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History 499 Senior Thesis

June 13, 2011

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Alexander the Great: A Lesson Taught by Roman Historians

ΣΤΟΝ ΚΑΛΛΙΤΕΡΟ ΠΑΝΕ ΤΑ ΛΑΦΥΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΓΝΩΣΗΣ

(to the best goes the spoils of knowledge)

The image of Alexander the Great, “according to the many legends he was a king, a hero, a god, a conqueror, a philosopher, a scientist, a prophet, a statesman, and a visionary.”<sup>1</sup> This is the story of Alexander the Great that is taught. The deeds of valor are truly awe-inspiring to those who take them at face value. Alexander is seen as a man who broke the mold. Libraries have been devoted to the study of Alexander. However, over the past sixty years scholars have become divided about their understanding of such a figure. There is one school of thought that still sees him as an inspirational leader. There is however a new story that is being explored, one that tells of a bloodthirsty man, always in search of the next battle, constantly putting himself and others in danger. This man of course is Alexander, it is important to note that he didn’t always have the title of Great, when he was born he was Alexander III of Macedon.

This divide has been created, because of critical questions regarding the primary historians, such as Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Curtius, Plutarch, and Arrian. The primary sources of Alexander that we now have were written during the zenith of the Roman Empire. The writers of Alexander’s history were Roman citizens. Although they were ethnically Greek, they were separated from their subject by hundreds of years. How well could they have really known Alexander the Great without using the history close at hand as a guide to explain the events of such a monumental figure? These historians speak about Alexander as if they knew him on an intimate level. The accounts of Alexander’s life are told with such confidence in their accuracy, and now their version is all there is to help explain who Alexander was.

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph, Roisman. *Alexander the Great: Ancient and Modern Perspectives*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1995. (3)

Roman historians of the second century A.D. such as Arrian and Plutarch use the story of Alexander to comment on Rome and its leadership. Moreover, they used and emphasized examples out of Alexander's life to exemplify good leadership and poor leadership qualities. They also used a history that was tangible, and close at hand in order to construct the history of Alexander to make him the figure we now know. The events that both Plutarch and Arrian relate in the biography of Alexander, mirror those events in the Roman Empire. This can only be explained, because both Arrian and Plutarch are using the history around them to construct the story of Alexander.

### **Historiography of Alexander the Great**

History has taken a figure like Alexander and given him the title of the Great. When there are those who see him as Alexander III of Macedon. There are those who regard him as Alexander the horned one. Some interpretations are that he has horns because he is a devil. Others make the claim that the horns represent a bull, which is an animal connected to his mythical heritage of Zeus as his father. This analysis is derived from the historians of Alexander. However, for the entirety of this paper will focus on Plutarch, and Arrian, because of their production of Alexander's biography within relatively the same time. Brooke Allen states, "each succeeding era seems to re-create Alexander in its own image."<sup>2</sup> Each generation that learns about him creates this romantic version of him when in reality it is through Roman sources that this image is created. A.B. Bosworth makes the stunning revelation that, "The study of Alexander as we have seen, is in large part the study of Arrian, who provides the constant thread against which

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<sup>2</sup> Brooke, Allen. "Alexander the Great: Or the Terrible?" *The Hudson Review* 58.2 (2005): *JSTOR*. Accessed on 11 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30044758>>, 220.

the rest of the tradition must be assessed.”<sup>3</sup> Sources like Arrian and Plutarch have created this romantic picture of Alexander. Their image has been used to explain why he earned the title of Great, when history could have just as easily recorded him as Alexander III. Due to the ever-changing biases within a society, the title of great for one society may not fit for another. Based on that reasoning our modern interpretation of Alexander, it may now be that of, Alexander the terrible because of the wave of death surrounding his reign.

Moreover, “ the problems of Alexander historiography are (relatively!) straightforward. Is Arrian more reliable than Plutarch?”<sup>4</sup> In either case there is the image of a hero being portrayed, but how accurate is said hero? Our faith in these sources are what has shaped our understanding of Alexander. This is the case because the, “Greek Alexander Romance is only one of many versions of the story of Alexander to gain a wide readership in both antiquity and the Middle Ages.”<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that, “the Alexander of Romance is scarcely to be judged next to the Alexander of history.”<sup>6</sup> With this reasoning there are schools of thought that are very distinct. There are those that follow the historians of Alexander, and paraphrase what they read, thus giving a version of Alexander that may be not entirely accurate but is unchanging; and then there are those historians who take a closer look, not at Alexander, but the historians of Alexander.

The style of Arrian, “it seems that Arrian was working inductively, beginning with the figure of a noble and driven Alexander, and assembling episodes that would

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<sup>3</sup> A. B. Bosworth. *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Jeremy McInerney, "Arrian and the Greek Alexander Romance," *The Classical World* 100, no. 4 (2007) *JSTOR*. Accessed on 31 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25434052>>, 424.

<sup>5</sup> McInerney, “Alexander Romance,” 424.

