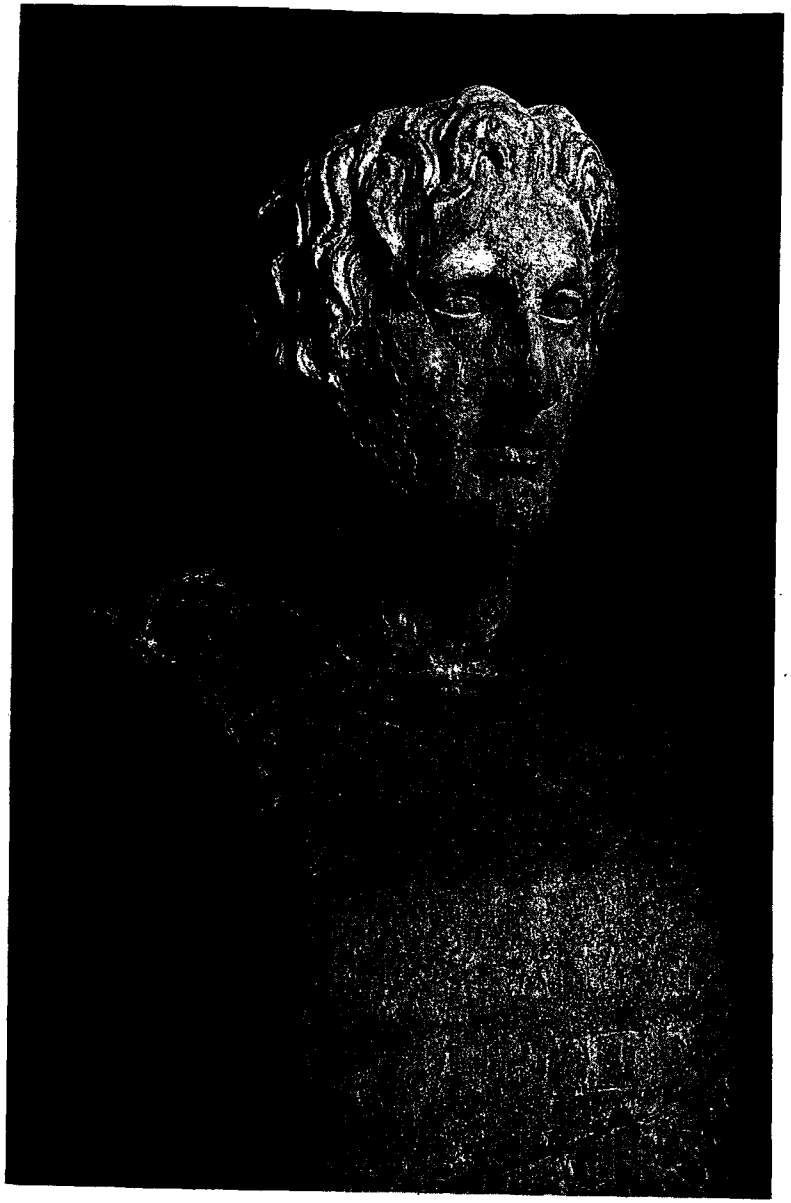
From: *Makers of World History*, ed. J. Kelley Sowards, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 120–143.



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# THE "PROBLEM" OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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| 356 B.C. | Born |
| 336 B.C. | Became king of Macedonia |
| 334 B.C. | Began conquest of Persia |
| 333 B.C. | Battle of Issus |
| 331 B.C. | Battle of Gaugamela and death of Darius, the Persian king |
| 326 B.C. | Battle of Hydaspes in India |
| 323 B.C. | Died |

If Alexander had simply been a successful conqueror, no matter how stupefying his conquests, there would really be no "Alexander problem." But, from his own lifetime, there lingered about Alexander the sense that there was something more to him, that he was "up to something," that he had great, even revolutionary, plans. The conviction of manifest destiny that Alexander himself felt so strongly contributed to this, as did his instinct for the unusual, the cryptic, the dramatic in political and religious, as well as in strategic and military, decisions. But most of all, his death at age thirty-three, in the year 323 B.C.—his conquests barely completed and his schemes for the future only hinted at or imperfectly forecast—led the ancient writers to speculate about the questions, "What if Alexander had lived on?" "What plans would his imperial imagination have conceived?" and to sift and resift every scrap of information available—and to invent a few that were not!

The problem of the ancient sources themselves has added greatly to the difficulty of interpretation. And this is surely ironic. For Alexander's own sense of his destiny made him unusually sensitive to the need for keeping records of his deeds. A careful log or journal was maintained, but it exists today only in the most useless fragments, if indeed the "fragments" in question even came from that record. Alexander's staff included at least two scholar-secretaries to keep records.

One was Callisthenes, the nephew of Alexander's old friend and tutor Aristotle. The other was the scientist-philosopher Aristobulus. Callisthenes subsequently fell out with Alexander and was executed for complicity in a plot in 327 B.C. But, while nothing of his work remains it was clearly the basis for a strongly anti-Alexandrian tradition that flourished in Greece, especially in Athens. This hostile tradition is best represented in Cleitarchus, a Greek rhetorician of the generation following Alexander, who never knew him but who became "the most influential historian of Alexander."[1] The account of Aristobulus, who was apparently much closer and more favorable to Alexander than was Callisthenes or Cleitarchus, is also lost. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's most trusted generals and later founder of the Hellenistic monarchy in Egypt, wrote a detailed memoir based in part on Alexander's own *Journal,* but this did not survive either.

Later ancient writers like Diodorus, Plutarch, Curtius, and Justin did know these sources and used them. But of the accounts of Alexander surviving from antiquity, the best one is that of the Greek writer Arrian, of the second century—thus over four hundred years removed from his sources! Furthermore, while Arrian's account is our fullest and most detailed and is based scrupulously on his sources, it is terribly prosaic: we miss precisely what we most want to have, some sense of the "why" of Alexander. Despite Arrian's devotion to his subject, he tends to tell the story—mainly the military side of it at that—without significant comment. And where we would like to have him analyze, he moralizes instead.

