

The Modern Image of Alexander the Great: Alexander in Cinema

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In 2004, Oliver Stone released his epic, *Alexander*, a film about the life of the conqueror Alexander the Great. This controversial film crafted a modern interpretation of the historical Alexander that formed an image in the minds of audiences. This is one of many adaptations dealing with Alexander yet this image created a question of historical accuracy in movies and how these images can affect the public view of the historical record. For Alexander, he has had varied adaptations from animated to live action movies as well as several drama series. In order to understand how historical films can affect his historical image; it is important to develop an understanding of these adaptations. Only through the development of the analysis of these films and series can one understand the impact of these new images on the historical ones. For Alexander he has influenced both Eastern and Western culture so to fully understand these images it will be important to see them from every angle and viewpoint. This will be an attempt to see how Alexander's representations in film directly affect how people view historical records and further affect the future studies of this historical events and figures.

Preface

In writing this paper my background in computer science and math allowed me to look at this issue of Alexander from various angles. I found that Alexander had a deep character beyond his military conquests including his interest in learning and a technical side that allowed him to create strategies against imposing enemy numbers. I pursued the study of Alexander because the impact of his life and death influenced many people and cultures. In my paper for my entrance application into the master's program I studied the parallels between American and Hellenistic culture. I thought it would be fitting to study Alexander for this thesis as it was a way to tie in both my interests in ancient and modern subjects while also serving as a bookend to my graduate program. In exploring this subject, I focused more on the study of film and television as I feel that is becoming increasingly influential in our society. Professor Gary Farney proved to be essential in the writing process. Our discussions on the paper as well as his feedback steered my paper into the direction of the final product. Finally, it was the support of my family and friends including my wife, Ivana Fajardo, and son, Altair Fernandez, whose support pushed through the ups and downs during the program. It was difficult at times due the workload from the program and a full-time job. With their constant support and motivation, I was able to push through to complete not only this thesis but the program as well.

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Introduction

“A king isn't born, Alexander, he is made. By steel and by suffering. A king must know how to hurt those he loves. It's lonely. Ask anyone. Ask Heracles. Ask any of them. Fate is cruel. No man or woman can be too powerful or too beautiful without disaster befalling. They laugh when you rise too high. And they crush everything you've built with a whim. What glory they give in the end, they take away. They make of us slaves.” - Philip¹

Modern media has consumed our daily lives from television screens, to movie theaters and our hands via our cell phones. People are inundated with new content every day so much so that it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern fact and fiction. History is caught up in the crosshairs of this debate wherein some filmmakers will argue the veracity of their use of historical figures while others will openly admit their use of artistic interpretation when making their films. The effect that this can have on the viewer can vary and influence how one perceives certain historical events and figures.

For ancient civilizations like Greece, Rome and Egypt much of the imagery used tend to lean towards artistic interpretation. This is done for various reasons but primarily because of lack of information. In the case of some ancient figures there is simply not enough information to create a compelling for the entertainment purposes of the modern character on screen. Other reasons include profitability which is a major factor when creating films. This factors into how a studio decides to approach historical events and

¹ Philip talking to a young Alexander about the dangers and duties of being a king. *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014). 52:00-55:00

figures. One of the most common ways studios manipulate and alter these events is by changing the ethnicity of the original people in order to cast a popular actor that will draw viewers in. This has been done for years such as when Elizabeth Taylor played the ancient Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, despite being a white European; although not a decision out of malintent for history it was simply a choice to draw audiences in with notoriety and due in part because the studio was more concerned with making money rather than appeasing historians.² It is important to note that while studios were concerned with what made the movie more palatable for audiences but as far as Cleopatra is concerned she was not Egyptian and was in fact Macedonian so her skin tone is questionable and it would be difficult to properly place in a movie.

The problem here is twofold: this compels other studios to make the same mistake in their films and more importantly it creates a false image of the historical figure in the public and furthers drive this image as accurate. In recent times, film makers have been more sensitive to the public by trying to more accurate to historical fact rather than their own vision but that has not stopped all these incidents from occurring. The most recent egregious incident in recent memory was the making and release of Lionsgate films, *Gods of Egypt*. Despite its main story being completely fictional, filmmakers failed to consider how using a historical backdrop can affect viewers. The film was panned for its use of white actors in the main roles of not just in the portrayal of ancient Egyptians but

² Howell, Peter. "Why Elizabeth Taylor Was the Ultimate Movie Star." *Toronto Star*. Toronto, Ont.: Torstar Syndication Services, a Division of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited, March 24, 2011. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/858343821/>.

also in the portrayal of the Egyptian gods; leading to the studio issuing a candid statement apologizing for their casting choices.³

The impact of these false historical narratives is difficult to measure but one can gather that the portrayal of historical figures can tell a lot about the person who crafted them as well as the intended audience. Additional factors that can affect this image are the number of portrayals of a person, a prime example of this is Julius Caesar who has had numerous adaptations across movies, television and plays. Due to his numerous appearances in these media there is no concrete view of him, audiences can understand that his characterization in these films are fictional and lack complete historical accuracy. This bears the question of how certain figures with fewer portrayals get viewed by modern audiences.

There has always been a struggle between scholars and Hollywood to find a middle ground behind accurate portrayals of history and entertainment. Typically, these movies exaggerate certain character traits or in certain instances tone down these traits; additionally, these movies may remove certain people that they may not deem important to the overall story. This can impact how people view a historical event or figure greatly because for some people these films and television shows will be the only image, they will see so having few portrayals if inaccurate can be detrimental. Perhaps the filmmakers adjust the movies to their audience. An audience member could be more inclined to see a

³ Grinberg, Emanuella. "‘Gods of Egypt’ Filmmakers Apologize for White Cast." *CNN*. Cable News Network, November 28, 2015. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/28/entertainment/gods-of-egypt-cast-apology-feat/index.html>.

movie if they could see themselves or someone like them in the film giving the creators a reason to commit to these character changes.

For some ancient figures like Julius Caesar with so many varying portrayals this can create big confusion among audiences but perhaps has less of an effect on his historical image because these images are numerous and it gives the audience a less permanent image to attach to. Karl Urban's portrayal of Caesar in the completely fictional, *Xena Warrior Princess*, portrayed Caesar in his prime as a young man whose brutish and power-hungry personality drove him to success on the battlefield and in Rome.⁴ Whereas Ciaran Hinds' Caesar in the HBO series, *Rome*, was seen as an elder statesmen whose time on the battlefield was coming to an end and his political aspirations were on the rise which were more in line with his historical past.⁵ Other figures were not so fortunate as mentioned before, Elizabeth Taylor's turn as Cleopatra influenced her future portrayals despite having little evidence to support the characterization. Her beauty and promiscuity in these films are greatly exaggerated not to say there was not some truth to it. But she was also considered a very intelligent person and a cunning politician who knew several languages and reportedly only had two partners, Caesar and Antony; this is not the Egyptian Helen of Troy as some filmmakers would want their audience to believe.⁶ Perhaps by exaggerating her faults rather than attempting to create a clear image of her, as it is difficult because ancient sources will also contest her character and

⁴ "Karl Urban." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Accessed December 21, 2019. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0881631/>.

⁵ "Rome - Cast and Crew." *HBO*. Accessed December 21, 2019. <https://www.hbo.com/rome/cast-and-crew>.

⁶ "Anger Grows over Jolie's 'Cleopatra' Casting." *Speakin' Out News*. Huntsville, Ala.: Speakin' Out News, June 23, 2010. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/609002504/>.

these are more so attacks on her because she is a powerful woman. Yet there are some historical figures that transcend others whose very existence shaped human history.

Alexander in History

Perhaps one of the most influential figures whose actions not only created an empire but literally changed the world was Alexander the Great. His vast empire and military success would influence leaders to the modern day accomplishing more in ten years than most have in their lifetimes. Despite his importance to history his portrayals in modern media has been rather lacking. There could be several reasons for this, one is his rather short life, as well as various parts of the world having stark viewpoints of his character.

Alexander the Great lived a rather short life and managed to accomplish his most famous feats in the last 12 years. He became king after the death of his father at the age of twenty gaining control of a vast army and immediately acting with it. He conquered and defeated many ancient powers including the empire of Persia and managed to do so in a short amount of time. The impact of his actions during his short life cemented his legacy to this day. Several cities he founded during his lifetime exist today like Alexandria in Egypt and Kandahar in Afghanistan. More importantly his efforts led to the Hellenistic age, a period where Greek culture was being extended across many of the territories Alexander had conquered. This allowed for the development of new trade routes and just as important it increased cultural exchange. Despite this, there have been numerous interpretations of Alexander's character as well as motives for his actions.

Some ancient writers have focused more intently on certain aspects of his life and less so on other areas. For example, the Greek biographer Plutarch is heavily criticized by other scholars for his biography of Alexander because he fails to properly analyze the Hellenistic legacy of Alexander. This is rather strange considering Plutarch lived more than 400 years after Alexander and could from a historical perspective see how important his legacy in that area was to the world. Hellenism entails the culture of Greece and Alexander helped to spread this across the known world.

This brings about the issue of accuracy of writings about Alexander and how a bias could exist. Whereas some historical figures and their impact are isolated to a certain area or civilization, Alexanders' influence spanned many miles and across many different people including the Greeks, Persians and peoples in the Indian subcontinent. The value of his actions are seen quite differently from area to area, whereas the Greeks and Romans valued him as a great conqueror and cultural figure. Other areas like the Persians and Indians had distinctly different versions of him. Iranians for instance named three individuals in their national history who earned eternal damnation for seizing power, one of which is Alexander.⁷

Despite this negative image of him, there has been attempts to integrate his character into some of these state's national history. This happened because some countries wanted to boost their cultural identity by creating a connection to ancient times. Persians did this in a couple ways but mainly tried to connect some of their powerful ancient figures to Alexander. For instance, Roxana, whom Alexander married after he

⁷ Shahbazi, Shapur. "Irano-Hellenic Notes: 3. Iranians and Alexander." *American Journal of Ancient History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 28.

took over Persia in some stories was the daughter of Darius thus making her husband a legitimate heir to the throne. Another story had Alexander as the older brother of Darius III.⁸ The latter brings a different interpretation of Alexander because in this way it excuses his actions against Persia making him a legitimate heir of the empire. The most prominent image of him in this region must be his inclusion in the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, which describes him as a

“Pious world emperor whom God empowered with the lordship over all earth and constantly gave him success until he reached the place where the sun set and the place where the sun rose.”⁹

This inclusion in the religious text of Islam is problematic in that it views his conquests as having godly authority. Due to this interpretation it insinuates that no Muslim can have an opinion counter to this because they would be going against the holy text. Thus, later, Muslim Iranians were stuck with trying to make Alexander seem like a rightful conqueror, even though traditionally he had been viewed as a villain. Iranians were not the only ones guilty of trying to connect the powerful image of Alexander to their past.

Alexander the Great was king of ancient Macedonia but modern Macedonia only contains a small portion of the ancient kingdom and the rest of the territory has been integrated into modern Greece. For years, Greece and Macedonia have been in conflict over naming of the country. Many modern Greeks felt that Macedonians should not be

⁸ Shahbazi, Shapur. “Irano-Hellenic Notes: 3. Iranians and Alexander.” *American Journal of Ancient History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 36.

⁹ Shahbazi, Shapur. “Irano-Hellenic Notes: 3. Iranians and Alexander.” *American Journal of Ancient History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 34.

allowed to use Alexander's lineage. This issue was ongoing as Greeks saw Alexander as a central figure in their history and wanted it to be known that he is part of their history. Simply put they felt modern Macedonia had not earned their connection to the ancient conqueror. In fact, this issue has been discussed for many years, the United Nations getting involved several times to mediate talks between the two countries.¹⁰ In 2006, Macedonia named their airport after Alexander the Great in an attempt to create a link to Ancient Macedonia which caused Greece to cut direct flights between the two countries; it wasn't until 2018 in which the two nations agreed to end this blockade.¹¹ This issue had gone on for years until 2019 in which the two nations reached an unprecedented agreement that would change the way people perceived connections to past. Macedonia agreed to change their name to the Republic of North Macedonia and renamed their airport, removing any connection to Alexander and ancient Macedonia itself.¹²

Modern Interpretations of Alexander

This misuse of a historical figure is not an isolated incident but also brings up the question of how Alexander's image can be influenced and changed according to the times. Actions like those of Greece, seek to preserve what they feel is an authentic image of the Macedonian king. Unfortunately, modern works of art including media and literature, have increasingly influenced history and created a distorted view at times in

¹⁰ Smith, Helena. "Macedonia Officially Changes Its Name to North Macedonia." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, February 12, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/12/nato-flag-raised-ahead-of-north-macedonias-prospective-accession>.