<sup>6</sup> McInerney, “Alexander Romance,” 425.

illustrate Alexander's character."<sup>7</sup> These episodes that Arrian describes emphasizes characteristics of a good leader, and of a bad leader. Arrian advised the readers of his time to make the connection whenever possible, and to learn from the deeds of Alexander in his writing.

Another historian who is credited with inspiring a great deal of writing regarding the narrative of Alexander the Great is Plutarch. However, the validity of his writing is also questionable. Craig Cooper notes that, "Plutarch draws a sharp contrast between rational history and irrational myth; the divide between the two, Plutarch suggests, can be navigated through archaiologia, a form of historiography that assumes the guise of history by applying its methodology of rational scrutiny..."<sup>8</sup> Plutarch speaks from a point of familiarity with Alexander, but it is important to note that in Plutarch's writing we see the, "adding of details about Alexander's early years and education, details typically not found in history but rather in related historiographical works..."<sup>9</sup> Keeping that in mind while reading about a figure like Alexander will raise several questions regarding the accuracy of Plutarch's writing, question like where and how does Plutarch know Alexander in such intimate detail? More specifically, what is there for Plutarch to gain by making such bold statements about a character like Alexander? Again drawing from Craig Cooper's writing, "though Plutarch leads his readers to believe that he has had difficulty producing a proper historical narrative based on wide reading, hearsay, and personal inquiry, that is precisely what he delivers."<sup>10</sup> Plutarch is seen as a primary

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<sup>7</sup> McInerney, "Alexander Romance," 429.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, Craig. "Making Irrational Myth Plausible History: Polybian Intertextuality in Plutarch's "Theseus" *Classical Association of Canada* 61.3 (2007) *JSTOR*. Accessed on 18 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20304656>>, 212.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, Making Irrational Myth Plausible, 213.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, Making Irrational Myth Plausible, 215.

source on Alexander the Great, although the accuracy is somewhat questionable. He does emphasize certain values that would be considered good qualities found in a leader, and the outcome of the use of such qualities. "History of the distant past can wander off course, as if were, into the land of the unknown, and, though Plutarch is aware of the danger, this does not prevent him from confidently repeating stories that seem as implausible..., but are backed up by his own rational scrutiny and autopsy, thus giving the appearance of history."<sup>11</sup> Plutarch is one of our best sources for Alexander and his work should not be completely discarded, but it should be closely analyzed. "Such rational scrutiny may give the "appearance of history," but even a cursory glance reveals how much the life wants to verge on the "mythic."<sup>12</sup> Plutarch writes a story of the individual of Alexander although this story verges as almost unbelievable.

However modern writers now hold the story of Alexander, if taken as pure truth that, "Alexander's story is one of inspirational heroism on the Homeric scale."<sup>13</sup> The image of Alexander is comparable to Achilles because our primary sources took that step to making his exploits that of a demigod, and in the same ways that Achilles was immortalized by the writings of Homer, Alexander has the same homage paid to him. Interestingly enough, the time separating Homer from his subject, Achilles, is the same in regards to Arrian and Plutarch and their subject, Alexander. This aspect of both writer is most clearly seen in their narrative at the battle of Granicus, which is discussed later in the body of this paper.

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<sup>11</sup> Cooper, *Making Irrational Myth Plausible*, 230.

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, *Making Irrational Myth Plausible*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, Brooke. "Alexander the Great: Or the Terrible?" *The Hudson Review* 58.2 (2005) *JSTOR*. Accessed on 11 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30044758>>, 221.

### **Plutarch's Introduction**

We know Plutarch simply by this name. However his original Greek name was Plutarchos. He was born 46 A.D. in the town of Chaeronea in Boeotia, and died somewhere between 119-127 A.D. Plutarch was ethnically Greek, but a citizen of Rome. His high standing in society afforded him several privileges. He was able to travel to several parts of the Mediterranean. However, it was his visits to Rome where he was able to make the connection that proved to be vital to his impending fame as a biographer. Using the friendships in Rome, Plutarch is able to gather enough finances to pay for the production of over seventy biographies regarding characters from both the Greek and Roman world.

Plutarch begins his biography of Alexander the Great by letting the reader know what his purpose of writing is. He is not writing a history, but his story of a person who was so famous that he had become legendary even in his own time. Plutarch is used as a source when looking to many figure of the ancient world, because his writing was so prolific. In Plutarch's biographies he takes famous Greek characters and compares them to Roman characters. With this in mind, there are Roman comparisons being made to Alexander by Plutarch. Place the connection to the readers. Letting the reader see that here is one famous figure in history and their actions, and here is another and their actions. Plutarch writes the life of this man that he is so temporally separated from, but writes about him in such minute detail as if he lived by Alexander's side. The smallest jest seemed to have been in a fashion to be the butterfly effect rippling throughout time. Plutarch writes with such confidence about those small gestures, which can almost fool the reader into believing that Plutarch was there next to Alexander.

