

Zitierhinweis

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RICHARD STONEMAN, *Legends of Alexander the Great*, London - New York: Tauris, 2012, pp. XLVI + 134, ISBN 9781848857858.

These are happy times for scholars in the field of the *Alexander Romance* and the narratives surrounding it: Even in the 1960s Friedrich Pfister, one of the pioneers and the nestor of Alexander studies in Germany, could deplore that basic texts concerning the *Alexander Romance(s)* still weren't available in reliable critical editions, and for a very long time George Cary's and Reinhold Merkelbach's *opera magna*¹ on the subject were quite the only reference guides through a jungle of different versions and recensions of Greek, Latin, and vernacular legendary texts about Alexander the Great.

But the last two decades, and recent years especially, have seen an ever increasing interest and research in this area of scholarship and several surveys and many special studies have been issued².

The book under review deals with some today presumably lesser known small legendary texts on Alexander and his Indian campaign, although in late antiquity and the middle ages these had an enormous influence on other works, Latin and the vernaculars alike.

This „new paperback edition“, then, as it is called on page IV, is an altered reprint of the 1994 edition originally published by *Everyman*. The main part of the book – that is the translations of texts regarding legends of Alexander the Great from late antiquity and (in appendix II) early English receptions and adaptations of these legends – is an exact reprint of that first edition, which can also be deduced from a slightly darker printing.

For this new edition, however, Stoneman has duly revised and expanded the introduction (VII-XLV), the notes (111-22), and, of course, updated the bibliography (123-9). Furthermore a welcomed translation of the Geneva papyrus 271 has been added in appendix I (78-83).

¹ G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, edited by D. J. A. Ross, Cambridge 1956 (and reprints); R. Merkelbach - J. Trumpf, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromanes*, München 1977² (pages 93-155 and 201-214 in this ed. by J. Trumpf).

² R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great. A Life in Legend*, New Haven - London 2008, is one of the major recent surveys in English. A. Demandt, *Alexander der Große*, München 2009, has also incorporated much of the legendary material (that is often neglected in biographies) into his biography of the Macedonian king. The bibliographies in these two works provide further recent titles. To name just a few very recent ones: I. Worthington (ed.), *Alexander the Great. A reader*, London 2012 (2003²); R. Stoneman (ed.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012; C. Gaullier-Bougassas (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale d'Alexandre le Grand*, Turnhout 2011; Z. D. Zuwiyya (ed.), *A companion to Alexander literature in the Middle Ages*, Leiden - Boston 2011; W. Heckel - J. Yardley (eds.), *Alexander the Great. Historical sources in translation*, Malden 2008.

In the first chapter of the introduction Stoneman briefly adduces the vernacular versions of the Alexander legend with special reference to early English sources (chapter 1, VII-IX). These two pages serve as a starting point to enroll the ancient sources and the background of the Alexander tradition, which Stoneman divides into four main channels (chapter 2, IX-XIII): First, there is the historical account of Curtius Rufus, „a Roman writer of the first or second century AD“ (IX), the main „reliable“ source for history on Alexander the Middle Ages relied on (although the first two books, which told about Alexander’s youth, are missing). „Curtius was the source for the epic poem in Latin by Walter of Châtillon (1178)“ (IX), who in turn certainly inspired Chaucer. As Walter’s source one should also add the version J³ of the important *Historia de preliis*, that developed from a now lost second Latin translation of the lost Greek δ -version of the *Alexander Romance* made by Leo Achipriest of Naples in the 10th century³ – an earlier Latin translation (Based on the Greek α -recension) had been done by Iulius Valerius in the early fourth century. These full-length narratives belong to Stoneman’s second strand of tradition (X). A third group comprises „shorter texts referring to particular episodes“ (X) in Alexander’s career, especially those in India, while the fourth branch of tradition about Alexander consists of „two texts of Arabic origin, *The Sayings of the Philosophers* and *The Secret of Secrets*“ (XI), which later were translated into Greek, Latin, and the vernaculars.