Modern scholars have continued to be fascinated by the puzzle of what Alexander was "up to," and none more than William W. Tarn (d. 1957). Tarn was one of those brilliant English "amateurs" of independent means and equally independent views who have contributed so uniquely to scholarship in a score of fields. He was a lawyer by profession, but he devoted most of his scholarly life—more than half a century—to Greek history. Tarn practically invented Hellenistic scholarship, that is, the study of the post-Alexandrian period in the history of Greek civilization. He authored numerous books and studies, beginning with his "Notes on Hellenism in Bactria and India," which appeared in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* for 1902, through his first important book, *Antigonos Gonatas* (1913), to *Hellenistic Civilization* (1928), *Hellenistic Military and Naval Developments* (1930), *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (1938), and chapters in the first edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1924–1929).

[1]N. G. L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes Press, 1980), p. 2.



Because the springboard of the Hellenistic age was Alexander, Tarn devoted special attention to him. He adopted the stance of a scholar-lawyer, in a sense, taking Alexander as his "client" and setting out to make a case for the defense. And Alexander was badly in need of such defense. The trend of modern scholarship before Tarn had been to view Alexander as an archtyrant, arbitrary and megalomaniac, a drunken murderer, and the oppressor of Greek political freedom and philosophic independence—a view derived ultimately from the Callisthenes-Cleitarchan tradition of antiquity.

Tarn was brilliantly successful in turning opinion around in his defense of Alexander, so much so that the "traditional" view of Alexander today is still essentially that created by Tarn. His authority has been so great that it has even affected the way in which we interpret the ancient sources themselves, whether they seem to be "for" or "against" Tarn's case.

# The Ancient Sources: Arrian, Eratosthenes, and Plutarch

In the first selection of this chapter, we present the five "proof texts" on which Tarn built his defense of Alexander: one from Arrian, one from Eratosthenes (preserved in Strabo), and three from Plutarch.

This passage, from *The Life of Alexander the Great by Arrian,* took place near the end of Alexander's incredible journey of conquest. In 324 B.C. Alexander assembled his Macedonian troops at Opis in Mesopotamia and announced that he proposed to discharge and send home, with lavish rewards, all those who were disabled or overage. But, instead of gratitude, a smoldering resentment surfaced, and the entire Macedonian force began to clamor to be sent home. Arrian attributes the resentment to Alexander's "orientalizing," his adoption of Persian dress and customs, and his attempt to incorporate Persians and other peoples in his army. This had offended the Macedonians' stubborn pride and sense of exclusiveness, and they now threatened a mutiny. Alexander was furious. After having the ringleaders arrested, he addressed the Macedonians in a passionate, blistering speech, reminding them of their own accomplishments, as well as his, and of what he had done for them. Alexander's speech had a profound effect upon the Macedonians, as did the plans, immediately put into effect, for reorganizing the army in the event that they defected. But instead of deserting, the Macedonians repented.

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Alexander, the moment he heard of this change of heart, hastened out to meet them, and he was so touched by their grovelling repentance and their bitter lamentations that the tears came into his eyes. While they continued to beg for his pity, he stepped forward as if to speak, but was anticipated by one Callines, an officer of the mounted Hetaeri, distinguished both by age and rank. "My lord," he cried, "what hurts us is that you have made Persians your kinsmen—Persians are called 'Alexander's kinsmen'—Persians kiss you. But no Macedonian has yet had a taste of this honour."

"Every man of you," Alexander replied, "I regard as my kinsman, and from now on that is what I shall call you."

Thereupon Callines came up to him and kissed him, and all the





others who wished to do so kissed him too. Then they picked up their weapons and returned to their quarters singing the song of victory at the top of their voices.

To mark the restoration of harmony, Alexander offered sacrifice to the gods he was accustomed to honour, and gave a public banquet which he himself attended, sitting among the Macedonians, all of whom were present. Next to them the Persians had their places, and next to the Persians distinguished foreigners of other nations; Alexander and his friends dipped their wine from the same bowl and poured the same libations, following the lead of the Greek seers and the Magi. The chief object of his prayers was that Persians and Macedonians might rule together in harmony as an imperial power. It is said that 9,000 people attended the banquet; they unanimously drank the same toast, and followed it by the paean of victory.

After this all Macedonians—about 10,000 all told—who were too old for service or in any way unfit, got their discharge at their own request.

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Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who lived about 200 B.C., was head of the great Library of Alexandria and one of the most learned individuals of antiquity. But his works exist only in fragments and in citations in the writings of others, such as the following, from *The Geography* by the Greek scientist Strabo, of the first century B.C.

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Now, towards the end of his treatise—after withholding praise from those who divide the whole multitude of mankind into two groups, namely, Greeks and Barbarians, and also from those who advised Alexander to treat the Greeks as friends but the Barbarians as enemies—Eratosthenes goes on to say that it would be better to make such divisions according to good qualities and bad qualities; for not only are many of the Greeks bad, but many of the Barbarians are refined—Indians and Arians, for example, and, further, Romans and Carthaginians, who carry on their governments so admirably. And this, he says, is the reason why Alexander, disregarding his advisers, welcomed as many as he could of the men of fair repute and did them favours—just as if those who have made such a division, placing some people in the category of censure, others in that of praise, did so for any other reason than that in some people there prevail the law-abiding and the political instinct, and the qualities associated with education and powers of speech, whereas in other people the opposite characteristics prevail! And so Alexander, not disregarding his advisers, but rather accepting their opinion, did what was consistent

with, not contrary to, their advice; for he had regard to the real intent of those who gave him counsel.

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Two of the Plutarch passages are from his essay "On the Fortune of Alexander," which is one of the pieces comprising the collection known as the *Moralia.*

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Moreover, the much-admired *Republic* of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, may be summed up in this one main principle: that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all, even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field. This Zeno wrote, giving shape to a dream or, as it were, shadowy picture of a well-ordered and philosophic commonwealth; but it was Alexander who gave effect to the idea. For Alexander did not follow Aristotle's advice to treat the Greeks as if he were their leader, and other peoples as if he were their master; to have regard for the Greeks as for friends and kindred, but to conduct himself toward other peoples as though they were plants or animals; for to do so would have been to cumber his leadership with numerous battles and banishments and festering seditions. But, as he believed that he came as a heaven-sent governor to all, and as a mediator for the whole world, those whom he could not persuade to unite with him, he conquered by force of arms, and he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life. He bade them all consider as their fatherland the whole inhabited earth, as their stronghold and protection his camp, as akin to them all good men, and as foreigners only the wicked; they should not distinguish between Grecian and foreigner by Grecian cloak and targe, or scimitar and jacket; but the distinguishing mark of the Grecian should be seen in virtue, and that of the foreigner in iniquity; clothing and food, marriage and manner of life they should regard as common to all, being blended into one by ties of blood and children.

