



Alexander the Great

Robin Lane Fox

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From award-winning historian Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* searches through the mass of conflicting evidence and legend to focus on Alexander as a man of his own time.

Tough, resolute, fearless, Alexander was a born warrior and ruler of passionate ambition who understood the intense adventure of conquest and of the unknown. When he died in 323 BC aged thirty-two, his vast empire comprised more than two million square miles, spanning from Greece to India.

His achievements were unparalleled - he had excelled as leader to his men, founded eighteen new cities and stamped the face of Greek culture on the ancient East. The myth he created is as potent today as it was in the ancient world.

Combining historical scholarship and acute psychological insight, *Alexander the Great* brings this colossal figure vividly to life.

'So enjoyable and well-written ... Fox's book became my main guide through Alexander's amazing story'
Oliver Stone, director of *Alexander*

'I do not know which to admire most, his vast erudition or his imaginative grasp of so remote and complicated a period and such a complex personality'
Cyril Connolly, *Sunday Times*

'An achievement of Alexandrian proportions'
New Statesman

Robin Lane Fox was the main historical advisor to Oliver Stone on his film *Alexander*, and took part in many of its most dramatic re-enactments. His books include *The Classical World: An Epic History of Greece and Rome*, *The Unauthorised Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible*, *Travelling Heroes: Greeks and their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer* and *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine*.

Alexander the Great Details

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From Reader Review Alexander the Great for online ebook

Hesamul Haque says

I took this book not exactly having in mind to know about the great adventures of the Alexander the Great but to understand the way how people used to live and their cultures at such an ancient time and how they follow their King's order. But I am glad that I chose to read a biography of Alexander, Alexander was a great leader, fearless, powerful, optimistic, respecting women and I also found him introvert at times and highly dedicated towards his work.

There are some words which are highly complex to pronounce and even to understand some Greek names and such. But I am happy to have read this book.

ActionScientist says

Having attended a private Christian church school, people have had occasion to ask me whether I am a Christian or not. My current response is along these lines: 'no more or less that I am an Alexandrian, they both claimed to sons of big chief gods, though neither had the significant symbolic and educational benefit of being impressionable kids when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the Moon, so who knows what god meant to each of them and what stories they made up about their subjective experience of their blazing temporal lobes all those thousands of years ago'.

One of the most interesting things I learned from the book was the age of many in his army by the end their incredible journey and giant adventure .. many of the warriors were over 60-years old by then, having first been brought together by Alexander's father. It wasn't about Alexander, but rather the incredible strength and endurance of the individuals making up that Only Once Ever army. As a queen bee, he was only as good as his hive.

Michael Finocchiaro says

This is a classic biography by the incredible Robin Lane Fox (I am trying to get through his latest Augustine now!) about Alexandre the Great. The fruit of years of research, this book dives into mountains of archeological research to portray this young conqueror of the known world who died too young to see his empire survive even a single generation. Any yet, someone who left his hand on the world from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and beyond. A moving tale and incredibly factual, it is the best book I have ever found about this incredible figure in history. That being said, it was published back in 1975 and I ignore whether there are more recent biographies that reveal more details or missing information that has resulted from the last 40 years of archaeological research into Alexandre the Great. I would certainly welcome suggestions of such in the comments to this review.

Adam says

Early on in this EXCELLENT book, the author makes it clear that no contemporary accounts of Alexander's life exist. All that the historian can rely on is material written long after Alexander's death, and much of it biased. Despite this, Lane Fox does his best to try to separate the wheat from the chaff in order to produce a

plausible biography of one of the world's military and political geniuses.

This wonderfully written book traces Alexander's life from Macedonia to India and back to Babylon. It is highly readable, and a great achievement.

Now, I shall tackle Napoleon Bonaparte's life!

Monty Milne says

Alexander is surely the only world-conquering hero who remains an attractive personality even under the close and fair minded scrutiny of a genius like Lane-Fox. The ruthlessness, the purges, murderous fits of drunken temper, the war crimes (by today's standards) - none are glossed over. But the mesmeric power of his personality still exerts a fascination, even at this distance in time. Perhaps it is because one senses Alexander's love for those who served with him (and sometimes even those he conquered) was genuine. Bonaparte never shed tears of remorse for those who died in his cause, and was in every point of comparison a far lesser man than Alexander.