As most of Stoneman’s translated texts belong to the third group of texts, namely those about India, the next chapter in the introduction (chapter 3, XIII-XXII) enlightens the historical and fabulous context(s) of Alexander’s visit to that land of marvels and fictions. Alexander’s Indian campaign lasted not even two years (from the beginning of 326 to the late summer of 325), but confirmed, and for many centuries sealed, the literary picture of India, that originated in (or to be more precise: that can be traced back to) the Indian accounts of Hekataios, Skylas, Herodot and most of all Ktesias⁴ which describe India as a land abundant of marvels, luxury, and strange people⁵. During Alexander’s fairly short stay in the Punjab valley – the mutiny of his army at the river Hyphasis prevented him from exploring and/or

³ The closest text to Leo’s lost translation is preserved in ms. Bamberg, Hist. 3, for which see now M. Th. Kretschmer, *Rewriting Roman history in the middle ages. The ‘Historia Romana’ and the manuscript Bamberg, Hist. 3*, Leiden - Boston 2007. Unfortunately, references to editions of Leo’s text and texts of the *Historia de preliis* are missing from Stoneman’s bibliography, but they might easily be looked up in any major study on the *Alexander Romance* (e.g. Stoneman, *Life in Legend*).

⁴ A new English translation of the fragments of Ktesias’ *Indica* appeared recently (A. Nichols, *Ktesias on India. Introduction, translation and commentary*, London 2011) – obviously too late for Stoneman to include it in note 24 on p. 112 and in the bibliography.

⁵ The only major additions came from Megasthenes, who was an ambassador at the court of Chandragupta in the lower Ganges region, about 300 BC.

conquering any other part of the big Indian subcontinent⁶ – he wanted to meet the brahmins, ascetic sages, near the town of Taxila. Because they refused to come to him, he sent one of his staff, Onesikritos, to interview them. This interview formed a nucleus that further developed into a strong philosophical branch which accompanied, and in part melted with the above mentioned marvel-stories. As Stoneman puts it at the end of his precise and informative chapter on these events, facts, and fictions: „Thus the visit of Alexander became the occasion for two types of story: an account of the marvels of the East, and a search for the wisdom of the East (later re-defined as Christian introspection)“ (XXII)⁷.

As these utopian and marvellous aspects clearly outweighed the historical accounts in regard to the development of the image of Alexander in medieval legend(s) – hence the title of the book under review, too –, it is no surprise that Stoneman has chosen the texts to be translated in his anthology out of this fascinating and entertaining repertoire. Each of the texts is individually introduced by him over the next pages (chapter 4, XII-XXVIII).

The opening text is the most widespread, at least regarding the number of manuscripts. Apart from a Greek version, whose small remains are incorporated in the α -recension of the Greek *Alexander Romance* Stoneman is inclined to think „in the main a Hellenistic work from the third or second century BC“⁸, the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem, magistrum suum, de itinere suo et de situ Indiae* survives as an independent text only in two Latin versions. The letter's version that dominated the tradition (about 130 manuscripts are extant today⁹) „belongs to the seventh century at the latest“ (XXII), whereas Stoneman's choice for translation is the second version, an adaption of the first to „Italian-Latin dating from the tenth century“ (XXII),

⁶ The historical accounts of Alexander's campaign, based mainly on the works of Arrian, Curtius, Diodor, Justin and Plutarch, are succinctly outlined by Stoneman, who focuses on Arrian, on p. XIII-XVI.