¹¹ Smith, Helena. "Flights between Greece and Macedonia Resume after 12-Year Blockade." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, November 1, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/01/flights-between-greece-and-macedonia-resume-after-12-year-blockade>.

¹² Smith, Helena. "Macedonia Officially Changes Its Name to North Macedonia." *The Guardian*.

comparison to actual historical events. For Alexander, his image is in more danger due to his lack of appearances in media. In fact, there has only been a few portrayals of his character and it has skewed the image of Alexander.

Due to the increased amount of films and television shows based on historical events and characters, there is the question of the veracity of the events depicted in these works. Some of these works depict events incorrectly or offer loose interpretations of happenings in order to better fit the story the creator wants to tell. The question here is whether historical accuracy is important or even necessary, and if it's okay for a story to change facts to tell a more entertaining story. So how does Alexander fit into this picture? Well Alexander has been featured in several films and shows who each have their own image and while some events are the same in these other are distinctly different including how others around him felt, the focus on his life or lack of depending on the work.

There will be a focus on studying several works that focus on the life of Alexander and how each one has affected how modern audiences view his life and accomplishments. In terms of media about Alexander, it usually splits between two views that each offer a unique take on his life. The first viewpoint and often the one that gets the biggest audience comes from the west. As far as American cinema is concerned there have been two major films released in the last seventy years. Whereas other previously mentioned figures have had regular adaptations, Alexander's lack of presence in television and films is curious. Western audiences have experienced a boom in the last ten to fifteen years of programming of all types as well as many historical docudramas ranging from recent history to ancient history.

Most recent productions have focused on periods that create good drama such as ancient Rome specifically during the time of Julius Caesar as well as the rebellion of Spartacus. In fact, there have been several different dramas and comedies about Rome just in the ten years such as Netflix's *Roman Empire* that saw a release in 2016 and is still ongoing today as well as the ITV comedy *Plebs* whose focus on the lower Roman social class is unique among most of these adaptations.¹³ Other recent programs have been the miniseries, *Tut*, released by Spike TV in 2015, one of the first media representations of the famous Pharaoh.¹⁴ Another popular area for Hollywood has always been the Bible, including depictions of Noah and Moses. More recently, there has been a miniseries produced by the History Channel and released in 2013 that tried to tell several stories including Adam and Eve as well as the resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ It is important to note that there has been a lack of interest in recent years in telling stories about ancient Greece including stories of Alexander. Added to the issue is the difference in years between the first Hollywood movie of Alexander and the second movie, which is forty-eight years. This has created two rather different but Western images of him; additionally, due to the length of time that passed in between these two films, the country has gone through many changes that has affected how these movies are perceived and taken in by the audience.

The first of these films, titled *Alexander the Great*, was released in 1956 and followed Alexander as a teenager from his time in the military under the command of his

¹³ "Plebs." IMDb. IMDb.com, March 25, 2013. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2731624/>. AND "Roman Empire." IMDb. IMDb.com, November 11, 2016. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6233538/>.

¹⁴ "Tut." IMDb. IMDb.com, July 19, 2015. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3214310>.

¹⁵ "The Bible." IMDb. IMDb.com, March 3, 2013. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2245988/>.

father into his own accomplishments later in life. Robert Rossen was hired to write and direct the movie with a four-million-dollar budget.¹⁶ Despite the low budget, this film adapted many high points of Alexander life and was relatively accurate but fell into the same trap of many historical adaptations at the time with little action and several monologues. It was a clear product of its time, made Alexander's life feel akin to a Shakespearean tragedy, and was restricted in terms of what it could offer due to the time of release.

The second and more prominent of these films was Oliver Stone's *Alexander*. This film debuted in 2004 with several high-profile actors playing the lead role. It had many things going for it that the original 1956 movie had including time. Due to the length of time that passed between the 1956 version and this one, Oliver Stone had a chance to create something of his own without having to worry about comparisons to previously established works. Additionally, he had a larger budget to work with and modern technology to provide for more accurate depictions of the source material. Stone did however use a historical consultant for his as he wanted to be as accurate as he could in his production. For this he hired, Robin Lane Fox, a historian whose wrote the 1973 biography on Alexander the Great which was used as a basis for the script, to advise him during production to ensure that he was staying true to the Alexander' character and life story.

In Eastern media, Alexander has been represented quite differently from how the west portrays him and for the most part has been represented as a secondary character

¹⁶ "Alexander the Great." IMDb. IMDb.com, March 23, 1956. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048937/>.

rather than the lead. The Indian film and television industry which began in the early thirties has expanded tremendously becoming one of the most popular films in the world, producing upwards of a thousand films every year.¹⁷ One of the popular genres is the historical epic, in 2017 Bollywood produced a television series called *Porus*. *Porus* is an Indian historical drama focusing on King Porus whom Alexander faced when he attempted to conquer India; in this Alexander is a secondary character and is considered an invader which is a stark view of his character when compared to other media.¹⁸ Alexander's image has also been adapted to animated media primarily in Japan.

Japanese animation or Anime is an enormous industry that has mass international appeal. Hundreds of series are produced every year with genres varying like action and drama. Several historical anime's have also been made where they offer a reimagination of an event or figure that are fictional but strive to maintain the historical accuracy when they can. Alexander has been featured in two of these animations. The first is named *Fate/Zero*, was released in 2011 and depicted Alexander as one of several historical warriors summoned to fight one another for the mythical Holy Grail.¹⁹ Here is an ancillary character primarily just to help the lead characters toward their goals. The second series is older but singly focused on Alexander himself is called *Alexander Senki* but more commonly known as *Reign: The Conqueror* when it was imported to western markets.²⁰ This series was released in 1997 and focused on the life of Alexander albeit in

¹⁷ "Bollywood." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 12, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bollywood-film-industry-India>.

¹⁸ "Porus." IMDb. IMDb.com, November 27, 2017. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7690392/>

¹⁹ "Fate/Zero." IMDb. IMDb.com, October 1, 2011. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2051178/>.

²⁰ "Reign: The Conqueror." IMDb. IMDb.com, August 5, 1997. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0295765/>

a reimagined science fiction setting. These two series offer a unique perspective on how Eastern audiences who historically never encountered Alexander view him as a person.

With the growing influence that film and television have had on modern audiences the lines between fiction and reality in historical works are becoming skewed. These adaptations are at times the only image of a person or event that some audiences see, and they build an image of a person that whether accurate or not sticks in their minds. Alexander has had a limited number of programs based on his life and these interpretations by filmmakers have made an impact. The purpose of this paper will be to determine the image set out by these works and how it has affected the modern image of Alexander to both western and eastern audiences.

Chapter 1: *Alexander the Great* (1956)

“Alexander is many things. He is logic, and he is dreams. He is warrior, and he is poet. He is man, and he is spirit. He is your son, but he's also *hers*... and he believes himself to be a god.” Aristotle – *Alexander the Great* (1956)

Historical films have been a constant in Hollywood, and films on ancient people have always fascinated audiences. In fact, a silent film based on Cleopatra released in 1912; Helen Gardner brought this role to life in this early black and white film.²¹ By the mid 1950s, dozens of movies based on ancient history had been released with Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Rome making a bulk of this adaptations. Director Robert Rossen decided to try his hand and adapt the story of Alexander the Great to the movie screen. Rossen was not new to Hollywood; he worked for many years as a screenwriter for Warner Brothers as well as several other companies during the early forties.²²

His directorial debut, *Johnny O’Clock*, was considered a failure by the studio but his two follow ups exceeded and surpassed expectations including an Academy Award win for his 1949 picture *All the King’s Men*. In fact, the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress registered two of his films. The previously mentioned *All the King’s Men* entered in 2002 and his 1961 film *The Hustler* entered in 1997.^{23 24} With his

²¹ “Cleopatra.” IMDb. IMDb.com, November 13, 1912.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0002101/?ref_=ttls_li_tt.

²² “Robert Rossen.” IMDb. IMDb.com, n.d.
https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0744035/bio?ref_=nm_dyk_trv_sm#trivia.

²³ “Collectible Cinema Librarian Names 25 Films to National Registry.” Collectible Cinema (January 2002) - Library of Congress Information Bulletin, n.d. <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0201/films.html>.

²⁴ “Complete National Film Registry Listing : Film Registry : National Film Preservation Board : Programs at the Library of Congress : Library of Congress.” The Library of Congress, n.d.

experience and talent, Rossen was prepared to take on the task of adapting Alexander's story to film.

Production

Presenting the story of Alexander is quite a feat to undertake especially for filmmakers in the early fifties. Due to the lack of modern computer graphics and special effects, these types of films required more work and money. For historical epics that meant big sets, accurate locations and a large cast to account for the armies of Macedonia and their enemies. With a budget of \$4 million in 1956 (\$37 million in 2019 accounting for inflation) there was not much to work with in terms of money and this affected the film greatly. For a comparison, 1963's *Cleopatra* had a budget of \$44 million (\$350 million in 2017 accounting for inflation).²⁵ The story of Alexander requires locations that imitate the surroundings in Macedonia as well as the battles seen in the movie.

Eventually Spain proved to be the ideal location for filming that provided various locations that could imitate some of the ancient landscape. The production worked closely with the Spanish Ministry of Information and Tourism as well as officials from several cities including Madrid, Manzanares, El Molar, Rascafria and Malaga to complete filming.²⁶

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/film-registry/complete-national-film-registry-listing/>.

²⁵ Gray, Tim. "Most Expensive Movie Ever? It's a Battle Between 'Pirates,' 'Cleopatra' and 'Avatar'." *Variety*, June 14, 2017. <https://variety.com/2017/film/news/most-expensive-movie-pirates-of-the-caribbean-cleopatra-avatar-hollywood-budgets-1202434333/>.

²⁶ *Alexander the Great*. United Artists, 1956 0:00-0:05

The locations in Spain provided a unique location with an ideal backdrop and climate. Mazanares for instance is a small area situated near several mountains, and granite peaks that imitate some of the Macedonian landscape; while El Molar was located near several rivers that were used for several shots in the film.²⁷ Additionally, Spain has several different ruins from different eras including several Roman ruins as well as some medieval forts used in the background of certain shots as Alexander progresses forward in his military campaigns during the film. Using these in the background strengthen the look of the film in an era where computer graphics did not exist to green screen a historically accurate backdrop. With the location set, Rossen moved forward with one of the essential parts of the film in this context, the casting.

Casting

Casting historical figures in any type of movie are difficult and because of this, it comes with great scrutiny. For the audience where the background knowledge of a person or event can vary greatly the person who is casted in the role has a large influence on the image in their mind. For instance, Charlton Heston, played many roles in the Fifties and Sixties becoming well known for the masculinity he brought to his character with his rugged good looks and gravitas in his voice. When he took on the role of Moses in *The Ten Commandments* and the titular role in *Ben-Hur* he carried this persona, bringing strength and dignity to these characters that for many audiences defined these characters and their images.²⁸ It was these character traits that director Robert Rossen wanted to

²⁷ Cianfarra, Jane. "International Troupe Films Rossen's 'Alexander the Great' in Spain." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 24, 1955.

²⁸ Raymond, Emilie. *From My Cold, Dead Hands Charlton Heston and American Politics* Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006. 20-21,23-26.

bring to Alexander. He went as far as asking Charlton Heston to play the conqueror. Yet Heston aware of how impactful Alexander was, refused the role. Heston claimed that "Alexander is the easiest kind of picture to make badly," most likely due to the complexity of telling a story like this.²⁹ Not one to give up Rossen turned to actor Richard Burton to fill the role.

