

# MAKING ALEXANDER 'GREAT' (OR NOT SO GREAT) IN HAMMOND'S AND BOSWORTH'S SCHOLARLY BIOGRAPHIES\*

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**ABSTRACT:** I explore how the different Alexanders have been created in the modern academic field and what we can learn from it. The focus of this paper is on how scholars produce their narratives by using the ancient source material. As my primary material for this study, I have chosen two famous critical scholarly biographies: Hammond's *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* and Bosworth's *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*. We can see how the two views; benign and cynical views are constructed in scholarly narratives. The narratives on Alexander's action are promoting certain moralistic views of imperialism and war.

**KEYWORDS:** Alexander the Great, scholarly biography, Getae, Siege of Tyre, Burning of Persepolis, Death of Parmenio

From the very beginning of the modern historiography the positive and negative, idealising and anti-idealising, praising and critical images of Alexander the III of Macedon, also known as Alexander the Great, existed. Already in the works of Enlightenment there were contrasting images of Alexander. This comes evident in Pierre Briant's monumental study *The First European – A history of Alexander in the Age of Empire* (2017). Briant pinpointed that Montesquieu's *l'Esprit des Lois* (1748) offered influential positive/idealising image of Alexander's imperialism while Sainte-Croix's *Examen critique de anciens historiens d'Alexandre le Grand* (first edition 1771, second edition 1804) represented the opposite viewpoint offering critical and negative image of the Macedonian imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes

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\* I wish to express my deep respect and recognition of the significant contribution of Nicholas Geoffrey Lemprière Hammond and Albert Brian Bosworth to the field. The purpose of this paper is NOT to undermine the great scholarly work that Hammond and Bosworth have done for research on Alexander.

<sup>2</sup> For Sainte-Croix's critique of Montesquieu's theories and benign views of Alexander, see Briant 2017: 227-236. Besides these two there were several other authors who composed their works on the Macedonian world-conqueror in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, Johan Gustav Droysen's *Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen* (Droysen

the debate over the nature of historical Alexander have been emotionally strong. Example of this debate were carried only a few years ago. In 1999, the *Ancient History Bulletin* published Ian Worthington's provocative article "How "Great" was Alexander?" (Worthington 1999) in which Worthington questioned the greatness of Alexander's career and accomplishments. In response, Frank Holt wrote an article entitled "Alexander the Great Today: In the Interests of Historical Accuracy?" and criticised some of Worthington's arguments and accused him of poor interpretation of the sources. According to Holt, Worthington had accused Alexander of crimes which he could not be proven guilty of. In the final paragraph of the article Holt sounded a warning for all Alexander scholars:

"The strong inclination today to de-heroize Alexander has contributed to a new consensus about the king that may be making us careless. Tarn's ideas, in as much as they arose from a prejudiced reading of the sources, have rightly been rejected; but backlash begun so well by Badian has perhaps led us to a new extreme orthodoxy that too, runs counter to the interest of historical accuracy" (Holt 1999: 117).

In this passage Holt was referring to the two divergent views on Alexander. This division of views in the Anglo-American scholarship of the twentieth century had been recognized by some other modern-day scholars too. Stanley M. Burstein pointed out this division in 1997 when he published a summary of the scholarship of the Hellenistic Age in *Ancient History: Recent Work & New Directions*.<sup>3</sup> According to Burstein, there was first the 'benign' view of Alexander, which governed scholarship for much of the first half of the twentieth century. According to this view, Alexander was a visionary statesman and a great leader who rose above racism and national prejudices. The famous representative of that outlook was Sir William Tarn (1869-1957).<sup>4</sup> Later, it was Nicholas G. L. Hammond (1907-2001) who strongly promoted this idealistic portrayal of Alexander. On the other hand, as Burstein further explains, the most dominant representative of the opposite view was Ernest Badian (1925-2011). In a series of articles in the late 1950s and mid 1960s he presented a 'tough-minded' Alexander

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1833 [1877<sup>2</sup>]) and its idealising image of Alexander's reign was also influential work. Cf. Wiesehöfer 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Burstein 1997: 40-43. For the German, Anglo-American, French scholarship on Alexander composed during the period from the aftermath of World War I to the Cold War, see Bichler 2018. In fact, Bicher 2018: 668 states that idealising tendencies dominated most of the portrayals of Alexander written by the scholars during this period.

<sup>4</sup> See Tarn 1948. Many of Tarn's ideas were rejected in later Alexander studies. Holt 1999: 111-112, described as Tarn's one fault his predilection to pardon Alexander's sins by choosing his sources uncritically and persuading his readers to see only good in his hero. See Mendoza's contribution to this volume.

to set against the idealised interpretations of Tarn.<sup>5</sup> Badian's Alexander was as a ruthless politician whose aim was to achieve autocracy and glory through conquest. As Burstein states, the recent contemporary representative of this view has been A. B. Bosworth (1942-2014).<sup>6</sup>

How is it possible that scholars who use the same body of evidence construct such a different picture of Alexander? The purpose of the present paper is not to claim who is right concerning the trustworthiness of the accounts on Alexander, or in finding 'historical facts' for the Alexander interpretation, but to examine how the different views on Alexander have been created and promoted in scholarly biographies.

According to Burstein, the reason for the division among scholars lies in their differing attitudes to the ancient authors. In other words, they disagreed on the reliability of different authors. Tarn and Hammond relied on Arrian as the most 'trustworthy' source. On the other hand, Badian and Bosworth were strongly critical of Arrian and relied more on 'vulgate' sources, such as Curtius and Diodorus. In Holt's opinion, Bosworth and Worthington produced their negative Alexander picture at the expense of historical accuracy, asserting the worst about Alexander based on inclination rather than evidence.<sup>7</sup> However, I will argue in this article that the big differences between these two 'views' are not only a result of the fact that Hammond often follows different sources than Bosworth and vice versa (Burstein) or that the scholars did not care enough about historical accuracy (Holt). Rather more likely, differences occur because Hammond and Bosworth are representatives of different value-systems; they see Alexander's reign from different moral perspective. The image of Alexander they create reflect their personal views on military conquest, imperialism, and one-man rule. Or at least their works construct distinctive images of these concepts.