I found this a profoundly moving and fascinating book, but it is not the one to go to first. It presumes a reasonable grounding in the ancient world, and it is certainly not the kind of book you can skim or read quickly: the text reminded me of a fine old vintage Burgundy of the type the author would be accustomed to drink at High Table in New College Oxford - dense, complex, robust, beautifully structured, fragrant - a delightful experience taken in steady appreciative sips, but if taken too quickly in large amounts, causing headaches, amnesia, and eventual unconsciousness.

Cliff Ward says

Robin Lane Fox has the very rare talent of epic storyteller, yet combined with a lifetime of dedication to historical studies. In the case of the subject of this book, Alexander the Great happens to be his most studied and focused area.

The descriptions of Alexander's early life, the political intrigues of the Macedonian court, his tutoring by Aristotle, and his fascination with Achilles and the stories of Homer all shine through.

When we get into the 'revenge' that Macedons and Greeks need to pay the Persians, the story is fast running and vivid. We can almost feel we are there on those dusty plains with Alexander charging on his famous horse Bucephalus, the steady march of the infantry with their porcupine formations, and the utter disbelief of the Persian king Darius as he needs to turn his golden chariot around and flee the battlefield.

Constantly the authors breath and depth of knowledge shines through and his strong intention to be impartial to the opposing sides bearing in mind only Greek derived sources exist. Alexander the warrior, Alexander the politician, Alexander the God, just about every aspect of his life is covered.

Oh, but the maps at least in the paperback are terrible! It hardly matters in the modern day of the internet though and I found I wanted to constantly look up and find other sources amid the mountain of new facts I was discovering!

Elena says

Recensione per il blog *Alessandro III di Macedonia* su WordPress

Per chi, come me, è interessato alla storia di Alessandro Magno, questo libro è un must. Il lavoro fatto da Fox è notevole e ripercorre tutta la vita di questa affascinante figura storica che non verrà mai dimenticata.

Stephanie says

DNF for now

Greg James says

If you want to know anything and everything about Alexander the Great, then this book is for you. Robin Lane Fox examines every aspect of the life of Alexander and crafts an extremely detailed and dense history of the man and his conquests. While it can sometimes be dry, the book as a whole is wonderful for students of history like myself. This book is not for the casually interested however.

My only criticism is Fox's description of Alexander's battle strategy, which I found to be a mistake. Alexander utilized the "hammer and anvil" strategy in most of his battles, with the phalanx acting as the anvil, holding the enemy in place, while the cavalry acted as the hammer, swinging around the flanks and smashing into the rear to break the enemy line. Fox wrote that cavalry broke the infantry first and then the phalanx marched over the disorganized enemy troops. Not a serious problem, as Fox is not a military historian, but cavalry has never been used to break unweakened infantry lines, it would be suicide.

Patricia says

Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great* has inspired me to compile my own suggested list of "Best History Books" because that is the best verdict I can give of this work. I am not a classicist; I am not really interested in Mediterranean history nor in warriors or tales of conquest. I am a sinologist, symbolist, and art historian, and as a result, thought I would quickly page through this tome (568 pages of tiny paperback print) looking for references of the Greek artists and artisans from Alexander's time whose descendants are credited with having influenced early Buddhist (Gandharan) iconography. What I found was a story so rich, so well told, so well researched with the sharpest of eyes and common sense that questioned tradition, that I was hooked from the first chapter.

I would assume that anyone reading this review also loves history and probably already knows the story of Alexander the Great, but if you haven't read this history, you aren't finished. Fox has constructed his life of Alexander from all the known sources, but questions each so thoroughly, asking whether it sounds reasonable or not, could there have been motivating factors that would have caused this interpretation of this event, and who was the author, and then (unlike many others), explaining his personal interpretation based on the context, historical facts, motivational factors, etc. that I finally understood all those discussions from that almost long-forgotten University course I took on the philosophy of history.

This is, as the dust jacket tells us, "a magnificent, compelling epic". The author's "vast erudition...exact scholarship...imaginative grasp of so remote and complicated a period and such a complex personality" is--

and I use this word carefully--riveting. I read late into the night for several days almost unable to put this volume down until I needed a break from the sheer depth and weight of the text.

I found my answer in the last chapter, which is the single best essay I have found to date of Alexander's gift to the world--the liveliest political culture in the world: Greek culture, trade, language, art, upbringing, aspirations--"the embers of Hellenism".