Richard Burton was eager for this film to do well, he had concerns about epics as he felt, "all epics are crap, but I felt this one could be different. How could I have been so wrong?" Alexander was filled with problems from the beginning and despite the talent of Burton. His age was one of the problems. Burton was twenty-nine at the time of filming which presented an issue as he was supposed to play a teenage Alexander during the first act of the film.³⁰ The production tried to hide this by surrounding Burton with younger actors during these including the scenes where they were being lectured by Aristotle yet this only made the difference in age more apparent. Additionally, he was dressed in a very short tunic in comparison to older actors to try to present him as young and vibrant teenager. This failed to help as he looked closer in age to other actors including Fredic March who portrayed Alexander's father Philip of Macedonia.

Alexander historically was very intelligent, prideful and yearned for success. This is how Burton portrayed Alexander but in doing so made him come off as somewhat arrogant and prideful rather than confident and inspiring. The second half of the movie corrects as he progresses through more battles and kingly duties following the death of

²⁹ "Alexander the Great." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048937/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv.

³⁰ "Alexander the Great." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d.

his father which imbued his character with a sense of experience and wisdom for the audience to get behind.

Outside of Alexander the casting was straight forward despite a few inconsistencies which can be attributed to the state of society at the time rather than the filmmakers themselves. Many of the supporting roles were played by Caucasian actors as well as several Spanish actors due to the filming location. Some notable stand outs were Olympias played by Danielle Darrieux, a French actress who had primarily played roles in European features was cast as Alexander's mother.³¹ Her role was notable for a couple reasons; in terms of appearance and age she was only eight years older than Richard Burton which made their scenes a bit awkward as she looked more like an older sister rather than his mother. The other interesting note is her time in the movie itself, Plutarch writes a fair amount about Olympias making her out as a complicated woman with ambition and wit. Due to this she was an important and impactful figure in Alexander's life. Save for a few scenes in the first hour of the movie, she is sparingly used, and her character lacks any development aside from a few other scenes that bring to light her deceptive nature. This goes for Alexander's wife Roxana whose use in the movie is questionable at best.

Instead of Roxana the movie chose to focus on Barsine. In fact, the only mention and appearance of Roxana in the film was in the letter left behind by Darius after his death, telling him to take Roxana as his wife and unite the two empires. In addition, there was a marriage scene at the end of the film depicting the mass marriage between

³¹ Agathos, Thanassis. "Danielle Darrieux." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d.
https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0201638/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm.

Alexander, his troops and the Persians at Susa³². Barsine was played by Spanish actress, Teresa Del Rio, whose background was in primarily European movies, and was a good foil for Burton.³³ Barsine is the wife of Athenian commander, Memnon, who was exiled by Alexander during the movie when he took the throne of Macedonia. The actual Barsine was married to Memnon, later becoming Alexander's lover and mother of his son, Heracles.³⁴

This was a key aspect in the movie in that she replaced Olympias as Alexander's female voice and consistently had his ear serving as a sort of conscience for him in the latter half of the film. Additionally, she is substitute for how Roxana is used in many other adaptations. Roxana was a significant figure in Alexander's life because their marriage was used a bridge between the cultures of the Greeks and those in the Asia Minor. In general, Alexander's wives had no significant impact or achieved any prominent role perhaps due to their background or the general way things were in the ancient world.

The use of Barsines's character could also be due to her ethnicity. It may have been easier to use Barsine rather than Roxana in this role as Hollywood in the Fifties did not use accurate ethnicities in their films. This is sometimes called "whitewashing". Whitewashing has been done in small roles and larger roles and more prominent in this era of filmmaking; some examples of this include Mickey Rooney portrayal of the Asian

³² Cartledge, Paul. *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010. 101-102.

³³ "Teresa Del Rio." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d.
https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0215907/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t18.

³⁴ Badian, Ernst. "Barsine." *Brill's New Pauly*. Leiden, Koninklijke Brill NV, October 1, 2006.

neighbor in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, John Wayne's portrayal of Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror*.³⁵ Roxana is of Persian descent thus this could have been a way for Rossen to use Del Rio to pass more believably for a Greek background rather than Persian as she is portrayed as being Greek and Persian in the movie. In theory this does little to affect the story and despite a few changes, there is little chance that the bulk of the audience will be fact checking the movie. The problem is that this distorts the image of Alexander as his marriage to Roxana was an important aspect of his life not simply because of the relationship but the impact of what he did. His marriage was a way to unite his army who had grown from Greeks and Macedonians to include Persians and other groups of the Asia Minor, but the movie simply shoehorns it in at the end minutes before his death reducing the impact.

Analysis of Rossen's Alexander

The image of Alexander created in this movie is simplified to a man seeking glory and praise with too little time in this world. The script makes a note of this with Olympias's last line, which includes a prayer to the gods to allow Alexander to accomplish great things despite his short life. Additionally, there is little variety to Alexander's character shown in Burton's portrayal. Alexander was a complex individual but Rossen's Alexander is more Shakespearean, a monologue heavy tragic figure portrayed one dimensionally. This idea continues with the subplot of his character development deals with the belief by himself or by others about his claimed godhood. In

³⁵ Jing, Leah. "Stealing Time: FATHERHOOD, THE 'THIRD SPACE' AND SAM VOUTAS' KING OF PEKING." *Metro : Media & Education Magazine*, no. 196 (January 1, 2018): 31. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2283400008/>.

the beginning moments of the movie, Philip is told by a messenger that his son was born and that he was called Alexander. But he is also told that Olympias, his mother, declared that her son was the son of a god. Plutarch stated that Olympias dreamed of a thunderbolt falling upon her womb, kindling a fire.³⁶ The thunderbolt here is Zeus while the fire is his destiny to greatness. However, this could also be a belief that Alexander was the son of Zeus and therefore, meant for great things because of it. This adds more to the idea of tragic figure as these are clear examples of hubris, a literary device often used in works by Shakespeare. Hubris describes a character who is arrogant or overconfident which often leads to the downfall of the figure.³⁷ With Alexander, this furthers the sentiment that the audience should see him as someone they should feel sorry for despite his arrogant tendencies because of his destiny to have a short life.

The film uses this idea of his destiny to create conflict, the first one between Philip and Olympias and the second later in the movie between Alexander and the general population. The first of these was fueling a growing dissent between Philip and Olympias with Alexander in the middle of the conflict and whether he should support his dedicated mother or his father who had the power to make him king. This eventually led to the marriage of Philip to Eurydice and the death of Philip. The second conflict was more speculative coming off as divisive and focuses on Alexander's godhood. Later in the film after his conquest of Persia, there is an orator in a Greek town square that announces Alexander declaration as being a demigod who is surrounded by several

³⁶ Plutarch. *Life of Alexander* 2.3

³⁷ Denis Fonge Tembong. "Ambanasom's Son of the Native Soil and the Western Concept of the Tragic Hero." CLCWeb 15, no. 1 (March 1, 2013). Pg 5 <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2272302575/>

people in the crowd protesting this idea. These conflicts should help to build his character but instead these ideas seem tacked on and are never fully developed within the film.

Criticisms and Reactions

The movie itself is underwhelming because it seems like it was rushed and possibly incomplete. His war against Persia is settled in less than a half hour with many of his accomplishments in Asia minor and Egypt nonexistent. Perhaps the only inclusion that offered any insight was the scene with the Gordian Knot. Plutarch had spoken of the Gordian Knot as the seat of King Midas and whosoever untied it would have the empire of the world; in the movie Alexander cut the knot signaling his entitlement to his conquests.³⁸ Understandably making a film about his entire life would be an arduous process and to include all his accomplishments would be extremely difficult. Yet obscuring a large amount of the details of his life diminishes his character and simply equates his character to just another military commander of the ancient world. Although this is a movie, this is also Hollywood where studios can force filmmakers to make unwanted changes.

Rossen had originally planned for the movie to be longer than the theatrical release. For a movie of this nature he planned for it to be a little over three hours with an intermission in between, but the studio forced him to cut it down to two hours and twenty-three minutes.³⁹ One could speculate that there exists additional footage but the studio has not released anything and it does not seem that there will ever be a rerelease.

³⁸ Plutarch. *Life of Alexander* 18.2-18.3

³⁹ "Alexander the Great." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d

This is part of the reason why Rossen was disappointed with the final product as the movie was not positively received by critics.⁴⁰ Burton was not a fan of the movie after release either to the point where he was hesitant to take on future roles in these types of films such as Marc Antony in *Cleopatra* which turned out to be the one of the highest grossing films of that era.⁴¹

The story of Alexander is complex and involves more than just a chronology of his accomplishments. As great as Alexander was, he had an important support system that sustained him through his various campaigns. Early on, this consisted of his parents as well as some influence from Aristotle who educated Alexander as young man. Later, he has the support of some of his generals who had been with him through his campaigns and provided him with a superior fighting force including the likes of Cleitus. The movie fails to capture any of this with many people omitted from the story and others left to meaningless cameos like the previously mentioned Roxana. While other characters seemingly exist to fill the scenes and lack any involvement. The other aspect of Alexander and perhaps one of his most important attributes is his military prowess. The lack of this development is where this movie fails to capture Alexander's image and reduces him to the like of any other military commander from the ancient world. Which is rather disappointing and failed to create a continued interest from the audience as many other figures have enjoyed. Spartacus, Caesar, and Cleopatra are prime examples of people who have sustained a public image within modern society that are possibly better

⁴⁰ Shahabudin, K. "The Appearance of History: Robert Rossen's *Alexander the Great*." In *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies*, 92–116. University of Wisconsin Press, 2010. Pg 97

⁴¹ "Alexander the Great." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d

known than Alexander. Many of their quotes, deeds and actions have stayed in the public eye beyond the release of their adaptations. The movie itself plays out simply and if it were any other military epic it would have been fine but in using Alexander, it changes the perception of his personal history. *Alexander the Great* was released in 1956, the film poorly received by critics, and it would be another forty-eight years before the next adaptation starring the titular figure would be released.

Chapter 2: *Alexander* (2004)

“Conquer your fear, and I promise you, you will conquer death.” - Alexander.⁴²

As 2004's *Alexander* opens, a room filled with people surrounding a bed comes into view as a lone hand reaches into ceiling to touch a picture of an eagle. Minutes later after a brief introduction by Ptolemy, the viewer is taken right into the start of the Battle of Gaugamela. A fierce, and bloody conflict between the Macedonian army led by Alexander the Great and the Persian army led by King Darius. Alexander gallops on his mighty horse, Bucephalus, to the center of his army, and stops to give a rousing speech to his troops telling them to fight for Greece as free Macedonian men. What follows is an epic battle sequence that shows the viciousness of ancient warfare as well the strategy used by the Macedonians against overwhelming odds. This is the image Oliver Stone crafts as he starts his story.

Confidence or perhaps ego is what's needed to create a film of Alexander that is both historically accurate and embodies the depth of his character. Alexander was confident maybe even egotistical, but it was this attitude toward himself and his actions that pushed him further than anyone before him. Rossen's *Alexander* lacked depth and failed to capture a compelling image of Alexander that the audience could get into. Perhaps though he was simply limited by the tools available to him at the time. Alexander's story required more modern equipment and technology to be able to tell a more cohesive and expansive story. Hollywood made a minor attempt at Alexander this

⁴² Alexander talking to his troops prior to the start of the Battle of Gaugamela. *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 17:15-17:25

time in the form of a television series, with the release of a pilot starring William Shatner and Adam West. Yet this pilot failed to generate interest and came to audiences as a television movie years later in 1967 due in part to the fame that West and Shatner gained for their roles in *Star Trek* and *Batman* respectively.⁴³ Oliver Stone had been contemplating developing a movie about the life of Alexander the Great for years with a script being written in the Eighties and development beginning in the Nineties; but further production was delayed until the early 2000's due to Stone's commitments on other films.⁴⁴

For a long time, Hollywood had turned away from the ideas of epics. Due the large budgets required and the high chance for failure many studios would not risk financing films like this let alone financing a story about Alexander. Stone had been thinking about Alexander the Great for years but was hesitant to act on it. In fact, it was not until the release 2000's *Gladiator* that Hollywood views towards these types of movies shifted. *Gladiator* was not only a financial success making \$460 million dollars against a \$103 million-dollar budget; it was also a critical success winning five Oscars including one for Best Picture.⁴⁵ This opened up the genre for Hollywood with many fictional and historical epics to have a release including *Troy* in 2004 and *300* in 2007. Alexander the Great was primed to take on the cinema again with a bigger budget, bigger

⁴³ "Alexander the Great." IMDb. IMDb.com, January 26, 1968. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0326725/?ref_=nv_sr_srgs_3.