Plutarch starts his story with Alexander's childhood, which is written in great detail in his biography. There are several indications that there are a series of mystical connections to Alexander's greatness, several of them are connected with the idea that Alexander was divinely conceived. In this story Plutarch also takes this time to set the stage for Alexander's personality, "...while he was still a boy his self-restraint showed itself in the fact that, although he was impetuous and violent in other matters, the pleasures of the body had little hold upon him, and he indulged in them with great moderation, while his ambition kept his spirits serious and lofty in advance of his years."<sup>14</sup>

This mentality is referenced again after Alexander's victory at the battle of Issus. Plutarch tells the anecdote of how Alexander conducted himself while in Asia Minor. "But Alexander as it would seem, considered the mastery of himself a more kingly thing than the conquest of his enemies."<sup>15</sup> Plutarch sets the stage for Alexander's mentality as a boy, and shows how it developed into good qualities of a leader later on in Alexander's life. Another anecdote that is mentioned, which further illustrates Alexander self control, "In the matter of delicacies, too, he himself at all events, was master of his appetite, so that often, when the rarest fruits or fish were brought to him from the sea-coast, he would distribute them to each of his companions until he was the only one for whom nothing remained."<sup>16</sup> These are the smallest jest in which Plutarch desires to shows the quality of Alexander character and values that must be present in good leaders.

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<sup>14</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives* VII: Alexander, IV, Translated by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXI. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXIII. 5



There is a story of ambition where Plutarch tells about the day that Alexander tamed what we are led to believe is a wild horse. Alexander names the horse Bucephalas, which in Greek means “Ox head”. Alexander’s father Phillip was ready to dispose of the animal, a twelve-year-old Alexander wanted the horse, and convinced Philip to stop and let him have a chance at riding the horse. He is laughed at which only seems to fuel the resolve of Alexander. He approached it showing no fear, as we are told. Upon seeing that it was spooked by its own shadow, he turned the horse towards the sun and climbed on its back. He was able to ride it and was even able to control the horse when he wanted to turn back towards the arena.

Upon Alexander’s return to the arena, his father broke out into tears of joy and shouted to Alexander, “My son, seek thee out a kingdom equal to thyself; Macedonia has not room for thee.”<sup>17</sup> This exclamation may have been taken to heart by Alexander, and so inspired him to push himself and his men to their very limits of the eastern known world. Plutarch uses this episode in Alexander’s childhood to comment, that in order to be considered a good leader, one has to be confident, and ambitious. Challenges may arise but they must be overcome in order to complete the task at hand.

### **Arrian’s Introduction**

Arrian was raised in the northern part of what is now modern day Greece. Born into Roman citizenship, he studied in Athens around A.D. 107. It is also important to note that around this point in time *Plutarch’s Lives* was beginning to be read and circulate around the Roman world. Other than that not a great deal is known about Arrian’s early

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<sup>17</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XI. 5

years. He served in the Roman army as an officer; while in the service of the empire, he was stationed in Gaul, what is now modern day France, and in the Danube frontier, a territory north of Greece. This military background served for a great deal of Arrian's understanding of Alexander's life, and gave him the military eye that proved to be helpful in his writing of the *Anabasis of Alexander*.

Very little information is available about Arrian's career until he is appointed consul in A.D. 130, a high position within the Roman government. In 131 he was granted the office of governor of the Black sea province of Cappadocia. Arrian was considered to have been a good friend with the Emperor Hadrian, and his personal connection to a Roman Emperor led to speculation regarding the promotions he received throughout his life.

Arrian's most famous work was the *Anabasis of Alexander*; it was written in Attic Greek, which was a common form of Greek. It was used so that both Greek and Roman people would be able to read his work. Published in 145 A.D. it is the last of what we would consider a primary source regarding Alexander's life. A. B. Bosworth states it perfectly, "The study of Alexander as we have seen, is in large part the study of Arrian, who provides the constant thread against which the rest of the tradition must be assessed."<sup>18</sup> From this quote in order to understand one we must understand the other. Trying to answer the questions of who Arrian was as a historian, or more simply who he was as a man, may prove difficult. However, from there we can begin to understand what influenced him, and possibly shaped his view when looking at a figure like Alexander.

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<sup>18</sup> Bosworth, A. B. *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.

In Arrian's narrative of Alexander the reader does not have the chance to read about Alexander as a boy. Arrian begins with Alexander's rise to the throne of Macedon. Arrian begins his history of Alexander by commenting that, "there is no one over whom historians have been more numerous and less harmonious."<sup>19</sup> Making it clear that he believes that his depiction of Alexander will be the truth and definitive. Arrian also makes it very clear that he uses primarily two sources, Aristobulus and Ptolemy. "My own view is that Ptolemy and Aristobulus are more trustworthy narrators, for Aristobulus took the field with King Alexander; Ptolemy not only did the same, but he was a king himself, falsehood would have been more shameful to him than to anyone else."<sup>20</sup> Arrian tells his readers where he received his information, but modern historians are not lucky enough to be able to consult his sources. Arrian tries to make his lack of sources valid by convincing his readers of their accuracy. Saying that Ptolemy would not have lied because of his noble standing, already creates within the reader a certain amount of doubt. This doubt is furthered by the fact that the reader is then getting a version of the story filtered through Arrian who is so separated by his subject that an completely true representation is impossible to accomplish.