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After dwelling on the wisdom of Alexander in affecting a mixed Graeco-Macedonian and Persian costume, Plutarch continues.

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For he did not overrun Asia like a robber nor was he minded to tear and rend it, as if it were booty and plunder bestowed by unexpected good fortune. . . . But Alexander desired to render all upon earth subject to one law of reason and one form of government and to reveal all men as one people, and to this purpose he made himself conform. But if the deity that sent down Alexander's soul into this world of ours had not recalled him quickly, one law would govern all mankind, and they all would look toward one rule of justice as though toward a common source of light. But as it is, that part of the world which has not looked upon Alexander has remained without sunlight.

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This passage from the famous "Life of Alexander" in *Plutarch's Lives* deals with an incident early in Alexander's career, after his conquest of Egypt—his journey across the desert to the oracle of Ammon at Siwah.

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When Alexander had passed through the desert and was come to the place of the oracle, the prophet of Ammon gave him salutation from the god as from a father; whereupon Alexander asked him whether any of the murderers of his father had escaped him.[2] To this the prophet answered by bidding him be guarded in his speech, since his was not a mortal father. Alexander therefore changed the form of his question, and asked whether the murderers of Philip had all been punished; and then, regarding his own empire, he asked whether it was given to him to become lord and master of all mankind. The god gave answer that this was given to him, and that Philip was fully avenged. Then Alexander made splendid offerings to the god and gave his priests large gifts of money. . . . We are told, also, that he listened to the teachings of Psammon[3] the philosopher in Egypt, and accepted most readily this utterance of his, namely, that all mankind are under the kingship of God, since in every case that which gets the mastery and rules is divine. Still more philosophical, however, was his own opinion and utterance on this head, namely that although God was indeed a common father of all mankind, still, He made peculiarly His own the noblest and best of them.

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[2]Alexander had come to the throne of Macedonia upon the murder of his father, Philip II, in 336 B.C.—ED.

[3]This is the only reference in antiquity to such a person.—ED.

# Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind

W. W. TARN

We turn now to the thesis that W. W. Tarn built in defense of Alexander. He had begun to develop his characteristic view in a number of journal articles and anticipated it in fairly complete form in his contributions to the 1927 edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*. He was later to state it most completely in his monumental two-volume *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948). But the most succinct statement of the Tarn thesis is that contained in his Raleigh Lecture on History, read before the British Academy in 1933. It is entitled "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind."

What I am going to talk about is one of the great revolutions in human thought. Greeks of the classical period, speaking very roughly, divided mankind into two classes, Greeks and non-Greeks; the latter they called barbarians and usually regarded as inferior people, though occasionally some one, like Herodotus or Xenophon, might suggest that certain barbarians possessed qualities which deserved consideration, like the wisdom of the Egyptians or the courage of the Persians. But in the third century B.C. and later we meet with a body of opinion which may be called universalist; all mankind was one and all men were brothers, or anyhow ought to be. Who was the pioneer who brought about this tremendous revolution in some men's way of thinking? Most writers have had no doubt on that point; the man to whom the credit was due was Zeno, the founder of the Stoic philosophy. But there are several passages in Greek writers which, *if* they are to be believed, show that the first man actually to think of it was not Zeno but Alexander. This matter has never really been examined; some writers just pass it over, which means, I suppose, that they do not consider the passages in question historical; others have definitely said that it is merely a case of our secondary authorities attributing to Alexander ideas taken from Stoicism. I want to consider to-day whether the passages in question are or are not historical and worthy of credence; that is, whether Alexander was or was not the first to believe in, and to contemplate, the





unity of mankind. This will entail, among other things, some examination of the concept which Greeks called Homonoia, a word which meant more than its Latin translation, Concord, means to us; it is more like Unity and Concord, a being of one mind together, or if we like the phrase, a union of hearts; ultimately it was to become almost a symbol of the world's longing for something better than constant war. For convenience of discussion I shall keep the Greek term Homonoia.

Before coming to the ideas attributed to Alexander, I must sketch very briefly the background against which the new thought arose, whoever was its author; and I ought to say that I am primarily talking throughout of theory, not of practice. It may be possible to find, in the fifth century, or earlier, an occasional phrase which looks like a groping after something better than the hard-and-fast division of Greeks and barbarians; but this comes to very little and had no importance for history, because anything of the sort was strangled by the idealist philosophies. Plato and Aristotle left no doubt about their views. Plato said that all barbarians were enemies by nature; it was proper to wage war upon them, even to the point of enslaving or extirpating them. Aristotle said that all barbarians were slaves by nature, especially those of Asia; they had not the qualities which entitled them to be free men, and it was proper to treat them as slaves. His model State cared for nothing but its own citizens; it was a small aristocracy of Greek citizens ruling over a barbarian peasantry who cultivated the land for their masters and had no share in the State—a thing he had seen in some cities of Asia Minor. Certainly neither Plato nor Aristotle was quite consistent; Plato might treat an Egyptian priest as the repository of wisdom, Aristotle might suggest that the constitution of Carthage was worth studying; but their main position was clear enough, as was the impression Alexander would get from his tutor Aristotle.