⁴⁴ Reames, Jeanne, "A History of Alexander on the Big Screen" (2004). *History Faculty Publications*. 18. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/histfacpub/1>

⁴⁵ "Gladiator." IMDb. IMDb.com, May 4, 2000. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0172495>.

scope and perhaps an image that stays in the minds of people. Unfortunately, these things are simpler on paper than in practice.

Development

Production on the movie began in the early 2000s with a modest budget that ballooned to \$155 million; this included everything from costumes, to actors' salaries as well as the cost for the numerous extras as well as filming on three separate continents to express the vision of Stone.⁴⁶ Many of these sets were built from scratch with the use of blue screen to bring to life some areas that simply do not exist anymore. Babylon for instance is not around anymore with many of the ruins and archeological findings tied to it having been destroyed by time and more recently war; although there have been attempts to reconstruct parts of it, they have yet to make any significant progress.⁴⁷ Babylon was thought to be the administrative center of Alexander's new empire in Asia and had served as cultural center for the ancient world for years but for all that's known about Babylon much of the appearance has only been confirmed through ancient texts and some archaeology.⁴⁸

This was one of the hurdles of making this film for in order to create *Alexander*. One needs to recreate the world around him. Some of these areas were completely built from the ground up but to fully capture the atmosphere of the time and area a blue screen

⁴⁶ "Alexander." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, November 21, 2004.

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0346491/?ref_=ttqt_qt_tt.

⁴⁷ Seymour, Michael. "Babylon." *metmuseum.org*. Accessed December 12, 2019.

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/babl/hd_babl.htm.

⁴⁸ Heckel, Waldemar. *The Conquests of Alexander the Great*. Cambridge; pp 149: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

was used to fill in the background. Stone was aware that the world of Alexander was something not seen by modern eyes and that in creating this film would show these worlds for the first time to a modern audience.⁴⁹ Despite the film's budget this film's production was fraught with problems including frequent changes to the script and controversies due to certain scenes and themes used in the film that caused delays in production and stress for crew and cast. There were times during filming where Stone and his actors would clash because they had not received the updated script changes prior to coming on set.⁵⁰ Stone had gone a with a core cast of well-known actors as well as hundreds of extras that would be used for background shots.

Casting

Stone picked an up-and-coming star at the time, Colin Farrell, to play the titular role of Alexander. Farrell had not played any major leading roles at that point with only some notable supporting roles in 2002's *Minority Report* and *Hart's War* earning him acclaim for his performances but he wasn't a proven Hollywood commodity as some of his other movies flopped financially and critically including 2003's *Daredevil*.⁵¹ This did not deter Stone from casting him as he felt that Farrell proved his worth during the auditions. One of the bigger criticisms of Colin's portrayal was his heavy Irish accent. Colin made no attempt during filming to hide his accent, which was noticeable for most viewers to the extent that Stone had other actors on set adopt an Irish accent to normalize

⁴⁹ *Fight Against Time: Oliver Stone's Alexander*. Warner Bros. Special Feature on Alexander: Ultimate Cut. 2014.

⁵⁰ *Fight Against time: Oliver Stone's Alexander*

⁵¹ "Colin Farrell." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Accessed December 12, 2019.
<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0268199/>.

the accent for the audiences.⁵² To be fair this criticism was hardly fair as many epics had actors with accents and voices that were not period specific, for instance Russel Crowe played a Roman soldier in *Gladiator* and had a slight accent himself compared to other actors in the film maybe not as noticeable Farrell's but still not authentic. However, if an American or English accent gets no criticism than an Irish accent should not either unless it damages the image of who Alexander was. The possibility that an audience member could walk away confused between the Colin's accent and the lack of accent on the part of others in the film exists. Despite this many student of history argue that audiences and critics shouldn't focus too much on finding errors and realize that these are just movies.⁵³

The problem is that perceived authenticity in a movie sometimes carries more criticism than what the truth is. For instance, in a movie set in the ancient Roman period, for it be completely accurate these actors would have to speak Latin. Yet this is difficult for many reasons, the big one being that most people do not speak Latin. In addition, even if subtitles would be used it would diminish box office sales.⁵⁴ The other factor in this has to do with Shakespeare and his work *Julius Caesar*. For a long time, his work has been the standard for plays and theater productions and many early screen adaptations used his work as a basis. This has led to many of these films using a Shakespearean way of speaking and written dialogue, which is not period specific to the film but has skewed the image of the way these ancient people speak to audiences. Burton adopted this type of

⁵² Bradshaw, Peter. "Alexander – Review." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, December 31, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/dec/31/1>.

⁵³ Allen, Jessica. "Oh My Goodness, Look at That Outfit! Classics Clubs Are Agog as Sword-and-Sandal Epics Replace Vampires as the Trend Du Jour.(media)." *Maclean's* 123, no. 18 (May 17, 2010).

⁵⁴ Siegel, Tatiana, Richford, Rhonda, Roxborough, Scott, and Tsui, Clarence. "The Demand for Dubbing Doubles Down." *The Hollywood Reporter* (Archive: 1930-2015) 419, no. 11 (March 22, 2013): 50, 52. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2298686746/>.

tone and had several monologues in the 1956 movie about Alexander that led to odd sequences where other actors were standing awkwardly listening to him speak. Which leads back to the Farrell and the criticism for his accent. His accent does not diminish his acting ability and Stone's insistence to his other actors to adopt a similar accent serves to make the dialogue between the actors more cohesive rather than being disruptive.

Unlike the previous adaptations Stone wanted to tell more of Alexander's life and aside from hiring Colin, Stone hired two other actors to portray Alexander at different points of his life so that certain scenes with a younger Alexander played more naturally. One was actor Jessie Kamm who played Alexander as a very young child.⁵⁵ He was primarily used to establish the closeness of the relationship that Olympias had with Alexander since birth. The most important scenes of this *Alexander* is the scene that serves to establish the tension and anger between Olympias and Philip. In it, Philip returns from battle, and enters Olympias bedroom where her and Alexander had been lying in bed talking. Philip, drunk and full of anger forces himself on Olympias unbeknownst to him, young Alexander is in the bed and lashes out on him as Philip stumbles backwards.⁵⁶ This is important for several reasons, while it establishes the closeness between Alexander and his mother; it encourages this wedge between father and son. Plutarch considers Olympias's claim that Alexander is the son of Zeus and not Philip further creating distance between her and Philip as well as driving a wedge between father and son.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Jessie Kamm." IMDb. IMDb.com. Accessed December 12, 2019.
https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1752523/?ref_=tt_cl_t3.

⁵⁶ Philip lashes out on Olympias. *Alexander* (2014) 35:40-37:14

⁵⁷ Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 3.3

This idea of godhood became a recurring theme throughout the movie and was further intensified by the second actor for Alexander this time playing him as a teenager. Connor Paolo played the teenage Alexander making his feature film debut only a year earlier in the 2003 hit, *Mystic River*.⁵⁸ Teenage Alexander had several moments in the film to establish motives or reinforce actions taken by his adult self. The scenes with this version of the character provided some background to Alexander's education as well as his relationship with other characters in the film most importantly his parents and Hephaestion who is a key character in Stone's film. Showing Alexander's education and training was important as it built his image as cunning and brave warrior. His education was split into two parts showing building this duality shown later in the movie between his philosophy, learned from Aristotle and conquests. Aristotle's role was to educate Alexander in his early life but his presence in the movie served to tell the audience some Greek philosophies that would be important in this presentation of Alexander's character later in the film.⁵⁹

Alexander's Thinking

Aristotle's idea of natural slavery is an idea that drives home the point that non-Greeks do not have the rational thinking that Greeks do and are more akin to animals therefore they should be slaves and thus subservient to Greeks.⁶⁰ The movie uses this in a couple different ways to show a possible motivation for Alexander later in life. Aristotle

⁵⁸ "Connor Paolo." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Accessed December 12, 2019.
https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1269733/?ref_=tt_cl_t7.

⁵⁹ Merlan, Philip. "Isocrates, Aristotle and Alexander the Great." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 3. 1 (1954): 60. www.jstor.org/stable/4434381.

⁶⁰ Heath, Malcolm. "Aristotle on Natural Slavery", *Phronesis* 53, 3:
<https://doi.org/10.1163/156852808X307070>. p. 245

is shown teaching a young Alexander and others during the movies explaining some of his ideas. Examples of this include extending his military campaign past Persia and into India because it was his right to do so as well as his own ideals that follow counter to Aristotle with him later integrating Persian troops into his army and his later marriage to Roxana, which is heavily protested, by his inner circle.⁶¹ This showed how different Alexander was in his thinking compared to other ancient figures, which is an important aspect of who he was and how he is perceived in this film. The second idea presented by Aristotle based upon Plato's symposium where he holds love of wisdom and beauty above sexual love and concludes that the love between two men is truer than that of a man and woman.⁶² It is this idea that leads to one of the more controversial issues surrounding this movie.

Sexuality

In the movie, young Alexander and Hephaestion develop a close friendship that leads to him serving as one of Alexander's generals later in the movie. Stone develops this close relationship into a romantic and sexual one despite there being no clear indication that these two had anything beyond a close friendship. Stone and others insinuate this idea due to the nature of Greek sexuality along with the ideas by Plato on this subject. The problem with this is not the historical accuracy. There has always been some speculation of their relationship but in the film's interpretation of Alexander's

⁶¹ Carney, "Women in Alexander's Court" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 245

⁶² Al-Momani, Hassan Ali Abdullah. "The Influence of the Conception of Love in Plato's Symposium on Virgil's Aeneid and the French Eneas.(Critical Essay)." *Studies in Literature and Language* 4, no. 2 (April 30, 2012): 17-22.

sexuality will confuse audience because it lacks context. Hellenic culture had a notably different view of sexuality that didn't ascribe to modern conventions of straight and gay.⁶³ While Alexander had relations with men and women, he was not homosexual or bi-sexual in a modern sense, he was simply a man of his time. Despite this, these implications of his homosexuality created controversy in modern Greece.

Modern Greece is highly protective of their culture due in part to its long history and its importance to Western culture. This includes Alexander the Great, who despite being Macedonian was educated with Greek values. It is worth to note that modern Greece—, which includes most of ancient Macedonia—has claimed Alexander as part of their cultural heritage. However, in ancient times Macedonia and the city-states of Greece were separate entities. His conquest of Asia minor not only added to his empire but in doing so it effectively spread Greek culture across vast parts of the known world.⁶⁴ Ancient Macedonia is currently located in modern Greece causing a feud to brew between the modern Macedonia and Greece over rights and usage of history particularly the use of Alexander the Great. This was settled after many years with these two states coming to an agreement that saw Macedonia lose the right to use the history of its namesake and rename itself the Republic of Northern Macedonia.⁶⁵ Stone made some

⁶³ Carney, "Women in Alexander's Court" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. p. 243

⁶⁴ Stoneman, "The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 325

⁶⁵ Halasz, Stephanie, Elinda Labropoulou, and Sheena McKenzie. "Macedonia Officially Changes Its Name to North Macedonia." *CNN. Cable News Network*, February 13, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/13/europe/north-macedonia-name-change-intl/index.html>.

controversial statements that led to backlash from Greek officials who were keeping an eye on the movies production because of its ties to Alexander.