Arrian also makes a definitive statement near the end of Alexander's biography, "a great many other stories have been written by the historians ... falsified told them, and will indeed never cease handing on these falsehood to others in turn, unless it be checked by this my history."<sup>21</sup> Arrian is claiming that his history is the most accurate. Also he praises Alexander by saying that, "No one man gave proof of so many or such wondrous

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<sup>19</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, in *Arrian History of Alexander and Indica*. Vol. 1. Translated by E. Iliff Robson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), I.I 1.

<sup>20</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. I 1.

<sup>21</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, XI. 2.

deeds, whether in number of greatness among Greeks and Orientals alike.”<sup>22</sup> There are lessons that Arrian wishes to comment on through the story of Alexander the Great, saying that he was great, but Rome is great now. However, there is something still left to learn.

### **Lessons Taught by Both Arrian and Plutarch**

#### **The battle of Granicus**

The battle of Granicus was Alexander’s first major battle fought in foreign lands. This battle is also one that Plutarch and Arrian both talk about in detail. Alexander’s army met the Persian force on the banks of the Granicus River. Holding a military counsel, “many of Alexander’s officers were worried of the depth of the river, and of the roughness and unevenness of the further bank, up which they would have to climb while fighting.”<sup>23</sup> In Arrian’s account of the battle a older general Parmenio<sup>24</sup> advised against any thought of battle, believing that such an action was foolish. Parmenio is quoted as saying, “the first disaster would be grievous at the present, and most harmful for the general result of the war.”<sup>25</sup> These factors do not seem to have deterred Alexander from his battle plan.

The Persians had formed an army according to Arrian’s numbers of 20,000 cavalry with about the same number of mercenary Greek infantry. The Persian infantry was composed of Greek mercenaries, which were set back from the banks. Alexander carried on with planning the battle; his reasoning for this, according to Arrian, was that

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<sup>22</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. XII 4.

<sup>23</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XVI. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Parmenio- a trusted general of Alexander’s father and Alexander

<sup>25</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. XIII 5.

the Persians would find courage in seeing that the Macedonian's were afraid to engage, which would be almost as detrimental as a defeat. Alexander's plan was as follows,

“Parmenio to lead the left wing; he himself passed along to the right. As commander of the right he had already appointed Philotas son of Parmenio, with the territorial cavalry, the archers, and the Agrianes, javelin-men. Next to them were marshaled the territorial guards, led by Nicanor son of Parmenio; besides these was the phalanx of Perdikkas son of Orontes; also that of Coenus son of Polemocrates; and those Craterus son of Alexander, Amyntas son of Andromenes, and the troops under Philip son of Amyntas. On the left wing came first the Thessalian cavalry, commanded by Calas son of Menelaus, then the Thracians, under Agetho; on their right were the infantry, the phalanx of Craterus, of Meleager, of Philip, up to the centre of the whole force.”<sup>26</sup>

This battle formation is substantially more detailed than Plutarch's interpretation of events before the battle. Alexander is still depicted as being the first to begin the crossing, and thus leading his army from the front, albeit, not in the frenzied manner where he charged across with thirteen squadrons, as with Plutarch. The image that Plutarch writes is of an unwinnable fight. When looking at Alexander's actions it seems that he was acting like a frenzied and foolish commander rather than a wise one.

Arrian writes that at the beginning of the battle, Alexander's army was slow to make progress. When it seemed that the Macedonians and allied Greeks were beginning to fall back, Alexander, “himself the first to attack, just where was the press of cavalry and where the Persian commanders were posted.”<sup>27</sup> Arrian is depicting Alexander as a

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<sup>26</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. XIV 1.

<sup>27</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. XV 3.

leader who has the ability to change the morale of his men, and attacks precisely where the attack is needed most. Plutarch describes Alexander's crossing the river very quickly leaving himself exposed, and because of his conspicuous attire Persian commanders targeted him out. Rhoesaces and Spithridates, two Satraps within the territory, attacked Alexander. Alexander first killed Rhoesaces by striking him in the face.

The manner in which both Plutarch and Arrian describe this an action is very similar to Homers depiction of how a hero would dispatch an enemy in the *Iliad*. There is this blatant similarity to Homer's writing style in both Arrian and Plutarch; they are continual making comments regarding similarities to Achilles. By doing this both writers are trying to make a connection that Alexander is similar to Achilles who in Greek mythology was a demigod who was very apt at the art of war.