⁷ Of course Stoneman provides all the relevant information throughout this third chapter, so that even a novice either in this whole field of research or the particular texts only gets a clear picture. It might be added, however, that in some recent studies the Cynicism of Onesikritos, the man Alexander sent to interview the brahmins, and likewise the Cynic origin and content(s) of the texts originating from that meeting – pointed out as facts by Stoneman (XVIII-XX, and see also XXX-XXXIII) – have been questioned. See the discussion in M. Steinmann. *Alexander der Große und die 'nackten Weisen' Indiens. Der fiktive Briefwechsel zwischen Alexander und dem Brahmanenkönig Dindimus*, Berlin 2012, 38-41, with further references.

⁸ P. 113, note 37, but Stoneman is one of the very few contemporary scholars who favors such early a date. Indeed, some parts of the conglomerated *Romance* most probably go back to early times, but the *communis opinio* is that the Greek *Alexander Romance* was compiled by an Alexandrian scholar probably in the late second or early third century AD; see Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*, 14-6, for a survey of different scholars' opinions.

⁹ The standard edition is missing from the bibliography: Fr. Pfister, *Kleine Texte zum Alexanderroman ... nach der Bamberger Handschrift*, Heidelberg 1910, 21-37.

whose sole surviving manuscript is ms. Bamberg, Hist. 3⁰. The core of the material in that letter derives from Ktesias, but obviously the anonymous composer took joy in inventing additional hybrids and marvels that in turn fascinated (medieval) readers of these letters.

Wonders and strange creatures occur in another Latin text as well, the *De rebus in oriente mirabilibus* that was soon translated into Old English and Old French. The purported author Pharasmanes writes to the Emperor Hadrian about „strange beasts and races of men such as the Pygmies, the Sciapodes, the Dog-heads and others“ and the earliest of „several manuscripts with widely varying content“ (XXIV) must have been composed before 800 AD. Like the *Letter to Aristotle*, this wonder-letter, too, was incorporated into the *Historia de preliis* in (slightly) altered form¹¹.

The third text is the Greek chronicle of Georgius monachus, also known as Georgius Hamartolus, who „in his chronicle from earliest times to AD 842“ (XXIV) assembled much (fantastic) material about India and drew on Jewish sources for his account of Alexander’s supposed visit to Jerusalem¹².

Another Greek text follows, namely Παλλαδίου περὶ τῶν τῆς Ἰνδίας ἔθνῶν καὶ τῶν Βραγμάνων (*De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus / De moribus Bragmanorum*). If Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis, really was the author of this text, which in the manuscripts is an appendix to his *Historia Lausiaca*, is a question still *sub iudice*, but most contemporary scholars are inclined to believe so – and so does Stoneman (XXV). J. D. M. Derrett was the first to thoroughly investigate the transmission of the text and distinguish two main versions: the *versio ornatior* and the *versio ornatior et interpolata*, of which Stoneman translates the first one¹³. Stoneman

¹⁰ The number 72 given by Stoneman (XXIII) was already outnumbered when D. J. A. Ross published his „A check-list of three Alexander texts“ in 1956 (*Scriptorium* 10, 127-132). It might have originated from St. Rypins, *Three Old English prose texts*, London 1924 (EETS, o.s. 161), cited by Stoneman in note 41 (p. 113).

¹¹ Unfortunately, Stoneman does not say which Latin version is the basis for his translation. He refers to the edition of C. Lecouteux, *De rebus in oriente mirabilibus (Lettre de Farasmanes)*, Meisenheim 1979, but that contains several versions. – After having compared those versions with Stoneman’s translation, it can be said that Stoneman translated the first two paragraphs from version A (put into brackets in his translation) and then continued with version D, inserting paragraph 20 again from version A in brackets.

¹² Once more the reader is not told what edition Stoneman’s translation is based on, but apparently it has to be de Boor’s standard edition: C. de Boor - P. Wirth, *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, corrected reprint of 1904 edition, Stuttgart 1978.

