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**Claudia Daniotti, *Reinventing Alexander: Myth, Legend, History in Renaissance Italian Art*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2022, 348 pp [978-2-503-59743-0].**

Over the past decade, studies on the reception of Alexander and his impact on culture have marked one of the most significant advances in analyzing the cultural meaning of Alexander's figure through time. Evidence of this progress can be found in foundational works such as those by Francisco Javier Gómez Espelosín<sup>1</sup> and Pierre Briant<sup>2</sup>, as well as in collective volumes dedicated to Alexander's tradition<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, there have been specific attempts to trace the trajectory of interpretations of Alexander within particular genres, such as historiography<sup>4</sup>, cinema and visual media<sup>5</sup>, or even in the development of the European tradition and its relationship with the formulation of colonial Europe<sup>6</sup>.

While earlier attention to Alexander and his traditions (in Rome, the Middle Ages, etc.) had resulted in some collective studies, most of the research on Alexander's reception was previously relegated to book chapters with broader themes and, to a lesser extent, to journal articles. However, the growing interest in this topic and the efforts to map its various pathways across traditions and themes underscore Alexander's near-universal appeal and the value of studying his legacy as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Moreover, by transcending the realm of the historical and tangible aspects of the figure, these studies increasingly focus on cultural frameworks that explore the reception, adaptations, and transformations across different eras and media. This systematic approach enriches our collective understanding not only of Alexander himself but also of how his legacy has been repeatedly invoked over centuries as a versatile symbol. This symbol adapts –rather than remains static– to the concerns and fascinations of each historical period, reflecting humanity's use of the young Macedonian king's adventure as a lens through which to address diverse and enduring questions. These inquiries span both time and space, extending from Alexander's death to the present day.

In the contemporary context that has finally validated the possibility of studying Alexander beyond his own historical persona, using him as a lens to understand other eras through the image projected of him, we encounter a work such as that authored by Professor Claudia Daniotti. Her book offers a comprehensive examination of Alexander's image through the study of artistic representations created (and preserved) in Italy during the transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

In a remarkable display of scholarship –one I must confess to having deeply enjoyed–, Claudia Daniotti embarks on a detailed exploration of the pillars of European culture as they were reshaped and transformed during the shift from medieval

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<sup>1</sup> F. J. GÓMEZ ESPELOSÍN (2015): *En busca de Alejandro: Historia de una obsesión*, Alcalá.

<sup>2</sup> P. BRIANT (2016): *Alexandre. Exégèse des lieux communs*, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> K. MOORE (ed.) (2018): *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*, Leiden.

<sup>4</sup> B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ – M. MENDOZA (eds.) (2023): *Historiographical Alexander: Alexander the Great and the Historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Coimbra.

<sup>5</sup> O. LAPEÑA – B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ (2020): *Alejandro Magno en la pantalla*, Bellaterra.

<sup>6</sup> P. BRIANT (2012): *Alexandre des Lumières: fragments d'histoire européenne*, Paris [English translation: *The First European: A History of Alexander in the Age of Empire*, Harvard (2017)].

conceptions of the past (and, by extension, the present of that era) to the Renaissance. This transition was profoundly influenced by the resurgence of ancient works, including previously unknown Greek literature, introduced to Western Europe through Humanism. While this intellectual journey is inherently tied to texts, Daniotti's study centers on visual representations, emphasizing their impact on the imagination and historical perception of those who encountered them.

With such a focused and well-defined approach, the result is nothing short of brilliant. Not only does Professor Daniotti demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the continuity of medieval traditions (and their origins in Antiquity) concerning Alexander, but she also contextualizes these within the transitional dynamics of the period. Moreover, she highlights how the process of observing this transformation serves to understand the evolution of a predominantly legendary and fantastical Alexander into a more logically "refined" figure, culminating in the emergence of a new image of Alexander—less imaginary, more historical, and ultimately, more real.

The work is organized into a series of chapters through which the author defines the essential points of this journey through European tradition during the transformative historical context she has chosen. The first chapter reviews the fundamental themes from Alexander's *story* that were most frequently depicted in 14th-century Italian art, where the enduring influence of the *Pseudo-Callisthenes* is particularly prominent. The second chapter describes the iconographic elements of the earlier legendary tradition that persisted into the 15th century. The third chapter delves into the Italian humanistic tradition surrounding Alexander, focusing on influential Renaissance figures such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Angelo Decembrio, and Pier Paolo Vergerio.

In the fourth chapter, the author examines in detail the new themes and iconographic motifs introduced by the emerging tradition, which breaks away from the more legendary narratives tied to the *Pseudo-Callisthenes* of earlier centuries. These motifs, as described in the fifth chapter, would endure over subsequent centuries. The volume is further enriched by a beautifully crafted introduction and two highly useful appendices: one cataloging the historical episodes of Alexander's life that were represented in art, and the other documenting the surviving paintings and drawings from the Italian art of the period under study.

Despite its scholarly depth, the book remains accessible to any reader with an interest in the subject. It maintains a level of rigor and quality—evident in the writing, the use of evidence and bibliography, and the depth of analysis—that makes it a delight to read. It guides readers seamlessly through the intersection of different eras (antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance) without posing unnecessary challenges, as the complexity of the topic is handled with a lucid and well-crafted narrative.

The work is, without a doubt, an invitation to embark on a journey of knowledge and to question the distinctions between the imaginary and the historical. It allows readers to observe how the tradition surrounding Alexander intertwines effortlessly with various elements of culture, remaining both contemporary and vibrant. This tradition, while intricately complex, also feels accessible, popular, and engaging.

As such, the book is not only enjoyable but also opens up new methodological perspectives for studying the reception of Alexander over time. It underscores the importance of examining the legacy of Alexander's tradition—a legacy that transcends borders, linking cultures in a shared historical dialogue.

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