After Alexander's disposal of Rhoesaces another Persian commander, Spithridates is said to have come behind Alexander and struck him on the helmet, and almost killing Alexander at a critical moment in the battle. The severity of the blow is described by Plutarch thusly; "and his helmet could barely and with difficulty resist the blow, so that the edge of the battle-ax touched the topmost hair of his head."<sup>28</sup> Plutarch paints a very vivid picture of an event that happened four hundred years before. This particular quote gives the reader the impression that Plutarch was there to see it happen, something, which is impossible. Moreover, as Spithridates raised his weapon to finish off Alexander a commander of Alexander's, Cleitus, known as Cleitus the Black, killed Spithridate before he could kill Alexander. At this moment (Plutarch does not mention why), the Persian cavalry began to withdrawal from the banks. The Cavalry withdrew

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<sup>28</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XVI. 5.

leaving the Greek mercenaries to fend for themselves. Plutarch speaks highly of these mercenaries; “Most of the Macedonians who were slain or wounded fought or fell there, since they came to close quarter with men who knew how to fight.”<sup>29</sup>

Arrian’s account of the battle states that over one thousand Persian cavalry, and eighteen thousand Greek mercenaries were killed. Macedonian and allied Greek losses are said to have been sixty cavalry and thirty infantry dead, plus another hundred wounded. There is some controversy in Arrian’s battle numbers. The dramatic contrast in losses give the audience a figure in Alexander that led his army, and was able to be fortunate enough not to have suffered tremendous losses. Alexander is said to have, “showed much concern about the wounded, visiting each, examining their wounds, asking how they were received, and encouraged each to recount, and even boast of his exploits.”<sup>30</sup> Arrian depicts Alexander as being a caring leader who is willing to care for the lowest ranking men in his army. Alexander tells them that they did well, and that they should brag about the wounds they earn while battling against the Persians. Alexander’s actions a personal connection with his troops that is valued in a good leader. In this Arrian is commenting that a good leader must do this in order to be remembered as a good leader.

Plutarch’s purpose for describes this particular battle was to show the value of a warrior emperor, describing a foolhardy charge across a river with arrows being shot and spears being thrown down upon. Moreover, the depiction of a large force that controls the high ground. These odds compounded and would have made a lesser general surrender or

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<sup>29</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XVI. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I. XVI 5.

withdrawal as in the case of Alexander's military advisors. Alexander does exactly the opposite of what both his advisors and his enemies expect him to do. He paints a picture of a leader who risks everything for his men, almost being killed in the process. But yet, his mere presence is enough to inspire them to push on as we are told. The presence of this dominating figure on the side of the Macedonians Greeks is enough to shatter the Persian defense. Plutarch is commenting that in order for a leader to have the same results, he must put himself in a similar situation. Lead by example and inspire the troops to do the same.

### **The Battle of Issus**

The Battle of Issus, fought in B.C. 333, was the battle in which Alexander, and the king of Persia, Darius met for the first time. "Alexander was still at Mallus when a report came that Darius with his full force was encamped at Sochi, a place in Assyrian territory, two marching days from the Assyrian Gates."<sup>31</sup> This close proximity to Darius seemed to have energized Alexander. Arrian writes that, "Darius... had selected a place in the Assyrian land... convenient for the multitude of his host."<sup>32</sup> Darius' position guaranteed a victory from all accounts. However, "false courtiers, such as will always haunt kings, led him on to decide that Alexander had no wish to proceed further... he was hesitating on hearing of Darius' own approach."<sup>33</sup> Here Arrian is making the comment that a wise tactician should trust that his judgment is best and that it should not be shifted by 'yes men.' Alexander is praised for trusting in himself and his men. In fact Arrian's

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<sup>31</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. VI 1.

<sup>32</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. VI 3.

<sup>33</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. VI 5.



depiction of Alexander is one of a man who can almost see the future when sizing up situations.

Arrian writes that Alexander inspired his men by comparing the two armies. Alexander's men are free men fighting out of desire; they have proven themselves competent in battle because they are battle hardened. Darius' force is composed of different tribes. They are paid to fight. They have no vested interest in victory, and their lives are ones lived in luxury. Alexander goes even farther by saying, "The stoutest in Europe, and the most warlike, will ranged against the feeblest and softest hordes of Asia."<sup>34</sup> With these words his men are so inspired that, "they crowded round and clasped their king's hand and cheering him to the echo bade him lead on without delay."<sup>35</sup> Arrian continues to amplify Alexander's ability to inspire his men by telling about how before the army began to march in battle formation, Alexander rode in front of his ranks, "calling aloud the names, with all proper distinction, not only of the commanders, but even squadron leaders and captains..."<sup>36</sup> He praised them for their prior actions, encouraging similar action from his entire army.

These actions told to us by Arrian make Alexander look as if he was an infallible leader, that there is no limit to his powers of inspiration, and we have an image of his men as being ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. It is possible that Arrian a former military man himself, may have been commenting, through the figure of Alexander, on the proper method for leaders to motivate their men. The battle ensued, and Darius saw a break in his line. He did not inspire his men. In fact he is one of the

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<sup>34</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. VII 5.