¹³ Derrett’s title *versio ornatior et interpolata* is wrongly (or intentionally?) labelled *versio ornatior et elaboratior* by Stoneman (XXVI). Again, he doesn’t precisely indicate the edition he uses for translation, since from his bibliographic data it cannot be deduced that Derrett 1960 edited the *versio ornatior*, while Berghoff 1967 (not 1987 as on p. 124 (also

briefly mentions the Latin translations of the Palladius-tract, which quite obviously have been falsely attributed to Ambrosius¹⁴. Closing this paragraph he adduces the Greek *Life of Zosimos* or *History of the Rechabites* which transferred the brahmins to the land of 'the Blessed'.

The fifth text is the *Collatio Alexandri et Dindimi* whose Latin title is nowhere (except as late as on p. XLI as *Collatio*) mentioned by Stoneman. Instead he calls the text *Correspondence of Alexander and Dindimus*¹⁵. This letter-exchange between Alexander and the brahmin king about the right way of living is only known in Latin, but Stoneman states: „It is to be assumed that there was a Greek original of this text“ and it „is not possible to date the Latin text very precisely“ (XXVII)¹⁶. The *Collatio* had an enormous influence in the Middle Ages (more than 80 manuscripts of its oldest version are known today) and likewise became important for English literature: Stoneman mentions the alliterative Romance known as *Alexander B*, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and texts from the 17th and 18th centuries. He misses to mention that three different versions of the *Collatio* exist: the oldest version which perhaps can be dated to the early fifth century, a second Italian-Latin version (just like the second version of the *Letter to Aristotle* known from the ms. Bamberg, Hist. 3, only), and a third version, which occurs integrated into the *Historia de preliis*¹⁷.

The sixth and last text is *Alexander's Journey to Paradise*, which predates 1175, when it was interpolated into the *Strassburg Alexander* of

wrong on p. 123 and on p. 113, n. 49)) edited an eclectic text tending more toward the *versio ornatior et interpolata*.

¹⁴ Due to the complex textual situation of the Greek Palladius-text it is not definitely clear which Greek version was used for the Latin translation, and - to be precise - the question is further complicated, because at least three different Latin versions exist. Some of them comprise the whole Greek text, some (as ms. Bamberg, Hist. 3) only the first two parts out of three (an overview is provided by Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*, 42-50 with fig. 7). Therefore a new critical edition of the Latin text(s) based on a thorough investigation of the manuscript tradition is a desideratum.

¹⁵ Due to this unprecise labelling the reader is again left wondering which version Stoneman chose for translation, but a quick glance at the first paragraphs reveals that it is the second version found in ms. Bamberg, Hist. 3. - For a thorough investigation of the *Collatio's* versions, dating, and contexts see now the introduction in Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*.

¹⁶ The non-existence of a Greek „original“ was already sometimes supposed in older studies on the *Collatio*, but very recently this has been independently denied by A. Cameron, *The last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford 2011, 563, and definitely rejected by Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*, 26-8. - The majority of scholars has dated the *Collatio* to the late fourth century (Stoneman cites only (114, n. 61) Cary's short overview (Cary, *Medieval Alexander*, 14), but Cary does provide the relevant special studies) on linguistic and moreover on rhythmical grounds. Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*, 79f., has most recently tried to make plausible a slightly later date of around 410-420 AD; see also Cameron, *Pagans*, 563.

¹⁷ For details see Steinmann, *die nackten Weisen*, *passim* and figs. 4 and 7.

Pfaffe Lambrecht. The story it tells, however, is much older and goes back to at least the Babylonian Talmud, so it must have been current before 500 AD. As an earthly paradise in late antiquity and the middle ages was located somewhere in the East, the place the virtuous brahmins also dwelled in, we need not wonder to see a strikingly similar development in the reshaping of once different thoughts and texts from antiquity to the middle ages and beyond¹⁸.