There were, of course, other voices. Xenophon, when he wanted to portray an ideal shepherd of the people, chose a Persian king as shepherd of the Persian people. And there were the early Cynics. But the Cynics had no thought of any union or fellowship between Greek and barbarian; they were not constructive thinkers, but merely embodied protests against the vices and follies of civilization. When Diogenes called himself a cosmopolite, a horrible word which he coined and which was not used again for centuries, what he meant was, not that he was a citizen of some imaginary world-state—a thing he never thought about—but that he was not a citizen of any Greek city; it was pure negation. And the one piece of Cynic construction, the ideal figure of Heracles, labouring to free Greece from monsters, was merely shepherd of a *Greek* herd till after Alexander, when it took colour and content from the Stoics and became the ideal benefactor of humanity. All that Xenophon or the Cynics could supply was the

figure of an ideal shepherd, not of the human herd, but of some national herd.

More important was Aristotle's older contemporary Isocrates, because of his conception of Homonoia. The Greek world, whatever its practice, never doubted that in theory unity in a city was very desirable; but though the word Homonoia was already in common use among Greeks, it chiefly meant absence of faction-fights, and this rather negative meaning lasted in the cities throughout the Hellenistic period, as can be seen in the numerous decrees in honour of the judicial commissions sent from one city to another, which are praised because they tried to compose internal discord. There was hardly a trace as yet of the more positive sense which Homonoia was to acquire later—a mental attitude which should make war or faction impossible because the parties were at one; and Isocrates extended the application of the word without changing its meaning. He took up a suggestion of the sophist Gorgias and proposed to treat the whole Greek world as one and the futile wars between city and city as faction fights—to apply Homonoia to the Greek race. For this purpose he utilized Plato's idea that the barbarian was a natural enemy, and decided that the way to unite Greeks was to attack Persia; "I come," he said, "to advocate two things: war against the barbarian, Homonoia between ourselves." But somebody had to do the uniting; and Isocrates bethought him of the Cynic Heracles, benefactor of the Greek race, and urged King Philip of Macedonia, a descendant of Heracles, to play the part. But if Philip was to be Heracles and bring about the Homonoia of the Greek world, the way was being prepared for two important ideas of a later time; the essential quality of the king must be that love of man, φιλανθρωπία,[4] which had led Heracles to perform his labours, and the essential business of the king was to promote Homonoia; so far this only applied to Greeks, but if its meaning were to deepen it would still be the king's business. The actual result of all this, the League of Corinth[5] under Philip's presidency, was not quite what Isocrates had dreamt of.

This then was the background against which Alexander appeared. The business of a Macedonian king was to be a benefactor of Greeks to the extent of preventing inter-city warfare; he was to promote Homonoia among Greeks and utilize their enmity to barbarians as a bond of union; but barbarians themselves were still enemies and slaves by nature, a view which Aristotle emphasized

[4]Literally "philanthropy."—ED.

[5]The league Philip formed after defeating the Greek states at Chaeronea in 338 B.C.—ED.



when he advised his pupil to treat Greeks as free men, but barbarians as slaves.

I now come to the things Alexander is supposed to have said or thought; and the gulf between them and the background I have sketched is so deep that one cannot blame those who have refused to believe that he ever said or thought anything of the sort. There are five passages which need consideration: one in Arrian; one from Eratosthenes, preserved by Strabo; and three from Plutarch, one of which, from its resemblance to the Strabo passage, has been supposed by one of the acutest critics of our time to be taken in substance from Eratosthenes,[6] and as such I shall treat it. The passage in Arrian says that, after the mutiny of the Macedonians at Opis and their reconciliation to Alexander, he gave a banquet to Macedonians and Persians, at which he prayed for Homonoia and partnership in rule between these two peoples. What Eratosthenes says amounts to this. Aristotle told Alexander to treat Greeks as friends, but barbarians like animals; but Alexander knew better, and preferred to divide men into good and bad without regard to their race, and thus carried out Aristotle's real intention. For Alexander believed that he had a mission from the deity to harmonize men generally and be the reconciler of the world, mixing men's lives and customs as in a loving cup, and treating the good as his kin, the bad as strangers; for he thought that the good man was the real Greek and the bad man the real barbarian. Of the two Plutarch passages, the first says that his intention was to bring about, as between mankind generally, Homonoia and peace and fellowship and make them all one people; and the other, which for the moment I will quote without its context, makes him say that God is the common father of all men.

It is obvious that, wherever all this comes from, we are dealing with a great revolution in thought. It amounts to this, that there is a natural brotherhood of all men, though bad men do not share in it; that Homonoia is no longer to be confined to the relations between Greek and Greek, but is to unite Greek and barbarian; and that Alexander's aim was to substitute peace for war, and reconcile the enmities of mankind by bringing them all—all that is whom his arm could reach, the peoples of his empire—to be of one mind together: as men were one in blood, so they should become one in heart and spirit. That such a revolution in thought did happen is unquestioned; the question is, was Alexander really its author, or are the thoughts attributed to him those of Zeno or somebody else? . . .

[6]The reference is to the German scholar E. Schwarz.—ED.

"To try to answer that question," Tarn follows with a long and complex analysis of Homonoia and kingship in Graeco-Roman history, leading to the universalism of the late Roman empire.

The belief that it was the business of kings to promote Homonoia among their subjects without distinction of race thus travelled down the line of kingship for centuries; but the line, you will remember, had no beginning. . . . It must clearly have been connected with some particular king at the start, and that king has to be later than Isocrates and Philip and earlier than Diotogenes and Demetrius.[7] It would seem that only one king is possible; we should have to postulate Alexander at the beginning of the line, even if there were not a definite tradition that it *was* he. This means that Plutarch's statement, that Alexander's purpose was to bring about Homonoia between men generally—that is, those men whom his arm could reach—must be taken to be true, unless some explicit reason be found for disbelieving it; and I therefore now turn to the Stoics, in order to test the view that the ideas attributed to him were really taken from Stoicism. . . . We have seen that it was the business of kings to bring about Homonoia; but this was not the business of a Stoic, because to him Homonoia had already been brought about by the Deity, and it existed in all completeness; all that was necessary was that men should see it. . . .