<sup>35</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. VII 9.

<sup>36</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II. X 2.

first to flee the battlefield. Arrian writes about Darius, “he was a man above all weak and incapable in warfare.”<sup>37</sup> Arrian emphasizes Alexander’s action before the Battle of Issus as being the proper method of leading an army, while contrasting those actions with the actions of Darius.

Plutarch is more interested in showing Alexander as a compassionate leader by writing about his actions after the battle, in Darius’ camp. Alexander discovered that he has royal prisoners upon his arrival into Darius’ tent. Plutarch tells us that Darius’ mother, pregnant wife, and two unmarried daughters were fearful because they thought that Alexander had killed Darius. Alexander sent one of his trusted companions, Leonnatus, to inform them that, “Darius was not dead, and that they need have no fear of Alexander; for it was Darius upon whom he was waging war for supremacy.”<sup>38</sup> They were given all of their rights that were expected of royalty. Plutarch even goes as far as to say that the women of Darius’ family, “lived as though guarded in... chambers instead of in an enemy’s camp.”<sup>39</sup> Alexander’s treatment of these women shows that he was not a monster, but more of an enemy to be respected.

The treatment of Darius’ family makes Alexander out to be a kind and forgiving ruler. Statements such as, ‘for it was Darius upon whom he was waging war for supremacy’, depicts Alexander as a collected leader. Darius sends a chamberlain to negotiate a peace and release of his loved ones; however, Alexander denied offers of peace and called Darius out for a final battle that would decide whose hands would control Persia. When asked further the chamberlain replied, “For Alexander is as gentle

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<sup>37</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III XXII 2.

<sup>38</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXI. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXI. 2.

after victory as he is terrible in battle.”<sup>40</sup> These examples show the reader what kind of picture Plutarch wants to convey about Alexander, and the values that are necessary to have if one wants to be considered a good military leader.

### **Mythical Themes in Both Plutarch and Arrian**

Plutarch makes continual references to Alexander divinity. However, Arrian is not so easily willing to admit that Alexander was of godly origins. This is most apparent in Arrian’s account of Alexander’s expedition to the temple of Ammon. Arrian comments on Alexander’s trip to the temple of Ammon as being purely a propaganda effort to reinforce the myth that he is the offspring of Zeus. If Alexander’s expedition to the temple of Ammon was purely propaganda, then the motivation for returning and claiming that he was greeted as the son of Zeus would be an effort to make connection with legendary figures such as Perseus and Heracles. Both of these figures are said to have also been Zeus’ offspring, and in legend are said to have accomplished impossible tasks because of their divine heritage. Thus Alexander is doing the same to explain his monumental campaign. This type of propaganda was used extensively in the Roman world as well. Therefore, Arrian informs the reader that even though this action is propaganda Roman leader use similar action to acquire similar results.

Arrian’s introduction to book five deals with a considerable amount of mythical comparison of Alexander to Dionysus. This could lead to an entirely different paper regarding the Greek Dionysus, god of drinking and acting, and the deity with a similar title that is so highly regarded in the part of the world that is now Afghanistan and

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<sup>40</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander*, XXX. 3.

Pakistan. Alexander speaks to envoys that compare him to Dionysus. Arrian writes, “One must not be a precise critic of ancient legends about the divine being.”<sup>41</sup> This is also where he is critical of making the mythical connection. Perhaps he is commenting that leaders should not be too hasty in commenting that they are in fact gods and should be patient and wait for others to make such a bold comment.

### **Misdeeds of Alexander**

Arrian writes about Alexander after the battle of Gaugamela as a leader that reached the height of his glory. In the following years Arrian describes values that are not prized in a leader. Alexander begins to lose his “greatness.” This is most prevalent in the story of his dealing with Bessus.<sup>42</sup> This man murders Darius in the hopes of getting on Alexander’s good side, as we are told. Alexander is angry and tortures this man to death. Arrian personally does not like Alexander’s treatment of Bessus or, “his taking to Median garb instead of the Macedonian traditional dress.”<sup>43</sup>

At this point in Arrian’s narrative he uses Alexander’s adoption of foreign customs and his actions as examples that a leader should not follow. It is also at this time that Alexander is beginning to be depicted as a poor leader, most notably in the execution of Parmenio and his son. This was done on the grounds that both were linked to a possible assassination plot. This is followed closely with the drunken murder of Cleitus.<sup>44</sup> Arrian writes, “Alexander I pity for this mishap, since he showed himself therein the slave of two vices, by neither of which any self-respecting man should be overcome,

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<sup>41</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V. I 2.

<sup>42</sup> Bessus is cousin to Darius, and the only possible successor to the throne

<sup>43</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV. VII 4.

<sup>44</sup> Cleitus- was a man that saved Alexander’s life at the battle of Granicus

namely, passion and drunkenness.”<sup>45</sup> These episodes in Arrian’s narrative show the value placed on a leader who does not let paranoia and passion affect his ability to maintain order. Arrian also chooses to illuminate the reader by showing Alexander at the very lowest extent of his popularity as a leader. The final action that Alexander commits is the murder of the royal philosopher Callisthenes and the squires in yet another assassination plot. These episodes show an Alexander far different from the man that is glorified for his action during the battle of Issus and Granicus.