In October of 2004, a month before the intended release date of *Alexander*, Stone made some comments during an interview with *Playboy* for an upcoming issue. He proceeded to say that they go into Alexander's bisexuality and explained his reasoning by giving an overly general explanation that the movie was set in a pre-Christian era, and that sexuality was different then from the way it is conceived of now.⁶⁶ He followed up by stating, "Young boys were with boys when they wanted to be".⁶⁷ This was too general and rather than explain what ancient Greek sexuality was, he put a modern perspective on it without any context to the situation. This could cause confusion and thus having unexpected implications on the character of Alexander. Views on modern sexuality on distinctly different than ancient times which are influenced by many factors including gender, culture and self-identity. By using modern labels on an ancient figure there is risk in skewing the image of ancient culture.

There were people in Greece that were worried that labeling Alexander would damage his image. Greek lawyers had threatened lawsuits against Warner Bros if they released the movie without a warning preceding the film letting the audience know that this is a work of fiction.⁶⁸ The concern was not about homosexuality or bisexuality but rather that the relationships between Alexander and the men in the movie would become

⁶⁶ Today Show. "Defending 'Alexander'." *TODAY.com*, October 13, 2004. <https://www.today.com/popculture/defending-alexander-wbna6234210>.

⁶⁷ Sheff, David. "Interview with Oliver Stone." *Playboy*, November 2004.

⁶⁸ Smith, Helena. "Legal Threat over 'Gay' Alexander." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, November 22, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/22/film.filmnews>.

a primary focus of his character and would obscure other aspects of who he was. The relationship with Hephaestion became a focal point of the movie with many scenes being centered on their physical as well as their emotional relationship. Stone's adaptation of this relationship including several physical encounters, but the most notable aspect of their relationship was the love, both physical and emotional, that was displayed between the two. "Who knows these things? When I was a child my mother thought me divine; my father, weak. Which am I, Hephaestion? Weak or divine? All I know is I trust only you in this world. I've missed you. I need you. It is you I love, Hephaestion. No other." – Alexander⁶⁹

This Alexander only trusted in Hephaestion and he depended on him to keep him together during the tough years in his campaign in the Asia Minor. A major development during the movie was the after-Alexander's marriage to Roxana during the celebration; Hephaestion met with Alexander in his quarters and gave him a ring he found in Egypt could be interpreted as a marriage proposal by modern standards.⁷⁰ In addition to this relationship, Alexander is shown to have sexual relations with two others in the movie Roxana, his wife, and the concubine Bagoas. Stone's large focus on Alexander's sex life is possibly Stone's way to humanize his character to make him more appealing to a broader audience. The problem with this display is that there is no historical context given to sexuality in this period making it an ineffective tool that attaches a modern bisexual characteristic that should not be there.

⁶⁹ Alexander to Hephaestion. *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 01:12:30-01:13:10

⁷⁰ Alexander and Hephaestion. *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 01:28:00-01:29:22

This film attempts to show Alexander and his accomplishments as a military leader and as a person. Yet much of his work as a commander, his victories on the battlefield and his tactics, does not show on screen but rather through tedious exposition. Despite the wealth of events in Alexander's life including campaigns through Greece and Egypt, Stone skips forward to the campaign against the Persians and his campaign to India. The script veers away from the military campaigns and instead is trying to show the person who Alexander is, similar to the 1956 version; in addition, the focus on his sexuality, Stone focuses on the relationships between Alexander and his parents. The narrative played out between the three is accurate in terms of actual events including Philip's marriage to Eurydice, his death and the resentment Olympias had for Philip. Yet it much of these events including dialogue and motivations are left to interpretation by the director. In the case of Olympias, her character was well documented and provided Stone a wealth of characterization to go on yet there are some implications made in the movie, which can skew the historical image.⁷¹

Parentage

Angelina Jolie was picked to take on the role of Alexander's mother. In 2004, she was already an experienced actor with a variety of film roles. Her most notable role at that time was for the movie *Girl, Interrupted* where she played Lisa, a mental patient diagnosed as sociopath where her performance earned her an Academy Award in the 2000 Oscars for Best Actress in a Supporting Role.⁷² To date this is her only win for the

⁷¹ Carney, Elizabeth. "The Politics of Polygamy: Olympias, Alexander and the Murder of Philip." *Historia* 41, no. 2 (January 1, 1992): 169–189. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1293952746/>.

⁷² "Angelina Jolie." IMDb. IMDb.com. Accessed December 12, 2019. https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001401/awards?ref_=nm_awd.

Academy Award but she has won several Golden Globes. Despite her acting abilities, during the early 2000s she her roles had largely involved using her sex appeal to move box office numbers such as 2001's *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and it's follow up *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life* and *Original Sin* which was released in 2001 as well.⁷³ Although this was not a focus of Stone's version of Olympias there was several shots in the film that were clearly used with this in mind including several close-ups.

Olympias herself was a complex and controversial figure whose actions may have been extreme, but her motives were clear, the success of her son Alexander. In an interview with *E!* she claimed that she was a bit apprehensive in playing Colin Farrell's mother due to them being the same age but felt that she understood the character and felt that she could play her well.⁷⁴ Olympias in the movie is driven by vengeance against Alexander's father, Philip, for looking her over in favor of others as well as for her mistreatment at his hands. She is an outsider and not a Macedonian by birth which shows as many other figures in Macedonia consistently mention that Alexander is not full Macedonian. Attalus implies that Alexander is an illegitimate heir because of his mother during the wedding party of Philip and Eurydice.⁷⁵ It seems to spite them; Olympias focuses on influencing Alexander from an early age to have ideas of kingship and godhood. This was not far from the truth as Plutarch mentions early on in his biography of Alexander where Olympias dreamed about a thunderbolt hitting her womb indicating that Zeus impregnated her, and he was the true father of Alexander.⁷⁶

⁷³ "Angelina Jolie." IMDb. IMDb.com

⁷⁴ E! Channel. Interview with Angelina Jolie. 2004. Interviewer Giuliana Depandi.

⁷⁵ Attalus at the wedding party. *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 1:52:30-1:52:45

⁷⁶ Plutarch *Life of Alexander* Part 1 2.3

This idea that Olympias never really considers Philip Alexander's true father plays a major part in this film's version of the character. She constantly tries to diminish Philip's qualities while simultaneously building the confidence that Alexander carries later in life. Furthermore, she is seen to be in an abusive relationship, which adds a more sympathetic motive for her actions. Aside from mentions in Plutarch's work, there is no clear indication about the feelings one way or the other between Philip and Olympias so there is much room for interpretation on how events play out.⁷⁷ This Olympias is tormented by her relationship as well as being neglected by Philip and so develops an extremely close bond to her son, using it to pursue her vengeance against Philip. This is speculative as Macedonian Kings were often polygamous and his marriage to Eurydice would have been normal.⁷⁸ The problem was that an heir from this marriage since Olympias was not Macedonian there was a chance an heir from this marriage could endanger Alexander getting on the throne. Jolie played this part perfectly as she came across as manipulative and power hungry; seeking only to bring Alexander to the throne and have him succeed Philip as per her vengeance. Stone's Olympias worshipped Alexander and kept him close, as he became older the depiction of their relationship became awkward due to the them being the same age in certain scenes that created sexual tension between these two actors. Although it is possible that this was intentional on the director's parts as there are many other scenes in the film that support this.

⁷⁷ Carney, Elizabeth. "The Politics of Polygamy: Olympias, Alexander and the Murder of Philip." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 41, no. 2 (1992): 179. www.jstor.org/stable/4436236.

⁷⁸ Carney, "Women in Alexander's Court" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. p 229-230

During a flashback scene in the film, Philip guides a young Alexander through a cavern that has many wall paintings. He proceeds to speak with the young boy about several different subjects to impart his kingly wisdom. One of the stories he goes through is the story of Oedipus who kills his father and marries his mother but tears out his eyes when he finds out he killed his father because he did it unknowingly.⁷⁹ This is one of the various scenes meant to warn Alexander about the dangers of glory as he believes that ‘There’s no glory without suffering.’⁸⁰ His mention of Oedipus is interesting because he follows it up with a warning about his mother and women in general. Sigmund Freud uses the story of Oedipus to define one of his theories regarding a psychological condition that some male adolescents develop. In this condition, the boy develops a sexual attraction while also engaging in a rivalry with his father (in most cases for his mother’s affections).⁸¹ The interesting part of this condition in relation to Alexander more so in the movie than in historical writing is the constant mention by others about Alexander not doing what Philip did and also going beyond what his father wanted to do.

One of the constant reminders is Parmenion who several times voices his displeasure for Alexander extending himself further from what Philip despite accomplishing more. This dynamic rivalry is told through flashbacks intercut with the present timeline in the film to create a possible motivation for his actions. Alexander’s similarities to Oedipus are implied by Stone including the desire to surpass and murder his father. Stone uses the murder of Cleitus to imply a desire for Alexander to murder his

⁷⁹ Philip to Alexander, *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 52:00-55:00

⁸⁰ Philip to Alexander continued 52:00-55:00

⁸¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Oedipus Complex.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., January 3, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/science/Oedipus-complex>.

father. In fact, it is the last words Cleitus speaks that drive Alexander to kill him. The scene picks up as Cleitus begins to criticize Alexander's recent actions while bringing up many of the ideas used by Parmenion earlier in the movie; as the scene progresses a drunken Alexander hallucinates seeing Philip instead of Cleitus for a brief second.⁸² It escalates when he says that Alexander would bring shame to his barbarian mother leading him to kill Cleitus.⁸³ This insult to his mother is what many others including his father brought up against her when he was younger.

It was this moment as well as his relationship to Roxana that supports this idea of the Oedipus complex. Roxana, portrayed by Rosario Dawson who is of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent, was his wife from the ancient area of Bactria Sogdiana, which is near modern day Afghanistan, who Alexander married despite opposition from his generals.⁸⁴ She is important in Stone's film because she represents an image of Olympias for Alexander while he is away on his campaign. In the movie, after having sex with Roxana, Alexander says that he wishes that she wasn't just a "pale reflection" of his mother.⁸⁵ This moment along with the murder of Cleitus is the moment where Alexander truly becomes Oedipus a fact that Stone continues to reinforce throughout the movie.⁸⁶

Criticism

⁸² Cleitus to Alexander *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 2:13:00-2:13:15

⁸³ Alexander kills Cleitus *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 2:14:45-2:15:10

⁸⁴ Holt, Frank L. "Alexander the Great's Little Star. (Alexander's Wife, Roxane)." *History Today* 38 (September 1, 1988).

⁸⁵ Alexander to a sleeping Roxana *Alexander: Ultimate Cut* (2014) 01:36:40-01:37:00

⁸⁶ Carney and Ogden. Philip II and Alexander the Great Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives. p 225

Oliver Stone spent years of his life trying to bring Alexander to the big screen and tell the story of his illustrious life. He carefully constructed an image of Alexander whose basis is in fact but in many other ways are fictional. For the most part, western society has glorified his life, romanticizing his conquests while in some respects obscuring just how brutal of a person he was. His accomplishments at a young age, his vast conquests made him a figure for many to look up to including past and future leaders as well as those who want to accomplish a great deal with their youth. The problem with storytelling in any era is that writers try to relate these figures to the current generation and attach attributes that are present in the current period but may not be a direct reflection of the time the person was from. For *Alexander*, Stone used information from Alexander's life and manipulated them to tell his story. Although this is a tactic, that many filmmakers employ but for Alexander specifically who has very little presence in modern media these details are important and affect how his image is perceived.

This movie's interpretations of Alexander can be seen from a couple different angles and vary on the agenda of the audience member. For instance, who despite his military experience and accomplishments, this Alexander seems like a man who is a slave to his emotions. Stone stuck on the idea of presenting his interpretation of Alexander, all too often tied in some way to modern political agendas. In some instances, Colin can make the audience get lost in the battles through the passion and emotion particularly in Gaugamela. Yet in some other scenes, he can come across as whiny and emotionally handicapped due to his constant mention or thoughts of the issues with his parents. Additionally, Alexander can be viewed as this sexual creature almost devoid of control due to the lack of context of Greek sexuality. Despite putting forward his sexuality

forward he set limits to it whereas the sex scene with Roxana is shown without hesitation, there is caution when exploring his physical relationship with Hephaestion despite making it clear at least in the director's eye that there was a physical relationship there but had no intent on showing that physicality on screen.