Lys says

Lane Fox è universalmente riconosciuto come il maggior esperto di Alessandro Magno vivente, la sua passione per questo personaggio e la sua preparazione storica sono evidenti in ogni singola pagina di questa biografia.

Un saggio equilibrato e ben fondato, scritto in maniera vivace e accattivante. Consigliatissimo.

Andrew says

Not your average biography. It's easy to get lost in the multitude of names, ancient places, and the digressions of the author. Nonetheless, it's worth the google searches and close reading to stick with this book. The author largely sticks to what is known of Alexander, and when there are competing sources, gives a detailed analysis and conclusion of what the most likely outcome was.

Helpfully, the author details Alexander's fighting style, weapons, and army companies near the start. This background allowed a greater understanding of the brilliance behind Alexander's strategy.

I doubt there's a more detailed book on Alexander out there. If you can keep the names and places straight, and not get lost in the digressions, this is the authoritative book on Alexander the Great. Although I had to slog through some portions, I'd recommend it to anyone interested in classical history, or curious about the man behind the legend.

Bruce says

This is a strong biography, interesting in itself and also essential to understanding 4th century BC classical history. The Hellenistic Age makes little sense without knowledge of who Alexander was and what he did. Fox does a good job in aiding one's understanding.

David K. Lemons says

I still have this fantastic biography on my shelves at home. It was the first book I read when I first arrived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, to work for Aramco. We were lucky to have landed in such a place to work for the next 10 years. Their library was as complete as you could hope for in such a place.

I had already become a devoted Hellenophile. Throughout my years in the Middle East--Iran, Arabia, Algeria, and Greece (Near East) I had accumulated a train of experiences that held onto me like the tentacles

of a gentle octopus, un-constraining, un-suffocating—just attached and always tugging me away from other horizons such as the Orient, India, South America, at least for living and working in those places.

So, Robin Lane Fox's Alexander underpinned a lot of what I know and feel about the Middle East and Western Civilization. I would say that if you truly want to understand Western Civilization from its first foundations, you have to know the story of Jesus of Nazareth, Alexander the Great and what formed him and the life and death of Julius Caesar—a few of the pivotal individuals from whom we have descended today. (Currently, in America at any rate, our leaders and culture seem to be lost in a deep, dark cave with no reference to, even ignorance of, our ancient past.)

Fox's Alexander is so well written, so well illustrated with maps of battles and so well contextualized that I cannot imagine a better biography being written of Alexander without new discoveries in historical texts and archaeology that would throw fresh light on the exploits of him and his Macedonians. I would like to know, for example, more about his impact on the history of India and China, or more on how his Ptolemaic heirs affected the development of Judaism and Christianity, how his stated intentions to dip down into Arabia Felix with his star admiral, Nearchus, affected the much later development of the Prophet Mohammed's vision for the spread of Islam.

Having lived in Persia under the last Shah, I felt that Fox depicted well Alexander's respect for the country and the Persian King Darius and his desire not to destroy the king or the country but to absorb it like a giant snake as he did with most of his conquests. It is very hard to have known the Persians without loving them, which I think he did. His example of understanding the cultures he conquered and turning their existing rulers and traditions into instruments of rule must have also influenced wise leaders from the Apostles to the victors of the Second World War.

Caroline says

Alexander has always been a fascinating figure to me. Modern society likes to compare him to Hitler and focus on the number of deaths involved in his conquest of the Persian Empire, but you just can't retrospectively judge figures from history with modern morals and ethics. Whatever else he was, Alexander was probably the greatest conqueror, general and explorer in history - to do all he did by the age of 32 is astonishing. One can only imagine what he might have achieved had he lived.

This isn't the easiest book to read - it presumes a certain level of knowledge about the world of the Greek Mediterranean, and Lane Fox's sentences do have a tendency to run on, but for the most part he writes clearly and lucidly. He really succeeds in bringing the world of Alexander to life, but he never veers off into imagination or speculation - he constantly reminds readers of how little there is left, how much is still unknown. I would have preferred less emphasis on the battles and more on the day-to-day life, but that's a small criticism. One gets little sense of the character of Alexander or Hephaisstion or other of Alexander's Companions, but with so little documentary evidence and at such a great remove in history it would be dishonest of any historian to pretend to such knowledge.