This is the point I want to make, the irreconcilable opposition between Stoicism and the theory of kingship, between the belief that unity and concord existed and you must try and get men to see it, and the belief that unity and concord did not exist and that it was the business of the rulers of the earth to try and bring them to pass. . . . Consequently, when Eratosthenes says that Alexander aspired to be the harmonizer and reconciler of the world, and when Plutarch attributes to him the intention of bringing about fellowship and Homonoia between men generally—those men whom his arm reached—then, wherever these ideas came from, they were not Stoic; between them and Stoicism there was a gulf which nothing could bridge. This does not by itself prove that Alexander held these ideas; what it does do is to put out of court the only alternative which has ever been seriously proposed, and to leave the matter where I left it when

[7]Isocrates (436–338 B.C.), the Athenian orator; Philip II of Macedonia (355–336 B.C.); Diotogenes, an early Hellenistic author of uncertain date; Demetrius (336–283 B.C.), an early Hellenistic ruler.—ED.



considering the theory of kingship, that is, that there is a strong presumption that Alexander *was* their author. . . .

Before leaving Stoicism, I must return for a moment to Zeno's distinction of the worthy and the unworthy; for Alexander, as we saw, is said to have divided men into good and bad, and to have excluded the bad from the general kinship of mankind and called them the true barbarians. Might not *this* distinction, at any rate, have been taken from Stoicism and attributed to him? The reasons against this seem conclusive, apart from the difficulty of discarding a statement made by so sound and scientific a critic as Eratosthenes. First, no Stoic ever equated the unworthy class with barbarians; for to him there were no barbarians. . . . Secondly, while the unworthy in Zeno, as in Aristotle, are the majority of mankind, Alexander's "bad men" are not; they are, as Eratosthenes says, merely that small residue everywhere which cannot be civilized. One sees this clearly in a story never questioned, his prayer at Opis, when he prayed that the Macedonian and Persian races (without exceptions made) might be united in Homonoia. And thirdly, we know where the idea comes from: Aristotle had criticized some who said that good men were really free and bad men were really slaves (whom he himself equated with barbarians), and Alexander is in turn criticizing Aristotle; as indeed Eratosthenes says, though he does not quote this passage of Aristotle. The matter is not important, except for the general question of the credibility of Eratosthenes, and may conceivably only represent that period in Alexander's thought when he was outgrowing Aristotle; it does not conflict, as does Zeno's conception of the unworthy, with a general belief in the unity of mankind. . . .

There is just one question still to be asked; whence did Zeno get his universalism? Plutarch says that behind Zeno's dream lay Alexander's reality; and no one doubts that Alexander was Zeno's inspiration, but the question is, in what form? Most writers have taken Plutarch to mean Alexander's *empire;* but to me this explains nothing at all. One man conquers a large number of races and brings them under one despotic rule; how can another man deduce from this that distinctions of race are immaterial and that the universe is a harmony in which men are brothers? It would be like the fight between the polar bear and the parallelepiped. The Persian kings had conquered and ruled as large an empire as Alexander, including many Greek cities; why did Darius never inspire any one with similar theories? It does seem to me that what Plutarch really means is not Alexander's empire but Alexander's ideas; after all, the frequent references in antiquity to Alexander as a philosopher, one at least of which is contemporary, must mean *something.* Zeno's inspiration, then, was Alexander's idea of the unity of mankind; and what Zeno himself did was to carry this

idea to one of its two logical conclusions. Judging by his prayer at Opis for the Homonoia of Macedonians and Persians, Alexander, had he lived, would have worked through national groups, as was inevitable in an empire like his, which comprised many different states and subject peoples; Theophrastus,[8] who followed him, included national groups in his chain of progress towards world-relationship. But Zeno abolished all distinctions of race, all the apparatus of national groups and particular states, and made his world-state a theoretic whole. His scheme was an inspiration to many; but in historical fact it was, and remained, unrealizable. But Alexander's way, or what I think was his way, led to the Roman Empire being called one people. I am not going to bring in modern examples of these two different lines of approach to world-unity, but I want to say one thing about the Roman Empire. It has been said that Stoic ideas came near to realization in the empire of Hadrian and the Antonines, but it is quite clear, the moment it be considered, that this was not the case; that empire was a huge national state, which stood in the line of kingship and was a partial realization of the ideas of Alexander. When a Stoic *did* sit on the imperial throne, he was at once compelled to make terms with the national state; to Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic world-state was no theoretic unity, but was to comprise the various particular states as a city comprises houses. And there is still a living reality in what he said about himself: "As a man I am a citizen of the world-state, but as the particular man Marcus Aurelius I am a citizen of Rome."

I may now sum up. We have followed down the line of kingship the theory that it was the business of a king to promote Homonoia among his subjects—all his subjects without distinction of race; and we have seen that this theory ought to be connected at the start with some king, who must be later than Philip and earlier than Demetrius; and there is a definite tradition which connects the origin of the theory with Alexander. We have further seen that the intention to promote Homonoia among mankind, attributed in the tradition to Alexander, is certainly not a projection backwards from Stoicism, or apparently from anything else, while it is needed to explain certain things said by Theophrastus and done by Alexarchus.[9] Lastly, we have seen the idea of the kinship or brotherhood of mankind appearing suddenly in Theophrastus and Alexarchus; their common source can be no one but Alexander, and again tradition supports this. Only one conclusion from all this seems possible: the things which, in the tradition, Alexander is

[8]The philosopher-scientist who followed Aristotle as head of his school.—ED.

[9]A minor Macedonian princeling, following Alexander, who set up his small state apparently on the model of Alexander's ideas.—ED.



supposed to have thought and said are, in substance, true. He did say that all men were sons of God, that is brothers, but that God made the best ones peculiarly his own; he did aspire to be the harmonizer and reconciler of the world—that part of the world which his arm reached; he did have the intention of uniting the peoples of his empire in fellowship and concord and making them of one mind together; and when, as a beginning, he prayed at Opis for partnership in rule and Homonoia between Macedonians and Persians, he meant what he said—not partnership in rule only, but true unity between them. I am only talking of theory, not of actions; but what this means is that he was the pioneer of one of the supreme revolutions in the world's outlook, the first man known to us who contemplated the brotherhood of man or the unity of mankind, whichever phrase we like to use. I do not claim to have given you exact proof of this; it is one of those difficult borderlands of history where one does not get proofs which could be put to a jury. But there is a very strong presumption indeed that it is true. Alexander, for the things he *did*, was called The Great; but if what I have said to-day be right, I do not think we shall doubt that this idea of his—call it a purpose, call it a dream, call it what you will—was the greatest thing about him.