Critics were not kind to the movie there were several complaints about the structure of the movie as well as the casting decision. Despite most agreeing that Colin is a fine actor for roles on a more human scale, he lacked the ability to properly portray Alexander on the level he needed to be. Roger Ebert best described it when he called Alexander the philosopher king who required someone of greater acting skill to show his ability to "drive men to the ends of the world with his unbending will."⁸⁷ As with any movie if the actor or actress cannot properly convey the character, they are playing especially one of the calibers of Alexander than the story is bound to fail.

Stone's movie was the last big budget Hollywood film about Alexander the Great. To date there hasn't been any adaptations at least in western media about him. He has been featured sparingly in some documentaries, but it seems no director wants to risk another movie. In fact, the only effort came from Stone himself who reedited and released not one but three separate cuts of the film. The director's cut in 2005, a final cut in 2007 and the Ultimate cut 2014; all of these incorporated unused footages and reorganized some of the scenes in the movie to provide for a better narrative structure.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ebert, Roger. "Alexander Movie Review & Film Summary (2004): Roger Ebert." RogerEbert.com, November 23, 2004. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/alexander-2004>.

⁸⁸ Sobczynski, Peter. "A Reappraisal of Oliver Stone's Alexander." RogerEbert.com. Accessed December 12, 2019. <https://www.rogerebert.com/demanders/a-reappraisal-of-oliver-stones-alexander-the-ultimate-cut>.

While these new versions may have improved the quality of the movie in certain areas, it is not enough to change the perception of Alexander that it has set in motion. Some viewers have some background knowledge and will not be affected by this yet there are many who see this version as the factual Alexander. An Alexander ruled by his emotions and lacking the ability to accomplish what they are told he accomplished. His relationship and his sexuality become the entirety of who he is rather than the military commander with no losses and drive to conquer the known world. It is unfortunate because the first scene in the Battle of Gaugamela shows the best screen representation of Alexander; his passion and ferocity in battle, the wits to outsmart a stronger enemy while empowering his troops to keep fighting despite the odds and ending with one his greatest victories with Darius running away and the Persian Empire in his grasp. This is the Alexander that the audience sees first but the rest of the movie never keeps up and only diminishes the image of this epic personality.

Chapter 3: Another side of Alexander

Like Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, Alexander exists primarily as a western character and is defined by his attachments to Hellenic culture. In Alexander's case, these movies shape him as tragic figure who managed to conquer the known world but doomed to a short life. With family problems and a sense of duty, his conquests become altruistic efforts to better the lives of the people he conquered. All the viewpoints in these stories come from Alexander or those who surround him serving to encourage his actions and bring a purpose to them. In conquering Persia, he took it upon themselves to say that he was bettering their lives by showing them the "better" Greek philosophy because there was this assumption that these people were barbarians. Greek philosophy assumed that the Greeks were superior to others including outsiders and those considered barbarians.

What makes Alexander unique in the ancient world is how far his influence spread versus many others. He not only conquered areas such as Greece and Egypt but his empire extended through much of the modern-day middle east and breaking into India. As such, he is viewed in many ways with the most common opinion of him as being this individual who was never bested in battle and integrating those areas he conquered into his empire. This is the western view of him, but the east has a distinctly

different perception of him and this shows in several different forms of media including animation from Japan as well as a drama series from India.

In Japan, there are many forms of media such as television and film like other parts of the world but in modern times, it is their animation (called “anime”) and manga that has gained broader global recognition. These works tell stories that range from everyday life to the fantastical and most often are fictional.⁸⁹ Use of certain characters and their portrayals in these stories at times serve as commentary on opinions of real-world people and events. Notably these mediums have developed certain tropes and stereotypes. One of the more noticeable of these is the stereotype of the foreigner where they are presented completely different from the Japanese characters. When it comes to Western characters whether European, American or even Mediterranean these characters are often depicted as being taller and more muscular as well as being typically arrogant and condescending towards the main characters who more often than not Japanese or some group that represents the Japanese in spirit.⁹⁰ Other characteristics may include a deeper voice for men, blonde hair and blue-eyes for woman.

Reign: The Conqueror

One Japanese anime that adapted the life of Alexander was called *Reign: The Conqueror* and was released in 1999.⁹¹ This was a collaboration between several studios in Japan with Korean artist, Peter Chung, as lead character designer. Peter Chung is well

⁸⁹ Odell, Colin., and Le Blanc, Michelle. “Anime Harperden”, *Herts: Kamera Books*, 2013. pp 11

⁹⁰ Fennell, Dana, Liberato, Ana S.Q, Hayden, Bridget, and Fujino, Yuko. “Consuming Anime.” *Television & New Media* 14, no. 5 (September 2013): 447.

⁹¹ “Reign: The Conqueror.” IMDb, IMDb.com, 5 Aug. 1997, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0295765/>.

known for his distinct art style most notably used in the series *Aeon Flux* that aired on MTV in the early Nineties.⁹² The series was based on a Japanese novel called *Alexander Senki*. *Alexander Senki* (Alexander: The Record of his Battles) was written by Japanese writer Hiroshi Aramata and adapted to series by director Yoshinori Kanemori.⁹³ This series is unique among the adaptations thus far in that it touches on many of the events that other media skipped over in their presentation. It is highly stylized with many historical inaccuracies in terms of visuals. This includes nontraditional armor and military weapons for that era as well as cities having more a futuristic look to it with elaborately tall and complicated structures as well as many urban centers that echo modern cities. Additionally, the character designs including Alexander, his family and associates look different from some descriptions from ancient writers but in these instances, they personify certain character traits rather than actual appearance of this. An example of this is Alexander's mother Olympias; historically she is not Macedonian so other media has presented her as a barbarian or outsider. In order to distinguish this in the series the character designers chose to give her green hair and deathly pale skin. This look is distinct from other characters in the series who have a light but not pale complexion or a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern look to their design.

Aside from Stone's movie, this series proves to be the most ambitious in terms of presenting the story of Alexander's life. Fantastical elements aside, there are many parts to this adaptation that present accurate historical aspects of his character. What is unique here is that this show details some events typically summarized in other works. There is a

⁹² <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0161285/>

⁹³ Martin, Thomas R., and Christopher W. Blackwell. *Alexander the Great: The Story of an Ancient Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. p. 178

fair amount of time spent depicting the dissent in Athens leading to the conquest and destruction of Thebes which is an important event in Alexander's early history that often gets cast aside in other media.⁹⁴ This is done primarily to foster an image of a strong and ruthless Alexander who does not hesitate to take stop those who get in his way. One of the more prominent opponents of Alexander in Athens is Demosthenes who constantly speaks against Macedonian rule and encourages a revolt against Macedonia when Philip is assassinated. This, however, does not happen as shortly after his speech a soldier from Thebes rides into the city. This soldier, near death at this point, tells the crowd of Alexander's destruction of Thebes, which quickly squashes any idea of revolution.⁹⁵ In addition to his ruthlessness in battle a big focus of this series is the philosophical side of Alexander particular his thoughts on battle, city planning, as well as discussing the various prophecies surrounding his reign. Aristotle, an ever-present figure in many adaptations about Alexander's life, also appears in the series to provide advice for the young Alexander. But it is his contemporary Diogenes who receives much of the attention in this series. Diogenes explains some of the more magical elements of the television series to the viewer but more, so he provides context for Alexander's motivation and his role in the world.

Diogenes is presented as a man living in a barrel, in poverty. He is constantly made fun of by the kids with the nickname, "Diogenes the Dog". His character design is that of a small man hunched over with a cane with bad teeth. Much like the real Diogenes, he lives in poverty and instead of the large ceramic vessel; they present him in

⁹⁴ Barry Strauss, "Alexander: The Military Campaign" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 141

⁹⁵ *Reign: The Conqueror* Episode 5 "God of Creation"

a barrel, which he declares is “his universe”.⁹⁶ The encounter between the two men is depicted in Plutarch where Alexander meets him, when he encounters him Alexander asks Diogenes what he wants and he responds by saying he wants Alexander to move two steps to the left; puzzled Diogenes explains that Alexander is blocking his sun.⁹⁷ However, this interaction in the animation deviates from sources turning into a philosophical discussion on the impact of Alexander’s campaigns as well as furthering the plot of the storyline prophecy that he will destroy the world. This prophecy in the series about the world’s destruction by Alexander is not based on anything factual but may be the writer’s interpretation of the impact of Alexander’s actions. Later scenes in the series support this idea as the philosophical destruction of the world as opposed to the physical one.

The series has two focal points one being the life of Alexander but the other is the fictional prophecy told by many different characters about how Alexander will destroy the world. These often crossover particularly when Alexander is in Egypt as he is told by the priests there that he is destined to destroy the known world while in Athens the philosophers Aristotle and Diogenes argue about whether Alexander needs to be stopped or not. Interesting enough Ptolemy is told a prophecy by Egyptian priests that he will become ruler of the world, which confuses him, but to the informed viewer they are predicting the eventual death of Alexander and later rule by Ptolemy in Egypt.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Gallo, Louis. “Alexander the Great Meets Diogenes the Cynic.” *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* (July 1, 2017): 116,127. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1932062156>

⁹⁷ Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 14.4

⁹⁸ Waterfield, Robin. “Dividing the Spoils : the War for Alexander the Great’s Empire.” *Oxford University Press*, 2011. p. 27.

To Egyptian priests their world is Egypt so in this context it makes sense. This is later referenced at the end of the series when Ptolemy attempts to kill Alexander because of his actions and the deaths of his friends, Cleitus and Philotus. When he fails to kill him Alexander states, “you failed to kill me but that does not change your future”; implying that Alexander is aware of his death and Ptolemy’s future as Pharaoh in Egypt.⁹⁹ Later on Alexander encounters Porus in India but it ends up being a version of himself which he kills, fulfilling the prophecy of destroying the old world ushering in the new world. The series end with Alexander encountering a young Euclid as he is working on his mathematics, as he watches him he is asked by Cassandra what he is doing he replies by saying he is watching the world he destroyed being recreated.¹⁰⁰ This could be understood in several ways but one is the implication by the writer is that Alexander’s campaigns marked a shift in history and that following his death; the world began to expand and build new ideas and philosophies.

Despite its take on Alexander’s life, there are many creative liberties taken here as well as many things that they did not focus on. For instance, there is no mention of his sexuality aside from his marriage to Roxane. Hephaestion is a close confidant and is shown to be Alexander’s personal bodyguard as an explanation for all the time they spend together. Added to this when Hephaestion dies in battle there is no emotion from Alexander. Cassander is portrayed as a female and is renamed to Cassandra becoming the only surviving general aside from Ptolemy. His mother Olympias is said to be involved in a religious cult, is constantly surrounded by snakes, and mystically haunts several

⁹⁹ *Reign: The Conqueror* Episode 13 “The Prophecy Comes to Pass” Ptolemy lunges at Alexander’s back but fails to kill him.

¹⁰⁰ *Reign: The Conqueror* Episode 13 “The Prophecy Comes to Pass”

characters throughout the series like Eurydice and Philotus through nightmares and visions.¹⁰¹ Alexander kills the assassin that killed Philip but could have prevented altogether but chose not to. This could have been due to Philip attempting to declare his son by Eurydice the heir of Macedonia instead of Alexander. This series implicates Olympias and Alexander in the murder of Philip much more clearly than any other adaptation but also portrays Philip as villainous and easily manipulated by others such as Eurydice's father. It seems that some of these changes were made to create a more diverse cast as well as creating a character with complex motivations.