### **The Battle of Hydaspes**

Arrian describes how Alexander crossed the river Hydaspes. Alexander attempted to make a quick crossing of a large river with 7,000 of his men all the while without alerting the enemy forces and their leader, King Porus. Through this anecdote, Arrian gives us a glimpse into his writing style regarding Alexander. Arrian openly admits that he does not know what Alexander did in order to move his military force quickly across the river, but in turn describes how Roman forces would have attempted it the same kind of crossing. In this case he writes from a point of knowledge giving the reader not a insight to who Alexander was but how Arrian is filtering the facts in order make Alexander an example how to cross a river correctly.

The battle of the Hydaspes is the turning point for Alexander through the eyes of both Plutarch and Arrian, Alexander’s army had reached their breaking point. Alexander showed no sign of stopping his advance through what is now modern day Pakistan and India. In fact there are reports that, “other Indians... larger and courageous... only stirred

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<sup>45</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV. IX 1.

Alexander to desire for still further advance.”<sup>46</sup> This shows a leader who has the ambition to continue further and further but, “Macedonians’ spirits were already flagging, seeing the king undertaking toils after toils and danger after danger.”<sup>47</sup> Alexander, hearing about his men losing heart, tried desperately to convince his men to carry on. He lists all of the places that were conquered and how rich they have become. “Our labors are shared in common; we bear an equal part in danger.”<sup>48</sup> This does not move his men. They refuse to march on. Alexander tried to justify his reasons for continuing further conquest, “so that there is reason to fear that if we turn back now, such territories as we now hold, being yet unconsolidated, may be stirred to revolt by such as we do not hold.”<sup>49</sup> He concludes by confronting the fear of all his men at this point. “It is a lovely thing to live with courage, and to die, leaving behind an everlasting renown.”<sup>50</sup> This is quite a turn from the leader at the battle of Issus. Alexander, “had allowed himself to be defeated by them.”<sup>51</sup> Alexander is no longer able to inspire his men to continue his ambitious campaign. Reluctantly Alexander makes plans to return to Babylon. Arrian praises Alexander for not being a dictator and will to listening to the opinion of his men. This section of Alexander’s narrative may be used to explain the ideals on which Arrian believes are present in the Roman world.

Alexander’s ambition is unstoppable; he is ever pushing the limits of himself and his men. A leader that demonstrates similar qualities is the Emperor Trajan. Trajan ruled from 98 A.D. to 117 A.D. and his reign was marked by several military campaigns. A

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<sup>46</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, in *Arrian History of Alexander and Indica*. Vol. 2. Translated by E. Iliff Robson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), V. XXV 1.

<sup>47</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V. XXV 2.

<sup>48</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V. XXVI 7.

<sup>49</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V. XXVI 3.

<sup>50</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V. XXVI 4.

<sup>51</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, V XXIX 1.

Roman scholar Edward Salmon comments about the dangers of setting borders, “obvious and perhaps fatal flaw in the policy... that it makes insufficient allowance for the fact that states and empires may expand or contract, but they hardly remain static.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Trajan undertook these military campaigns to show the power of Rome, and to win riches for the empire. In Arrian’s narrative of Alexander, he is described as making the same arguments, and justification in his actions as Trajan. Just as Arrian tells the story of Alexander crossing the river by using Roman techniques he is explaining how a leader must handle the challenges that he faces. Alexander tried to use all his power of inspiration that once worked so well at motivating his troops, but they refuse to follow Alexander at this point. Arrian glorifies Alexander’s reaction to this insubordination. Alexander agreed to terminate his eastern campaign, and return to safer territory. In this response Arrian makes a note that Alexander shows compassion towards his men and that is what makes a good leader. Arrian describes all the detriments of Alexander leadership up to this point, which make this one action even more noble.

### **A Comparison of Arrian and Plutarch’s Writing Styles**

Comparing the historians of Alexander such as Arrian and Plutarch allowed one to create a good contrast how each went about depicting their subject. It is within each author’s styles that there is a noticeable difference on what characteristics are chosen to be exemplified in the figure of Alexander. It is important to note that when looking at the space of material used to give each narrative Arrian has almost five times as many pages

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<sup>52</sup> Edward T. Salmon, *A History of the Roman World from 30 B. C. to A. D. 138*. 298. (London: Methuen, 1959), 298.

to tell the story of Alexander, than Plutarch does. While Plutarch devotes a large amount of his writing to the telling of Alexander's childhood. While Arrian begins his telling from the moment that Alexander begins his conquests. Plutarch sets the stage for Alexander as a child.