# The New Alexander

## N. G. L. HAMMOND

Despite Tarn's enormous scholarly reputation and his lordly dismissal of critics, his own interpretive view of Alexander was bound to be challenged, and it has been. Tarn massively overstated his case. As Mary Renault put it, "the defence was pushed too far."[10] And Ernst Badian, probably Tarn's most effective critic among this generation of scholars, has called the Alexander of Tarn's vision a "phantom" that "has haunted the pages of scholarship" for "a quarter of a century."[11] In reaction against Tarn's view of Alexander not only as a stunning conqueror but as a conqueror of stunning philosophic profundity as well, scholars have again depicted him "as a ruthless murderer, an

[10]Mary Renault, *The Nature of Alexander* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), p. 23.

[11]Ernst Badian, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *Historia* 7 (1958), 425.

autocratic megalomaniac, even a bisexual profligate."[12] Even more careful and moderate scholars like R. D. Milns hold that such an idea as the kinship of mankind was quite beyond Alexander and must be attributed to "later thinkers and philosophers."[13]

Now the reaction seems to be moving back toward the Tarn view. The "new" Alexander is more anchored in his own times and mores, and none of the more recent authorities attribute to Alexander the "great revolution in thought" that Tarn did. But the Alexander we see today is considerably more cerebral and innovative both in thought and action. This new image of Alexander is nowhere better represented than in the work of the distinguished Cambridge classicist N. G. L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman,* from which the following excerpt is taken.

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We have the advantage of hindsight. We can see that it was Alexander's leadership and training which made the Macedonians incomparable in war and in administration and enabled them as rulers of the so-called Hellenistic kingdoms to control the greater part of the civilised world for a century or more. In a reign of thirteen years he brought to Macedonia and Macedonians the immense wealth which maintained their strength for generations. All this was and is an unparalleled achievement. Moreover, as king of Macedonia he did not drain his country unduly in his lifetime, since Antipater had enough men to defeat the Greeks in 331 B.C. and 322 B.C. Yet the system he was creating—quite apart from any further conquests he had in mind in 323 B.C.—was certain to put an immense strain on present and future Macedonians. They were spread dangerously thin at the time of his death, and the prolonged absence of so many Macedonians abroad was bound to cause a drop in the birth-rate in Macedonia itself. Of course Alexander expected his Macedonians to undertake almost superhuman dangers and labours, and it was their response to his challenge that made them great. But the dangers and labours were being demanded for the sake of a policy which was not Macedonian in a nationalistic sense, which the Macedonians did not wholly understand, and which they never fully implemented. Philip's singlemindedness made him the greatest king of Macedonia. Alexander's wider vision made him at the same time something more and something less than the greatest king of Macedonia. . . .

As constitutionally elected king, Alexander had sole right of command and an inherited authority. From the age of twenty onwards he appointed his deputies without let or hindrance, issued all orders, and controlled all payments, promotions, and discharges. His authority as a commander was almost absolute, his discipline unquestioned, and his position unchallenged. As religious head of the state, he interceded for his men and was seen daily to sacrifice on their behalf.

Unique in his descent from Zeus and Heracles, he was acclaimed "son of Zeus" by the oracle at Didyma, the Sibyl at Erythrae, and the oracle of Ammon (the last at least in the opinion of his men), and he fostered the idea of divine protection by having the sacred shield of Athena carried into battle by his senior Bodyguard (it saved his life against the Malli; [Arrian] 6.10.2). Before engaging at Gaugamela Alexander prayed in front of the army, raising his right hand towards the gods and saying, "If I am really descended from Zeus, protect and strengthen the Greeks." That prayer, apparently, was answered. In the eyes of most men—and most men then had faith in gods, oracles, and omens—Alexander was favoured by the supernatural powers. To those who were sceptical he had extraordinarily good luck.

The brilliance of Alexander's mind is seen most clearly in his major battles. . . . For example, he saw at once the advantages and disadvantages of Darius' position on the Pinarus river and he anticipated the effects of his own detailed dispositions and orders to a nicety. "He surpassed all others in the faculty of intuitively meeting an emergency," whether in besieging Tyre or facing Scythian tactics or storming an impregnable fortress. He excelled in speed and precision of thought, the calculation of risks, and the expectation of an enemy's reactions. Having himself engaged in every kind of action and having grappled with practical problems from a young age, he had a sure sense of the possible and extraordinary versatility in invention. Unlike many famous commanders, his mind was so flexible that at the time of his death he was creating an entirely new type of army.

A most remarkable quality of Alexander's was the concern for his men. No conqueror had so few casualties in battle, and the reason was that Alexander avoided "the battle of rats" by using his brains not just to win, but to win most economically. He made this his priority because he loved his Macedonians. He grew up among them and fought alongside them, both as a youth admiring his seniors and as a mature man competing with his companions. He honoured and rewarded courage and devotion to duty in them, paying a unique tribute to the first casualties by having bronze statues made by the leading sculptor, and he felt deeply with them in their sufferings and privations. He aroused in them an amazing response. He not only admired courage and devotion to duty in his own men but in his enemies, whom he treated with honour. In return he won the respect and loyalty of

[12]Hammond, *Alexander the Great,* p. 5.

[13]R. D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London: Robert Hale, 1968), p. 265.

Asians of many races whom he had just defeated in battle. . . . Some commanders may have rivalled him in the handling of his own race. None have had such a capacity for leading a multiracial army. . . .

We have already touched upon his statesmanship in enhancing the prestige of the Macedonian monarchy and advancing the power of the Macedonian state. He reduced the harshness of customary law, (for instance, he no longer required the execution of the male relatives of a convicted traitor), and he was concerned for the welfare and the birth rate of Macedonia. He provided tax reliefs for the dependants of casualties, brought up war orphans at his own expense, and sought to avoid conflicts between the European and Asian families of his Macedonians by maintaining the latter in Asia. He increased the number of young Macedonians when he legitimised the soldiers' children by Asian women, and he sent the 10,000 veterans home in the expectation of their begetting more children in Macedonia. . . .