Reign: The Conqueror proves to be a unique series that attempts to adapt the life of Alexander without the typical western trappings choosing to focus on the events as well as the motivations behind the man. He is shown to be eager to learn and prove himself to the world. At times though his emotions do not come through whether intentional or not. He seldom gets angry or even cracks a smile in fact when he is not in battle, he barely reacts at all to any emotional events whether the death of his companions or his parents' antics. Even his initial encounter and eventual marriage to Roxane seems more like a morbid curiosity rather than emotional interest. Despite this, he is an unstoppable force in battle, shredding enemies without mercy and showing a side of him unseen anywhere else. The series counters this ferocity by his curiosity for knowledge about the world around as well and himself. He is constantly searching for answers, questioning what his motivations are and this expands as he learns more.

¹⁰¹ Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 2.7

A common scene that occurs multiple times has Alexander encountering a person who either does not know who he is or does not care shares their personal views and knowledge with him. In Egypt, he encounters the architect Dinocrates who without looking at Alexander criticizes his choice of location to build Alexandria. Alexander without hesitation asks him what he thinks would be better and without even looking Dinocrates begins to explain and outline his vision for the city noting in it similarities in design to the human body because the city he envisions is alive.¹⁰² Instead of shooting down his critics or being consumed by anger, he takes in what others have to see especially if he believes what they are telling are in line with his ultimate vision. This type of focus away from emotion and more on the internal philosophical sets this image of Alexander apart from other adaptations. This could be an overall viewpoint or criticism of how Westerners view their historical figures or simply artistic interpretation. Despite that, this image serves a purpose into bringing attention to Alexander's thoughts and motivations rather than his emotions and family ties as many other adaptations have done.

Fate/Zero

Another Japanese anime. *Fate/Zero*, is about a fictional battle between warriors summoned from different time period takes place for the mythical Holy Grail. In this story, one of the characters is a fictional version of Alexander going by his Persian name Iskandar. Despite being a fictionalized version of Alexander, it is important to understand the characterization featured here. Creator Gen Urobuchi wrote this series in 2005 as a novel before it was adapted in animated form with the first episode airing in 2011 and

¹⁰² *Reign: The Conqueror* Episode 7 "Here Shall Stand Alexandria"

concluding in 2012.¹⁰³ Urobochi is of Japanese origin and provides a unique take on Alexander that one could say is well researched and has some basis in fact. Some characteristics of Alexander in this story fall in line with some of the foreigner stereotypes depicted in many anime series. This Alexander is presented as a tall, muscular figure that towers over many of the other characters. In addition, he has a full beard and red hair, which is a departure from how he is typically portrayed in other media. Alexander explains this in the series when another character questions why he doesn't look like he is said to look, and he responds by saying "You can't trust books when you don't know them."¹⁰⁴ This seems like the creator commenting on the issue of fact versus fiction in the case of Alexander's life. Many of the literary sources about his life were written after he died and in some cases many years after his death such as in the case of Plutarch.¹⁰⁵ Added to that this is a completely eastern view and while not to be taken as an opinion from Japan it is interesting to see this perspective.

The character crafted here is less personal more idealistic and passionate. He constantly speaks about the responsibilities of a king including the necessity of a king to be greedier than all others in order to personify the extremes of good and evil so that his followers both envy and adore him.¹⁰⁶ This was a response to the criticism that Alexander's greed pushed his army further yet cost the lives of many of his soldiers during his campaign. This greed however extended his empire greatly and with the addition of many conquered territories he also expanded the size of his army by

¹⁰³ "Fate/Zero." TV Tropes, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/LightNovel/FateZero>.

¹⁰⁴ *Fate/Zero* Season 1 Episode 13 "The Forbidden Feast"

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Baynham, "The Ancient Evidence for Alexander the Great" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Fate/zero* Season 1. Episode 11 "Discussing the Grail" Iskandar discusses his viewpoint of what a king is

integrating those he vanquished. This side of Alexander was the focus of this image; he and other characters constantly refer to him as the “King of Conquerors”.

Rather than focus on any single accomplishment the series presents him as a man always seeking to surpass himself, which is admirable. Instead of rehashing his life story the writers chose to craft a character based on the philosophy thought to have been attributed to Alexander. Including the previously mentioned integration between people both in his armies and his territories as well being open to dialogue and debate. The latter is perhaps a reference to his education with Aristotle who was known to debate and engage in dialogue with others.¹⁰⁷

Visually the series backed up this idea of integration by giving Alexander the ability to summon his army in times of need. During a climactic battle, Iskandar summons his army called the Ionian Hetairoi (a nod to the name of the elite cavalry units the real Alexander deployed in his armies).¹⁰⁸ The viewer sees a vast army made up of several different types of soldiers including both Spartan and Athenian hoplites, the Macedonian phalanx and the Persian Immortals.¹⁰⁹ This served to impress upon the viewer that despite Alexander being a conqueror, he respected those people he conquered so much so that they would serve under him. This characterization of Alexander is important to the study of his modern image because it provides context on how non-Westerns view him. This one specifically looks at him more for his philosophy behind his

¹⁰⁷ Merlan, Philip. “Isocrates, Aristotle and Alexander the Great.” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1954): 76.

¹⁰⁸ “The Hellenistic East and Persia: A Cultural Bridge” In *World History: A Concise Thematic Analysis, Volume One*, 1:153. John Wiley & Sons, n.d.

¹⁰⁹ Fate/zero Season 2 Episode 10 “The sea at the end of the world”

actions rather than the action themselves. Additionally, one can speculate that the author doesn't completely believe that the information collected on Alexander is factual and assumes that there is room for interpretation.

Both these series offer viewpoints about Alexander from an eastern perspective but specifically a Japanese one. Japan historically has no connection to Alexander, as he never ventured that far east, so these perspectives are tied to their own culture rather than any negative or positive reactions from past events. The next series that will be analyzed offers a different perspective from the western films as well as the previous two series.

Porus

Porus was developed in India by producer Siddharth Kumar Tewary and released in 2017.¹¹⁰ This live action series, set in 350 BC, follows King Porus of India from birth leading to his interactions with Alexander the Great. This series is significantly different from other adaptations in how it presents Alexander. The show revolves around Porus and his battle with Alexander the Great. In this two hundred plus episode series we see the life of Alexander and Porus from early childhood to their last battle in India. This was an ambitious project and one of the most expensive projects ever made in India with an estimated budget of \$5 billion rupees or \$70 million dollars.¹¹¹ Tewary wanted to create a series on a global scale but that also deeply rooted in Indian history and culture.¹¹² This

¹¹⁰ "Porus." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7690392/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast.

¹¹¹ "Porus." *IMDb*, IMDb.com,

¹¹² Siddharth Kumar Tewary Interview. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjsCOVQL5l8>. April 2018

show provided a view that was unique compared to other images of Alexander in that it is focused on the point of view from one of the kings that faced Alexander and survived.

Siddharth stated that he wanted to present a series from an Indian perspective and did not intend to portray Alexander as a villain; rather he wants to present Alexander's life story leading to his invasion of India so that the viewer would understand his motives.¹¹³ From the perspective of the people involved in this project they felt that it was important to protect their country and their roots. This was a different than Alexander's philosophy and Tewary stated that for Alexander he protected his family through conquest, but for Indians they do not have imperialistic goals.¹¹⁴ This discourse on ideologies becomes a common theme used to throughout the series to better characterize Porus and Alexander. Yet despite the creator's intentions to create a global program without a villain, his idea to present Alexander as an antihero ultimately fails. Alexander was a conqueror and his actions during his campaigns cost the lives of thousands, yet he continued to push through because of his own ideology. *Porus* presents this to a point but does not shy away from showing Alexander as a ruthless invader who will stop at nothing for victory. Even in promotional trailers, these ideas are clear as the announcer calls Porus the "Glory of the East" and Alexander the "Curse of the West".¹¹⁵

Alexander in *Porus* hits many of the same story beats as other adaptations including his personal issues with his parents, his conquest of Persia, as well as his eventual invasion of India. During the early part of the series, Alexander is betrayed by

¹¹³ Tewary Interview

¹¹⁴ Tewary interview

¹¹⁵ *Porus* Promotional Trailer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKmzKglX4Jo> November 11, 2017.

Philip as he is denied his inheritance of kingship and instead of banishment he is sentenced to death as is his mother Olympias.¹¹⁶ They escape with the help of Alexander's long-time friend, Hephaestion, who also serves as important supporting figure in the series that joins Alexander on the front lines of all the battles in the series. This may imply that the creator felt he was an illegitimate ruler or perhaps to show how ruthless Philip was to create sympathy for Alexander. Following his escape, he goes with his mother to her homeland. Here Olympias's portrayal is not so different from other versions, but here the series outright calls her a witch; accusing her of black magic when she puts a spell on one of Alexander's rivals in Philip's court.¹¹⁷ This in itself is not an issue, many of these adaptations like to focus on the nature of Alexander's parents as a catalyst for his campaigns. His father Philip is a contentious and difficult figure to understand, and most depict him as the villain to draw sympathy for Alexander. This series does not stray from this path but does have Philip acknowledge Alexander as a demigod perhaps to offer up a reason for his actions towards him.¹¹⁸

Following Philip's death and Alexander's rise to power the series turns a man known for his military leadership and strategy into a stereotypical soap opera villain.¹¹⁹ This begins the downfall of his portrayal in this series as many creative liberties are taken to serve the purpose of the story. After the victory in Gaugamela, Alexander goes to Babylon and plots on how to finish Darius. Here Alexander in the series as in actual history receives a message from Darius that stated that Darius wanted to build an alliance

¹¹⁶ *Porus*. Episode 58. 02/15/2018

¹¹⁷ *Porus*. Episode 53. 02/08/2018

¹¹⁸ *Porus*. Episode 68. 02/28/2018

¹¹⁹ Maria Brosius, "Alexander and the Persians" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 171

where they share the rule of Persia.¹²⁰ Unlike ancient times, this Alexander derides the actions of Darius comparing him to a businessman and loses respect for him calling him a coward not a king. This is quite different from how other movies and shows viewed Darius as most acknowledge the immense respect he had for Darius even going so far as having Alexander execute the traitors who killed Darius.¹²¹ Additionally, it is here that the series begin to plant the seeds of Alexander's path to India going so far as having Porus infiltrate the palace in Babylon with the help of the Princess Barsine.¹²² From here on out with the next hundred episodes the focus shifts to Alexander's invasion of India. His actions here acknowledge his ruthlessness but make him look like a typical villain rather than the so-called anti-hero Tewary intended to portray.

Showrunners begin to craft a story of India and Porus being Alexander's greatest challenge. Their first encounter has Porus claiming victory and scolding Alexander for underestimating his power; with the Macedonian army encountering elephants in battle.¹²³ However this battle does not end well, historically Alexander develops a strategy to defeat the elephants causing Porus to retreat which is shown here.¹²⁴ This scene is rather important as it shows the image the creators are crafting. After using the fire to ensnare the elephants in a circle of fire, he and the army ruthlessly murder the elephants. Elephants are important to Indians and are considered sacred in their culture.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Barry Strauss, "Alexander: The Military Campaign" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 151

¹²¹ Barry Strauss, "Alexander: The Military Campaign" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 152

¹²² Episode 125.

¹²³ *Porus*. Episode 146. 06/18/2018

¹²⁴ A. Brian Bosworth, "The Indian Campaigns, 327-325 BC" in Roisman (ed). *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p 164-165

¹²⁵ "The Elephant Men." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, October 22, 2014. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/the-elephant-men-living-gods/2310/>.

This a dark image of Alexander and does not encourage the audience to sympathize with the conqueror and perhaps it was used by the creators of the show purposely. Actions like this that seems to paint Alexander as evil and the complete opposite of Porus.

Ultimately the creators want to show that their ideology is better than that of Alexander and perhaps using Alexander as an extension of western culture. This is more evident when Alexander is on his death bed as he asks his wife and followers to do a couple things after his death. One was to spread his wealth on the road like the dust because despite sacrificing important moments of his life collect it, it could not give him extra moments to live or make his way easier after death.¹²⁶ The other interesting request was that he asked that they tie his arms upright with the palms up so that world can see that the great conqueror left the world with nothing and only earned a grave to lie in.¹²⁷

This series was written by writers of Indian background and that influence carries in the production of the show. This influence provides a perspective from individuals whose ancestors encountered Alexander in past which is why they may have skewed events in order to attach some sense of their culture and nationality through their work. The creators chose to impart an idea that Alexander was changed philosophically by his encounter with Porus. This was never confirmed the only confirmed change is that Alexander chose to turn back to Babylon. There is some sense that this show is a way to promote Indian values and culture on an international level with its intent by its creator to make a product that would be seen worldwide.