Alexander in Plutarch's story has the ability to develop from childhood into the figure that he is known for. Arrian begins his narrative from the point Alexander becomes king. Arrian focuses on Alexander as a military figure. In Arrian's narrative Alexander is an adult and the reader has no idea who Alexander was as a child. However this translates into Arrian having more space to describe less space of time of Alexander's life, the outcome of this is that we have a very detailed, albeit biased story of Alexander from Arrian. It is also important to note the times in which these two historians are writing. *Plutarch's Lives* are produced in the years around A.D. 102-107, and Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander* is published in A.D. 145-46.

One aspect of Plutarch's style is his placement of what he classifies as similar figures in his biographies. He not only has the actions of the Emperor Trajan to model the figure of Alexander after at the time of his production of his works, but within those works he places the biography of Julius Caesar next to Alexander's. By placing the biography of Alexander the Great next to Julius Ceasar, Plutarch is comparing Alexander, a third century B.C. Macedonian-Greek leader, to that of one of Rome's most famous leaders, saying to his readers that both these men had similar traits and were able to use their ambition to achieve remarkable things. This is common in his styles of writing biographies. Plutarch used his writing to compare famous Greek figures with famous Roman figures. Plutarch compares himself to a portrait painter in that he focuses on the



smallest points of detail but leaves a great deal else to be known. Plutarch writes about the importance of the battles, but tells us very little about how said battles unfolded. In his writing, there is more of an emphasis on the mythical aspects of Alexander. Plutarch is a good contrast to Arrian, in that when both writers make note of a certain event and how it unfolded, there is a significance which tells the reader that there is a great deal of speculation on the subject, because of the manner in which each respective stories is being told by each respective writer.

Arrian takes great efforts to describe Alexander's battle formations, the leaders of those formations, and what happens during battles. Arrian uses several 'I statements', showing that he is using his deliberation when deciding what facts will be passed through his creative screen. The facts that he chooses to use only come from two sources, Ptolemy and Aristobulus. This tells us that the depth of his scope is quite shallow, and he uses these sources and screens them in order to synthesize his version of who Alexander was, although his military knowledge cannot be overlooked, because of his focus on the military campaigns of Alexander. Making Arrian a primary source when looking at any military aspect of Alexander's life. This explains why Arrian chooses to write about Alexander's reign, because in accordance with the lectures of Michael Wedde, Alexander's reign is marked by a thirteen years of a continuous military campaign. Moreover, Arrian spent a large amount of his life in the military, which explains why he focuses on Alexander as a king. Arrian is writing from a stand point of knowledge which is why he can speak with so much confidence. It also explains his use of 'I' statements, which further show that the story of Alexander is being shaped by Arrian's life and what values he places on a good leader, not the true life of Alexander.

## Conclusion

The world in which Alexander now presides is in the imagination, “for Alexander became a legend virtually in his own era, and that legend, extended and corrupted throughout antiquity, has made him an enigma, affecting as it did every piece of serious or foolish writing about him.”<sup>53</sup> It is this legend that gave writers such as Plutarch and Arrian the power to use that figure of Alexander to comment on what it takes to become a good leader. Their use of a history close at hand was the putty, which they used to sculpt the image of a leader in Alexander that we now see today. In doing so they may have obscured what we truly know about Alexander, but it tells us that there were parallels with the world of Alexander and the Roman world. Both Arrian and Plutarch used those parallels as a means to comment on the world around them. Their emphasis on the actions of Alexander, when he led his men from the front, or putting himself through the same pain and suffering as the average men in his army, these show a good leader. On the other side, Alexander’s assimilation of foreign troops into the ranks was insulting to his men the same way the Roman army was insulted by the use of Auxilia. Moreover, posing as a god was accepted, but exacerbated uses was frowned upon when used by the living rulers. The best example of this is when Alexander admitted to one of his aids when he was wounded, it was human blood not that of the gods that flowed from the wound. Hadrian also admits on his deathbed that he never thought of himself as a god. However, both used mythical connections as a political mean to influence either of their subjects.

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<sup>53</sup> A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1988), 16.

The Roman Empire during the time of both Arrian and Plutarch was at its height. Experiencing the *Pax Romana*, the borders were stretched, in the case of Hadrian, past its limits. Trajan much like Alexander as we are told believed that in order to keep the enemy at bay, these border regions must be conquered in order to discourage outside invaders. When trying to convince his Macedonian troops to continue both Arrian and Plutarch tell us that Alexander mentioned the need to press on. To stop now would only tell the enemy that the army did not have the fortitude to fight them. In both cases of Alexander and Trajan there was a fear that to remain static would only last for a finite amount of time before the enemy would summon the strength needed to challenge the power of either ruler. Examining these similarities in either history, there is a pattern that developed linking Arrian and Plutarch's depiction of Alexander as an example of a good military leader. Both used the story of Alexander to comment on Rome and its leadership, moreover, they used and emphasized examples out of Alexander's life, both as an example of good leadership and of poor leadership. The history that was used was a history that was tangible and close at hand in order to construct the history of Alexander, to make him the figure that we now are led to believe to know.

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