The seven English texts that comprise appendix II (84-110) and had already been introduced by Stoneman in chapter 1 are very briefly summarized on p. XXVIII again. Appendix I (77-83) contains the two oldest accounts of Alexander's meeting with the Indian brahmins, both preserved on fragmentary papyrus texts. The first, Pap. Berolinensis 13044 (ca. 100 BC), had already been included in the first edition of Stoneman's book, whereas the second, Pap. Geneviensis 271 (2nd century AD), is new to this 2012 edition and is more than welcome¹⁹.

A chronological table with the Greek, Latin, and vernacular texts concludes this fourth chapter. In the following chapters five and six (XXX-XLII) Stoneman, respectively, gives a lucid overview of ancient (philosophical) controversies on Alexander and the Christianisation of Alexander. Needless to say that the notes to the introduction and the texts alike hold much information and many hints for further studies for those readers whose interest has been awoken. A map of the Punjab and Indus valley showing sites visited by Alexander is printed on p. XLIV. The reproduction of the Hereford world map on p. XLV unfortunately is too small to recognize anything substantial except that it is a T-O map. The first edition included an enlargement of the eastern area of the map which, sadly, has been removed from this second edition.

¹⁸ See Stoneman's illuminating remarks about the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* in this context (XXIf.). – Again the precise edition employed for Stoneman's translation is only hinted to in connection with *La Prise de Defur* (114, n. 69). In the introduction to the edition of that Old French text (Princeton 1935 (Elliott monographs 35)) „hides“ Alfons Hilka's edition of the Latin *Iter ad paradisum* which is based on more mss. and has a fuller *apparatus criticus* than the *editio princeps* by Julius Zacher (1859) and the one by Mario Esposito (1909). For the whole context of the *iter* see now C. Gaullier-Bougassas - M. Bridges (eds.), *Les voyages d'Alexandre au paradis: Orient et Occident, regards croisés*, Turnhout 2013.

¹⁹ The date of the Geneva papyrus is given correctly in the text on p. XI, but unfortunately is printed falsely as „1st c. AD“ in the chronological table. – As further fragments of the Geneva papyrus have been found that precede the hitherto known ones (See W. H. Willis- K. Maresch, „The encounter of Alexander with the brahmins: new fragments of the Cynic diatribe P. Genev. inv. 271“, *ZPE* 74, 1988, 59-83), they should have also been translated.

As the more important *addenda et corrigenda* have already been given during the course of this review, I will here only add those that are more relevant (the book is almost error-free, otherwise):

P. 113, n. 50, should read: Derrett 1960 (not 1964); the reference on p. 114, n. 62, to ms. Cambridge, CCC 219 should probably be removed as it has nothing to do with the alliterative *Alexander B*²⁰; p. 127 should be Pfister 1976 (not 1975 (correct on p. 114, n. 58 and 59, but wrong, too, on p. 113, n. 49)).

To sum up: While research on Alexander the Great has never decreased, the *Alexander Romance* has drawn quite ballooning attention among scholars in recent years. Therefore one has to appreciate Stoneman's high quality translations of six quite remote texts and two papyruses about Alexander in India. Scholars and non-specialists alike are served well with the illuminating introduction, and the notes and bibliography provide a good starting point for further studies in this wide field of myths and legends.

It lies in the nature of a review to point out the inaccuracies and mistakes. If I have done so in this review, my criticisms are not to be interpreted as detracting from the strong merits of Stoneman's *Legends of Alexander the Great*, but rather as improving the book's value, that is recommended to the advanced as well as to the novice on Alexander studies²¹.

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²⁰ The addition „edited by Bisse“ to this ms. is quite idiosyncratic: „Bisse“ certainly means Sir Edward Bysshe (Latinized: „Bissaeus“), who was responsible for the *editio princeps* of the *Collatio Alexandri et Dindimi* in 1665, but neither did he edit *Alexander B*, too, nor did he use ms. CCC 219 for his edition of the *Collatio*.

²¹ This review was written in Nov-Dec. 2012. Whereas its main text has not been altered since then, I have taken the opportunity to add some most recent bibliographical data in note 18.