
L. Braccesi, *Alessandro al bivio. I Macedoni tra Europa, Asia e Cartagine*, Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2020, 232 pp. [ISBN 978-88-6973-534-9].

In his recent book, Braccesi theorizes that Alexander planned to fight Carthage together with Molossus before going East by joining a circular conquest project that lasted two centuries.

The *Introduction* explains the book speaks of the history of the Macedonians and Philip and Alexander's in particular, but also the history of Macedonia when it is hegemon and when Carthage and Rome are instead. Two are the key ideas: Philip was aiming for control of the Straits, not only in the East but in the West too and Alexander wanted to clash with Carthage to control the Mediterranean. Chapter I focuses on the history of Macedonia up to 359 BC, from Alexander Philhellene to the advent of Philip II. Chapter II shows how much Philip II profoundly changed Macedonia's history through wars and diplomacy, wit, intelligence, and marriages but also the history of Greece. There's an in-depth Olympias (of which he spoke extensively in Braccesi 2019¹). Chapter III focuses on Philip's project of the Molossus expedition in Italy with dominion over the Otranto's canal and according to *Oxyrynchus Papyri*, 865 Braccesi hypothesizes that he embarked on two expeditions, the first when Philip was still alive with the siege of Otranto, the second would be that in 334 two years after Philip's death (54-59). Then follows the events chronologically and returns to treat the events of Philip's last years and explains how Alexander distanced himself from the regicide but how he was ambiguous by citing the passage from *Medea* and in the questions he posed to the Siwah Oracle (72-76). In chapter IV, there's a reconstruction of Alexander's relations with the Romans (78-81), the Molossus expedition parallel to Alexander's. Braccesi throws new light on Harpalus' escape in 333 who may have been sent on a secret mission by Alexander himself, doubtful of his uncle who died (85-87). But why did Taranto ask Molossus for help? And why did he accept? Why then did Taranto left him alone? (88-91). Braccesi through the sources comes to think that he died in the winter 332 or in the spring 331 and it would be in sync with the founding of Alexandria in Egypt (94). Molossus would have had a specific task: to control Magna Graecia to arrive in Africa and support Alexander in the conquest of Carthage (94-96). It's interesting how Braccesi connects the two Alexander's expeditions to control the Mediterranean.

Chapter V explains how Alexander behaved at his father's death, the battles of the Granicus and Issus and analyzes in depth the siege of Tyre (106-111). Why in the speed of his Asian conquest, did Alexander lose eight months for this siege by not handing it over to his lieutenants? Tyre had to fall because it was the metropolis of Carthage and it would have been the fundamental step before arriving at the Phoenician city. Alexander declared war on Carthage (Curt. IV 4,18) not referring to the projects that remained unfulfilled due to his untimely death, nor did he do so ten years in advance.

In chapter VI, Alexander thought to wait for his uncle in Paraetonium (113) to wage war on Carthage but there he learned of his death. The arguments in favor of the thesis are: Curtius Rufus writes that Alexander receives help forces in Memphis from

¹ L. BRACCESI (2019): *Olimpiade regina di Macedonia. La madre di Alessandro Magno*, Roma.

Antipater (III 5,19) and Amyntas (IV 6,30); to Pelusium, symmetrically opposed to Paraetonium Alexander rebuilds the fleet (Arr. *An.* III, 1,1); Diodorus (XVII 49,2) says Alexander received three hundred war horses from Cyrene at Paraetonium (116-117). If things had gone differently, Alexander probably would have clashed with Molossus against Carthage and the Mediterranean would have become Macedonian (118). He will continue to have this thought but it will remain unfinished due to his death. In 324 Pytheas from Marseilles did the first research on Atlantic space, probably commissioned by Alexander to know the secrets of the ocean like Carthage, Nearchus did similar research for the Indian (120-121), but Alexander died suddenly. If Molossus had not died, Alexander would have gone to Siwah for quite other reasons, namely to gather information for the war against Carthage thanks to the links of the oracle of Ammon with the Punic power. But history went differently, so Alexander wanted to make his Asian conquest divine (122-123) and otherwise Alexander would probably have accepted Darius's proposals for peace. The *a posteriori* motivations for the pilgrimage to Siwah are propaganda (125-131). Alexander's project was no longer circular as it was originally planned, but there was the expansion to the East that we know. Braccisi's theory is supported by evidence and would explain many actions that otherwise have a more hazy sense, such as rebuilding a fleet he then didn't use. With this vision we find an Alexander even more astute than we know, a young man who inherits a project from his father by making it his own, adapting and even twisting it for the obligatory circumstances in which he found himself. Alexander with Molossus' death found himself at the crossroads of having to decide what to do, so he switched to B plan and did what we know him for.

In chapter VII the author describes in detail the battle of Gaugamela and Alexander proposed himself as a non-demolishing continuator of the Persian empire, thus clashing with the "old" Macedonian mentality and with Cleitus' episode has his nerves uncovered because his new project it rests on the idea of his divine filiation from Zeus, not because of the wine (138). Philotas and Callisthenes' episodes too show how Alexander represses in blood those who don't want or can't understand him. Alexander in Ecbatana dismissed the Greek contingents because by now the attacks of Persia were avenged but he found himself at another crossroads: to return to his homeland which was now on the outskirts of the kingdom or to extend the conquest (142)? He still chooses the second way and after the Indian conquest he had the twelve altars built on Hyphasis' bank, not columns, which mark the end of his dream, of his failure and testify to his great regret (147-149). Alexander returned to Babylon and sent Nearchus to explore the "Great Sea" of the south to understand if it was possible to circumnavigate Libya always with the idea of arriving in Carthage (151-152).

Chapter VIII analyzes Alexander's life last period, his cultural heritage and the reasons for the disintegration of his empire. The IX chapter is on the post Alexander, with the struggles between the Diadochi and the strategic importance of the island of Corcyra and the channel of Otranto. The narrative is focused on the eastern Mediterranean to see how it changed in the Hellenistic period: a century after Alexander, Macedonia is no longer hegemon at the expense of Rome and Carthage. Alexander with Molossus against Carthage we now find in parallel Hannibal allied with Philip V against Rome. Hannibal came out victorious in Cannae waits in vain for reinforcements from Philip V who won't arrive and wastes time until it's too late, which Alexander didn't do and suddenly changed his program.

Braccesi's theory is extremely interesting and new and I'm curious to know how it will be received by academics and researchers.

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