
Giustina Monti, *Alexander the Great. Letters: a selection*, Aris and Phillips Classical Texts, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2023, pp. 272 [ISBN 9781800348622].

Tools are probably what best defines the quality of a field of research, or the depth of its analysis. In the sphere of studies on the Hellenistic world, Argead Macedonia, and Alexander the Great, recent years have proved highly fruitful with regard to the appearance of new scholarly tools, as suggested by the paradigmatic example of the publication of the *Lexicon of Argead Macedonia* in 2020. Such tools ensure that the considerable effort invested by their authors bears very positive fruit for the ability of other scholars in the field to advance with their own research, while also opening new interpretative pathways and facilitating, refining, or stimulating innovative analytical proposals that only the emergence of such instruments can truly nourish.

In this respect, I personally consider commentaries on the sources to be the most valuable tool available to a researcher when confronting the challenges of enquiry and the interpretation of evidence. For this reason, the works of Bosworth on Arrian, Atkinson on Curtius, Landucci on Diodorus, Yardley and Heckel on Justin, or Hamilton on Plutarch (although the latter is in need of an update, despite Stadter's efforts in the 1999 reissue), to cite the most renowned commentaries, are now fundamental works whose use ought to be incorporated into any historical approach to the age of Alexander. Nevertheless, for those of us dedicated to this subject, the problem of the sources always persists and goes far beyond the works of the so-called Alexander Historians. Information on Alexander in ancient Greek and Roman authors is scattered across an extensive array of texts. If we consider Plutarch alone, for example, his references to Alexander reach far beyond what appears in the *Life*, extending throughout the *Moralia*. In the case of Athenaeus, we find a similar situation.

What Giustina Monti offers in this volume is a selection of texts of diverse provenance but united by a common nature: the epistolary form. The book thus gathers a selection of letters attributed to Alexander in the tradition, dispersed across a wide range of works, authors, and chronologies. To the compilation of this corpus, Monti adds a careful critical edition of the Greek text with a corresponding translation, accompanied by a pertinent historical commentary. Yet Monti's contribution is not limited to the formal dimension: the construction of this selection of letters enables her to put forward a series of overarching interpretative hypotheses which deepen and refine our understanding of Alexander's administration after the conquest of the Persian Empire, including issues of titulary and protocol, bureaucratic formalities in letter format, and the manner in which these letters address their recipients.

The effort to bring together a set of sources that do not, in their original contexts, appear in such proximity allows Monti to offer the reader a comparative reading through which these letters reveal various aspects, both in their similarities and in their differences. As a result, this volume goes far beyond a simple provision of texts for a potential student audience in Classics, for Monti's work is of considerable interest to research on the period and on questions relating not only to Greek and Roman literature or to particular authors and the modes of transmission of information within their works. Her 'synoptic' proposal concerning the epistolary tradition on Alexander, and the manner in which it has been preserved in the works of ancient authors, shows that there is a real need for holistic analyses in which authors are compared beyond their

individual works, contexts, or isolated pieces of information, in order to formulate more complex, wide-ranging observations.

In the current educational context, in which many curricula (in countries such as Spain, for example) have separated the study of History from that of the classical languages, Monti's volume is a precious gift. Those who have not received deep and detailed training in Greek or Latin can, thanks to works of this kind, continue to engage with the texts (having both the original and the translation available) and explore the complexities of interpretation which this synoptic exercise (σύννοψις) facilitates, enabling an analytical perspective that transcends more traditional boundaries. Despite this value and the evident usefulness I find in Monti's proposal, I must also admit that I detect certain limitations, such as the fact that the volume presents a selection rather than the totality of the letters, something that would constitute a definitive and complete resource, compiling all specific cases of this epistolary material relating to Alexander and his age. Nonetheless, in this Monti merely joins a line of illustrious names and 'source selections' in our tradition, such as the epigraphic collections of Heisserer¹ and Cynthia Schwenk², to mention two excellent examples.

With this volume, Monti demonstrates, in sum, her generosity in offering a work that enhances the quality and depth of other scholars' research, in addition to serving as a valuable educational tool (thanks to the meticulous treatment of the text's editing and critical-historical commentary) by showing any reader in the process of scholarly formation the importance of broad, synoptic, and far-reaching perspectives on the complex topic of Alexander's age.

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¹ A. J. HEISSERER (1980), *Alexander the Great and the Greeks. The Epigraphic Evidence*, Norman (1980).

² C. J. SCHWENK (1985), *Athens in the Age of Alexander: The dated Laws and Decrees of 'The Lykourgan Era', 338-322 B.C.*, Chicago.