While Philip invented and inaugurated the Greek League, it was Alexander who demonstrated its efficacy as a *modus operandi* for the Macedonians and the Greeks and used their joint forces to overthrow the Persian Empire. By opening Asia to Greek enterprise and culture Alexander relieved many of the social and economic pressures which had been causing distress and anarchy in the Greek states. At the same time he was personally concerned with affairs in Greece, as we see from the large number of embassies which came to him in Asia rather than to his deputy, Antipater, in Macedonia. . . .

Alexander's originality is seen most clearly in Asia. He set himself an unparalleled task when he decided in advance not to make the Macedonians and the Greeks the masters of the conquered peoples but to create a self-sustaining Kingdom of Asia. Within his kingdom he intended the settled peoples to conduct their internal affairs in accordance with their own laws and customs, whether in a Greek city or a native village, in a Lydian or a Carian state, in a Cyprian or a Phoenician kingdom, in Egypt, Babylonia, or Persis, in an Indian principality or republic. As his power extended, he did not introduce European administrators at a level which would inhibit native self-rule (as so-called colonial powers have so often done); instead he continued native administrators in office and raised the best of them to the highest level in civil affairs by appointing them as his immediate deputies in the post of satrap (e.g., Mazaeus at Babylon) or nomarch (e.g., Doloaspis in Egypt). . . .

What is important is the effectiveness of Alexander's system: native civilians and armed forces alike lodged complaints with Alexander, the accused were tried legally and openly, and those found guilty were executed forthwith, in order "to deter the other satraps, governors, and civil officers" and to make it known that the rulers were not permitted to wrong the ruled in Alexander's kingdom. In the opinion of Arrian, who lived at the zenith of the Roman Empire and had a standard of comparison, it was this system which "more than anything else kept to an orderly way of life the innumerable, widely diffused peoples who had been subjugated in war or had of their own will joined him" (6.27.5). In the same way rebels, sometimes in the form of native pretenders, were put on trial; and, if found guilty, they were executed, often in the manner native to the particular area (Arrian 6.30.2). Where the rights of his subjects were at stake, he showed no mercy or favouritism for any Macedonian, Greek, Thracian, Persian, Median, or Indian. . . .



What Alexander sought in his senior administrators was summed up in the word "excellence" (*arete*). He assessed it by performance in his own army and in that of his enemy; for he approved courage and loyalty, wherever he found it. But a particular kind of excellence was needed where conquerors had to accept the conquered as their equals in administering the kingdom of Asia. The Macedonians justifiably regarded themselves as a military élite, superior to Greeks and barbarians, and closer to their king than any foreigner; and the Greeks despised all Asians as barbarians, fitted by nature only to be slaves. Yet here was Alexander according equal status, regardless of race, not only to all his administrators but also to all who served in his army! Resentment at this was the chief factor in the mutiny of the Macedonians at Opis. On that occasion Alexander enforced his will. He celebrated the concept of equal status in an official banquet, at which the Macedonians sat by their king, with whom they were not reconciled; next were the Persians; and after them persons of "the other races." All the guests were men who ranked first in reputation or in some other form of excellence (*arete*). . . .

When Alexander encountered nomadic or marauding peoples, he forced them, often by drastic methods of warfare, to accept his rule and to adopt a settled way of life. Many of his new cities were founded among these peoples so that "they should cease to be nomads," and he encouraged the concentration of native villages to form new urban centres. For he intended to promote peace, prosperity, and culture within these parts of his kingdom too, and the cities and centres were means to that end. Strongly fortified and well manned, they were bastions of peace, and the young men in them were trained by Macedonian and Greek veterans to join Alexander's new army and maintain his peace. They were sited to become markets for agricultural produce and interregional exchange, and their citizens, especially in the new cities by the deltas of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Indus, learnt the capitalistic form of economy, which had brought such prosperity to the Greek states in the fifth and fourth centuries.

The cultural model for the new cities was the Macedonian town, itself very strongly imbued with Greek ideas and practices. The ruling element from the outset was formed by Macedonian and Greek veterans; and the Asians, although free to practise their own religion and traditions, were encouraged to learn Greek and adopt some forms of Greco-Macedonian life. According to Plutarch (*Mor.* 328e) Alexander founded 70 new cities, which started their life with 10,000 adult male citizens as the norm, and he must have envisaged a fusion of European and Asian cultures developing within and spreading out from these arteries into the body of the kingdom. . . .

The effects of a statesman's ideas, especially if he dies at the age of thirty-two, are rarely assessable within his lifetime. Yet before Alexander died his ideas bore fruit in the integration of Asians and Macedonians in cavalry and infantry units; the training of Asians in Macedonian weaponry; the association of Asians and Macedonians in each file of the army; the settling of Macedonians, Greeks, and Asians in the new cities; the spread of Greek as a common language in the army and in the new cities; the development of Babylon as the "metropolis" or capital of the kingdom of Asia; the honouring of interracial marriage; and the raising of Eurasian children to a privileged status.

Peace reigned in this kingdom of Asia, and its people now had little to fear from their neighbours. Urbanisation, trade, water-borne commerce, agriculture, flood-control, land-reclamation, and irrigation were developing fast, and exchange was stimulated by the liberation of hoarded treasure. The gold and silver coinage of Alexander, uniform in types and weights, was universally accepted because it was of real, bullion value. In the eastern satrapies especially the gold darics and silver shekels of the Persian treasuries continued to circulate, and in the western satrapies local currencies were provided by the Greek, Cyprian, and Phoenician cities. . . .

The skill with which Alexander changed the economy of Asia into that system of commercial exchange which the Greeks had invented and we call capitalism, and at that within so few years, is one of the most striking signs of his genius. . . .

The fulfilment of Alexander's plans was impaired by his early death and by the strife between the generals which ensued. Yet even so, within the span of thirteen years, he changed the face of the world more decisively and with more longlasting effects than any other statesman has ever done. He first introduced into Asia the Greco-Macedonian city within the framework of a monarchical or autocratic state, and this form of city was to be the centre of ancient and medieval civilisation in the southern Balkans, the Aegean, and the Near East. For the city provided that continuity of Greek language, literature, and culture which enriched the Roman world, fostered Christianity, and affected Western Europe so profoundly. The outlook and the achievements of Alexander created an ideal image, an apotheosis of kingship which was to inspire the Hellenistic kings, some Roman emperors, and the Byzantine rulers. And his creation of a state which rose above nationalism and brought liberators and liberated, victors and defeated into collaboration and parity of esteem puts most of the expedients of the modern world to shame. . . .



