, in particular in the magistral works of Bosworth, perhaps Arrian’s worst enemy. Arrian is usually better than other sources on military affairs, but even there or everywhere his comparative value should be judged on a case by case basis.

**The role of the Macedonian Kings in the Macedonian Assembly and Trials has been another one of the many topics you have analysed. Do you think we can consider Macedonian Kingship as Constitutional (as Hammond assures) or Absolute (following Errington), or maybe you consider other models?**

Given the choice, I’d go with the absolutist model. With that said, I don’t particularly like models because they too often lead to a forced application of the evidence to the model or to discarding of valuable information just because it does not fit it. Instead of

characterizing Macedonian kingship as either constitutional or absolute, we may look at power relations in Macedonia as a continuum on which the same king acted at one time “by law” and popular consent, at another with impunity or by fiat, and at still another with a mixture of both, depending on the king, circumstances and the issue involved. Anecdotes about Macedonian kings who ignored their subjects’ petitions and then, following a rebuke, accepted them, illustrate the point.

**Other of your research topics has been the Attic Orators and Alexander. Is there still so much to do concerning Greece in Alexander’s times? Between Ptolemy and Hieronymus of Cardia, which author do you find more fascinating?**

Livy says in his Preface that people write ancient history in the belief that they either have something new to say or that they can write better. It was true then as it is true now, even for Alexander’s era which is one of the most researched topics in modern historiography. This why even though nothing new comes to mind about Alexander and Greece, I am sure that I miss plenty.

I find Hieronymus more fascinating than Ptolemy. In spite of his elitist attitudes, he had a broader perspective on the people he wrote, including ethnography. He also experienced more ups and downs than Ptolemy, and served two of the more interesting and complex Diadochs, Eumenes and Antigonus I.

**On the *Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Blackwell, 2011), can you explain how the idea of such a book arise? There was a need of this Companion? Can you evaluate the impact of this book and if it meant a change in Ancient Macedonian Studies? Finally, if you know the “reply” by Brill (*Brill’s Companion to Ancient Macedon*, edited by R. Lane Fox), can you tell us your opinion about the difference between them?**

The credit for the idea of the Companion belongs to Ian Worthington, who initiated the project and kindly invited me to be his co-editor. I agreed because there was no comparable book then that combined historical, archaeological, numismatic and cultural investigations of the topic. Also, many other publications on ancient Macedonia were too specialized, or dated, or not easily accessible to readers who approach the topic for the first time as well as experts.

I’ll leave it to others to assess the impact of the book. I know that it is frequently cited and that many start their investigation of ancient Macedonia with the Companion or consult it for their research. That’s good enough for me.

I believe that the two Companions complement each other. While the Brill’s Companion is rich with information about the archaeology and cities of ancient Macedonia, our Companion offers a comprehensive and thematic treatment of Macedonian history, its evidence and its leading aspects.

**Which are your favourite books about Antiquity, and about Macedon? Which Works do you recommend to the students who begin in our fieldwork?**

My favourite books about antiquity focus on Alexander, Macedonia, Classical Athens and Greek military history. Because naming them all will make a very long list, I shall

mention only A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988), which is still unsurpassed as historical account of the king.

For beginners in ancient Macedonia studies, I would recommend the two Companions to Ancient Macedonia mentioned above as well as C. King, *Ancient Macedonia* (London: 2018).

**Which Author in Ancient Macedonian Studies has influenced you more, and why?**

I have mentioned that Zeev W. Rubensohn, was responsible for my interest in ancient Macedonian studies and Alexander. I also learned a lot from E. Badian's and A.B. Bosworth's numerous publications, and even from W.W. Tarn, who was savaged by both scholars, though not always deservedly. I did not always agree with their theses, but they taught me to read the evidence closely and critically and marshal it in support of the main idea.

**During the last decades, the great historians that have shed light over our fieldwork (Hammond, Badian, Bosworth...) passed away. Are you worried about the future of the Ancient Macedonian Studies or do you think we can count on a generational relay?**

The historians you name were undoubtedly giants of their field. Yet there is always room for Epigoni, not to mention that it is not always beneficial to have a dominant view as opposed to plurality of opinions. In the case of Alexander, for example, it appears that more and more historians are ready to revise Badian's and Bosworth's dark portrayal of the king without sharing Hammond's idealistic view of him. There is also no decline in new publications on the subject. I am not worried, then, about the state of Macedonian studies.

**Who do you consider your Master? And who do you consider your disciples?**

I should add to my teachers and guides mentioned in the previous answers Carol G. Thomas, University of Washington, my dissertation supervisor and strong supports ever since. I owe her more than I can say. I don't know if I have disciples, although it may happen that people agree with my views or follow paths I have taken.

**Alexander had been viewed as an Icon for many powers along the XX<sup>th</sup> Century. What kind of responsibility the Academic Historians had on this use of Alexander's image?**

As I am writing my responses, President Donald Trump both abandoned the Kurds in Syria and accused them of not helping the allies in WWII. Come to think of it, they also did not lift a finger when the Americans were fighting the British. And did they do anything to save the dinosaurs? More seriously, the abuse of history creates an opportunity for historians to react whether in the case of the Kurds or Alexander. They may also participate in current debates on clash of cultures in light of Alexander's experience. Admittedly, however, our public voice is weak and outside interest in what we do is little. But then we get to do what we love.