¹²⁶ *Porus*. Episode 249. 11/13/2018

¹²⁷ Episode 249.

India has a long history, and there are various cultures within the country including many different ethnic groups and religions. Many stories such as the Indian epic, *Ramayana*, differ from group to group within India.¹²⁸ More recently there has been action taken by the Indian state to create a homogenous identity within the country whether it is to consolidate the many different versions of stories, historical figures and general philosophy or create a more centralized worldview of the culture. With recent television adaptations of *Ramayana* and *Porus* there is speculation that the government is pushing for a more centralized and unified identity of India.¹²⁹ With *Porus*, this sense of nationalism provided by the creator also seems like a criticism of the west. By having Alexander change his personal philosophy because of his encounter with Porus is a big statement to make because of how strongly Alexander represents Western culture and this could be considered submitting to Eastern ideology. Having Porus, who is so closely tied to the history of India, beat Alexander, this icon of western society, maybe not militarily but ideologically, says a lot of how the creators and perhaps how the Indian government feels about their views and the views of the rest of the world.

Porus was not the only adaptation of Alexander in Indian film and television. He has been featured in movies as far back as the forties predating Hollywood with *Sikandar* in 1941 as well as *Sikandar-e-Azam* in 1965.¹³⁰ ¹³¹ Additionally, he has been featured in

¹²⁸ Thapar, Romila. "Helter Skelter: The Ramayana Syndrome." *Helter Skelter Magazine*, April 28, 2014. <https://helterskelter.in/2014/04/the-ramayana-syndrome/>.

¹²⁹ Thapar, Romila. "Helter Skelter: The Ramayana Syndrome."

¹³⁰ "Sikandar." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0243559/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

¹³¹ "Sikandar E Azam." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Accessed December 23, 2019. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0176140/?ref_=nv_sr_srgs_3.

other television series such as *Chanakya* in 1991 and *Chandragupta Maurya* in 2011¹³². He is considered an important figure in Indian culture and because of this has been portrayed several times. The focus has been on *Porus* because it is the most current but also uses him far more extensively than any other version being featured in over 200 episodes of this Bollywood drama series.

Reign: The Conqueror, *Fate/Zero* and *Porus* provide a unique perspective of Alexander that shows him as less heroic and more ruthless in nature. That perhaps Alexander can be interpreted in many ways from the great military commander to a philosopher and in some ways a purveyor of violence justified or not. Perhaps it must be accepted violence is violence and despite one's accomplishments they should not forget the actions that took them there. Also, unlike the two previous films that show Alexander as tragic Shakespearean figure, these focus on his philosophy and ideologies which helps to expand the image of Alexander and shows that there is more to him than his family and military campaigns.

¹³² "Chanakya." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, September 8, 1991. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0389593/?ref_=nv_sr_srgs_2. And "Chandragupta Maurya." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, March 11, 2011. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2955622/?ref_=nv_sr_srgs_2

Conclusion

Entertainment media from books, plays, films and even animations have told the story of Alexander. Each of these adaptations constructed their own unique image of Alexander in hopes of telling his story. However, what effect did these have on the historical image of Alexander, with each director having their own agenda behind their story, how would audiences view Alexander going forward.

This article has analyzed several adaptations of Alexander including two Hollywood productions, anime, and an Indian television drama. All of these provided a version of Alexander that hit many of the same story beats but shifted some elements to suit their needs. This is an excellent example of historical accuracy on film. Filmmakers take plenty of liberties with historical fact in order to create a better narrative structure for their film, but some historians worry that doing this simplifies historical events.¹³³ The idea is that this will create better more easily digestible content for audiences, but this can obscure important details that alters the historical record. Hollywood made two major attempts at telling the story of Alexander once in 1956 and in 2004.

In 1956, United Artists released *Alexander the Great* directed by Robert Rossen. This movie was in the tradition of many of the epics at the time. These stories required many extras, large film locations, big budgets and lengthy films times. Rossen worked tirelessly to bring this movie to life, choosing Spain as his primary film locations for everything from a recreation of an ancient Macedonian city as well as some areas used in

¹³³ Lewis, Jan. "Historians Don't Need to Be Fiction's Fact Police. (accuracy of Historical Motion pictures)(Column)." *The Washington Post*. Washingtonpost Newsweek Interactive, February 15, 1998.

place of some key battles like Granicus. Richard Burton's casting as Alexander gave the film a high caliber actor to help draw audiences in.

Unfortunately, this movie missed the mark perhaps due the cut in length or the low budget. Many critics at the time praised it for its visuals but felt that it failed to capture the attention of the audience due to its repetitive and boring nature.¹³⁴ Rossen's failure here was perhaps due to the period he lived. It appears he had expected to tell a bigger more involved story, but the limitations of film technology affected his work. His Alexander became lost in the dozens of epics that littered the 1950s and 1960s. The next major adaptation did not come until decades later with director Oliver Stone.

Stone's film, *Alexander*, released in 2004 to a mixed reaction. This film was much bigger in scope than any previous adaptation before. The production crew filmed in a couple of different countries to capture the expansive empire that Alexander had. New tools in filmmaking such as CGI and bluescreen allowed Stone to recreate Alexander's world, including the legendary city of Babylon and the Battle of Gaugamela. With a much larger budget and run time, the movie was set to make an impact. Stone invested time and effort on working on a script with historian Robin Lane Fox to not only tell a dramatic story but a historically accurate as well. Despite Fox's help, Stone took some creative liberties and chose to focus on certain aspects of Alexander's life including his relationship with his parents, his sexuality and a supposed internal conflict. These things to create a broader interest in Alexander as a historical figure, but this portrayal skewed his public image greatly.

¹³⁴ Coe, Richard L. "Real History in 'Alexander'." *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, Mar 31, 1956. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/148803709?accountid=1362>

Colin Farrell's portrayal of Alexander was much different from Burtons. While Burton had a more Shakespearean way to his portrayal, Farrell was much more modern and emotionally charged maybe too much at times. The relationship with his parents became a focal point of the movie that had plenty of material to work with, as there are many writings about Alexander's connection to his parents. This led to an internal conflict within Alexander due to the aggressive nature of both his parents. Jolie played perfectly a dedicated if not overbearing mother while Kilmer played a Philip consumed by his alcoholism and ego. This fed the motivations of Stone's version of Alexander throughout the movie. Sexuality was also an important aspect of Stone's film. Despite the lack of information on Alexander's sexuality that is available Stone pushed this aspect to the forefront especially the relationship with Jared Leto's Hephaestion. Stone wrote Alexander as bi-sexual, having relationships with Roxana and Hephaestion as well as Bagoas. This created a lot of controversy, creating a debate among historians and others. This debate dealt with the historical accuracy in films versus the creative license used to change events to better suit the needs of the story.

The film did receive mixed reactions with some criticizing Farrell's portrayal while other pointing story issues within the script and structure of the movie. Stone undeterred by critics continued to work on his film rereleasing it several time for home release with the last version coming out in 2014. This was the last big Western film depicting Alexander to be released but Alexander in addition to being a prominent figure in Western culture, he is has a big presence in various areas in Eastern culture specifically those places in the modern day Asia minor. These adaptations include a couple anime from Japan and an Indian drama series.

In Japan, there have been two series released featuring Alexander and these portray him in completely different way. *Reign: The Conqueror* tells the life story of Alexander with a focus on the military campaigns and his personal philosophy. Unlike the films of Stone and Rossen who chose to focus on some areas of his military campaign and personal life; this series goes forward with detailing many other events including his eradication of Thebes, and his time in Egypt. Despite being a fictional piece, many of the episodes use real events to convey the creator's story. One of highpoints of this series include Alexander's focus with his destiny, as well as his desire to learn and expand his view of the world. Because of this, the series chooses to focus on figures like Aristotle and Diogenes to provide exposition to help the viewer understand events that are happening. The next series, *Fate/Zero*, is unique among the other adaptations in that he is a supporting character not the focus. This gives the audience a unique perspective to look at.

Instead of the typical life story, they summon Alexander to the modern era to help win a secret war in Japan. During the story, with some of his backstory shown through exposition, but the series tend to focus on Alexander's concept of kingship and war. This is interesting as *Reign: The Conqueror* dealt with Alexander as a philosophical yet monstrous military leader, but *Fate/Zero*'s version is Alexander the king dealing with his responsibilities to his people and to himself. In addition, to be ferociously powerful, nearly unstoppable in battle. One other aspect that sets this Alexander apart from others is his appearance. Alexander is seen as a typically as a man with average height, fair skin and no facial hair, *Fate/Zero*'s Alexander is immensely tall with a darker skin tone, red hair and a full beard. The analysis of these series' is important in that it is from the

perspective of a non-Western but also from an Eastern culture, that has no ancient connections to Alexander such as India. India itself has done many adaptations of Alexander.

The most recent Indian adaptation, *Porus*, tells the story of Alexander from the viewpoint of a people whose ancestors had many interactions with him in the past. The live action series splits the viewpoint between Alexander and Porus ultimately leading to their battles in Asia Minor. Like many of the previous Western films, the series depicts the life of Alexander from his rise to kingship as well as his conquests in Persia. The primary difference here is that this series skews his character as a villain depicting his ruthlessness and ego as his primary character traits. For comparison, they make Porus a hero, morally right in his actions and dedicated to stopping Alexander's invasion. An interesting choice of the series is to make Alexander regret his personal philosophies and his choices in life on his deathbed in favor of Porus's way of thinking.

These however are not the only adaptations of Alexander but have been some of the most detailed. On the 1986 album *Somewhere in Time* by Iron Maiden there was a track called "Alexander the Great" released. At 8 minutes and 35 seconds, this lengthy track incorporates the history of Alexander accompanied by a difficult musical arrangement making it one of the only songs the band has never performed live in its 32 years.¹³⁵ Drummer Nicko McBrain has stated that he would like to include this song in their set lists for future performances.¹³⁶ Another more recent image of Alexander

¹³⁵ Colothan, Scott. "Nicko McBrain Wants Iron Maiden to Play 'Alexander The Great' Live One Day." *Planet Rock*. Planet Rock, June 5, 2018. <https://www.planetrock.com/news/rock-news/nicko-mcbrain-wants-iron-maiden-to-play-alexander-the-great-live-one-day/>

¹³⁶ Colothan, Scott. "Nicko McBrain Wants Iron Maiden to Play 'Alexander The Great' Live One Day." *Planet Rock*.

appeared on the YouTube channel *Epic Rap Battles*. *Epic Rap Battles* pits historical and sometimes fictional characters in a rap battle to see who is better. Alexander the Great is shown opposite Ivan the Terrible detailing his many conquests and ending with Ivan admitting defeat and poisoning Alexander.¹³⁷ As of this writing, it has 43 million views and counting. This continued interest in Alexander shows the massive impact that his actions still influence modern audiences.

These adaptations provide different images of Alexander for their audiences. For the most part these stories hit the typical story beats of his life including Philip's death leading to his rise in power, his battles with Darius III and the eventual invasion of India. Western adaptations seem to create this image of a tragic figure whose path to greatness stopped by his death. Eastern adaptations focus more on his way of thinking, how his view of the world affects him and the people he encounters. All of these emphasize his military prowess some more than others but make it clear that he was a military commander to be feared who was in the fore front of the battles, leading the charge with his mighty cavalry. In addition, because his military campaigns affected so many areas there is still debate on the morality of his actions as well as his philosophy. Therefore, it is important to continue to study and develop these images of Alexander as well as how creative liberties can affect the historical viewpoint of people and events.

¹³⁷ "Alexander the Great vs. Ivan the Terrible." Epic Rap Battles of History. YouTube, July 12, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVbH1BVXyWY>.

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