That Alexander should grow up with a sense of mission was certainly to be expected. For he was descended from Zeus and Heracles, he was born to be king, he had the career of Philip as an exemplar, and he was advised by Isocrates, Aristotle, and others to be a benefactor of Macedonians and Greeks alike. His sense of mission was inevitably steeped in religious associations, because from an early age he had been associated with the king, his father, in conducting religious ceremonies, and he was imbued with many ideas of orthodox religion and of ecstatic mysteries. Thus two observations by Plutarch (*Mor.* 342 A and F) have the ring of truth. "This desire (to bring all men into an orderly system under a single leadership and to accustom them to one way of life) was implanted in Alexander from childhood and grew up with him"; and on crossing the Hellespont to the Troad Alexander's first asset was "his reverence towards the gods." Already by then he planned to found a Kingdom of Asia, in which he would rule over the peoples, as Odysseus had done, "like a kindly father" (*Odyssey* 5.11). He promoted the fulfilment of that plan "by founding Greek cities among savage peoples and by teaching the principles of law and peace to lawless, ignorant tribes." When he had completed the conquest of "Asia" through the favour of the gods and especially that of Zeus Ammon, he went on to establish for all men in his kingdom "concord and peace and partnership with one another" (*Mor.* 329 F).

This was a practical development, springing from a religious concept and not from a philosophical theory (though it led later to the philosophical theory of the Cynics, who substituted for Asia the whole inhabited world and talked of the brotherhood of all men), and it came to fruition in the banquet at Opis, when he prayed in the presence of men of various races for "concord and partnership in the ruling" of his kingdom "between Macedonians and Persians."

What distinguishes Alexander from all other conquerors is this divine mission. He had grown up with it, and he had to a great extent fulfilled it, before he gave expression to it at the banquet at Opis in such words as those reported by Plutarch (*Mor.* 329 C). "Alexander considered," wrote Plutarch, "that he had come from the gods to be a general governor and reconciler of the world. Using force of arms when he did not bring men together by the light of reason, he harnessed all resources to one and the same end, mixing the lives, man-

ners, marriages and customs of men, as it were in a loving-cup." This is his true claim to be called "Alexander the Great": that he did not crush or dismember his enemies, as the conquering Romans crushed Carthage and Molossia and dismembered Macedonia into four parts; nor exploit, enslave or destroy the native peoples, as "the white man" has so often done in America, Africa, and Australasia; but that he created, albeit for only a few years, a supranational community capable of living internally at peace and of developing the concord and partnership which are so sadly lacking in the modern world.

## Review and Study Questions

1. In your judgment, do the ancient sources quoted in this chapter support the interpretation of W. W. Tarn? Explain.
2. Is it credible that, given the nature and temperament of Alexander, he was responsible for such a sophisticated concept as "the natural brotherhood of all men"?
3. Is it justifiable to characterize Alexander as "the great"? Give your reasons.

## Suggestions for Further Reading

As is often the case, the classical sources for the biography of Alexander are among the most lively and entertaining works about him, especially Plutarch and Arrian. Plutarch's "Life of Alexander" from his *Parallel Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans* (available in several editions) is, like the rest of the biographical sketches in this famous book, a gossipy and charming account, containing most of the familiar anecdotes associated with Alexander. Arrian's work, the most substantial of the ancient sources, despite a certain stuffiness and lack of analytical daring, is solidly based on more contemporary sources now long lost—particularly Ptolemy's journal and the work of Aristobulus. And it contains the best and most detailed account of Alexander's conquests. See the excellent modern translation by Aubrey de Sélincourt, *Arrian's Life of Alexander the Great* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1958).

The views of W. W. Tarn summarized in the excerpted passage above from his Raleigh Lecture on History, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," are spelled out in greater detail in the chapters he wrote on Alexander and his age—chs. 12–15 of the *Cambridge Ancient History,* vol. 6 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1927), and in his larger *Alexander the Great,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1948), based on the account in *Cambridge Ancient History* but expanded and updated.



Tarn's most bitter critic is Ernst Badian, who chose to challenge Tarn in particular for the views expressed in his Raleigh Lecture. Badian's article, with the same title, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," appeared in *Historia,* 7 (1958), 425–444, and is reprinted in *Alexander the Great: The Main Problems,* ed. G. T. Griffith (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966). This article is highly specialized, closely reasoned, and contains long passages in Greek; but it is very important and, despite the difficulties of the text, the argument can be clearly followed even by the nonspecialist. Peter Green, *Alexander the Great* (New York: Praeger, 1970), is a modern general account of Alexander's career in the same critical tradition as Badian. Two other modern works that deal more with the conquests than the conqueror are Peter Bamm, *Alexander the Great: Power as Destiny,* tr. J. M. Brownjohn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), and Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Flames over Persepolis: Turning Point in History* (New York: Morrow, 1968), the latter of particular interest because of Wheeler's expert knowledge of Near Eastern and Indian archaeology.

There is another relatively recent book that stresses the continuing work in archaeology, including the dramatic finds at Vergina in Macedonia: Robin Lane Fox, *The Search for Alexander* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980). The most balanced and readable modern general account, however, may still be A. R. Burn, *Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Empire* (London: The English Universities Press, 1947), although the more recent R. D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London: Robert Hale, 1968) is also recommended.

Finally, Alexander is the subject of two first-rate historical novels by Mary Renault, *Fire from Heaven* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), and *The Persian Boy* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), the first carrying the story through Alexander's childhood to his accession to the throne of Macedonia, the second recounting his conquests as narrated by the Persian boy-eunuch Bagoas, Alexander's companion and lover. Renault has also produced a nonfiction account, fully as readable as her novels, and based on the meticulous research she prepared for them, *The Nature of Alexander* (New York: Pantheon, 1975).