The focus of this paper is on how scholars produce their narratives, different 'Alexanders', by using the ancient source material. For this goal, I have systematically read through a large quantity of Alexander biographies. However, in this current article I have decided to follow two different lines of argumentation. As my primary material for this study I have chosen two famous critical scholarly biographies of Alexander from the works of Hammond and Bosworth: Hammond's *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (1980) and

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<sup>5</sup> As is well known, Badian attacked W. Tarn's idealistic Alexander interpretation in his two articles Badian 1958b; 1958c. Badian's critical view of Alexander can also be read from his article 'Alexander the Great and the Loneliness of Power': Badian 1962. Badian's *Collected Papers on Alexander the Great*, containing articles published in the years 1958-2007, has been published (Badian 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Both N. G. L. Hammond and A. B. Bosworth have written various articles concerning the reign of Alexander the Great and the history of the Macedonian empire. See for example Hammond 1989; 1993; 1997; Bosworth 1980a; 1995; 1988a; 1996a.

<sup>7</sup> Holt 1999: 111-112.

Bosworth's *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (1988b). These studies can be regarded as one of the most influential Alexander biographies which already Burstein mentioned as recent representatives of the two divergent views. Both of these monographs claim to give an accurate description based on the best sources available. They treat Alexander's life and career as statesman and military commander in chronological order and therefore deal with much the same episodes in the career of the Macedonian king. Above all, they represent the two opposing interpretations: the idealised and praising picture of Alexander and the anti-idealising and cynical one. This dichotomy prevailed in the texts of the ancient authors as well.<sup>8</sup> In the ancient texts Alexander could be both praised as the Greek cultural hero of the Second Sophistic and strongly criticised in the Roman philosophers as the despot whose inclination to anger and wine destroyed his relationship between his Macedonian staff.<sup>9</sup> To show that Hammond's and Bosworth's interpretations are not extraordinary in their argumentation, I shall also discuss some more recent studies for comparison.<sup>10</sup>

I will discuss these studies by taking up how certain specific cases are being dealt with in the scholarly narratives. Since it is unnecessary here to treat all the known episodes of the reign of Alexander in one article, I have selected four episodes and I will analyse these by closely reading how Hammond and Bosworth build their respective narratives. These events are as follows: first, Alexander's military expedition against the Getae; second, the siege of Tyre and its interpretations; third, the divergent images of the destruction of Persepolis and the burning of the palace; and finally, the death of Parmenio.

I will pay attention to the sources the scholars used and the elements in that information that are regarded as true or false. What particular terms and concepts are chosen by the scholars and how do they assign meanings to Alexander's reign? How do the scholars assess the incidents that took place and on what basis do they make their moralizing judgements concerning Alexander? It has been observed more than once that we all whether professional historians, or not create/invent the Alexander of our dreams –or nightmares. When Paul Cartledge discussed the different Alexander traditions that had developed since Antiquity, he stated: 'There are not one but many Alexanders, because every historian, or anyone seriously interested in him, creates an Alexander of her or

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Briant 2015: 65.

<sup>9</sup> As an example of the two extreme views of Alexander in antiquity see Plu. *Mor.* 335f; Sen. *Cl.* 1.25.1. For a reception of Alexander in the Roman world, see Spencer 2002; Peltonen 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The list of published studies on Alexander's career is long and rich. Cf. Bichler 2018; Bowden 2014. In this study I especially deal with works composed in the twenty-first century: Cartledge 2004; Heckel 2008; Freeman 2011; Gabriel 2015.

his own.<sup>11</sup> In this study, I explore how the different Alexanders have been created in the academic field and what we can learn from it.

## I. ALEXANDER AND THE GETAE

Alexander's military expedition against the Thracian Getic tribes was part of his Balkan campaign in the year 335 BCE. This took place six months after Alexander was crowned king of Macedonia, succeeding his father, Philip. The importance of the expedition rests on the fact that it gives an image of the early development of Alexander's reign and of what kind of military commander and leader Alexander was at this early stage of his reign.

Arrian's *Anabasis* is the only remaining source for the Balkan campaign and in this respect it differs from all the episodes below. Both Hammond and Bosworth consider the account reliable and follow its main lines in detail.<sup>12</sup> However, their viewpoints and interpretations differ crucially. Bosworth begins his narrative:

“The Getae peoples of the northern Danubian plain had gathered by the riverside, hoping to deter the invader from crossing. That was a mistake. Alexander took their appearance as a challenge – and an opportunity to display the versatility of his army”.<sup>13</sup>

Bosworth has chosen to describe the event from the perspective of the Getae. He calls Alexander's army the *invader* and the gathering of the Getae a *mistake*. In his narrative Bosworth does not pay attention to the armed forces of the Getae. He does not mention the numbers given in Arrian concerning the strength of the Getic army (4,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry).<sup>14</sup> Instead he uses the term *peoples*, giving the impression that the operation was carried out against the helpless inhabitants of the land instead of an offensive army. This impression is emphasized when the narrative continues:

“They [Alexander's army] had crossed into the rich corn land, and the king proceeded to ravage it; the sarisa blades of the phalanx, held horizontally and diagonally, made havoc of the fresh harvest. The unfortunate Getae kept their distance, first retreating to a lightly fortified town and then withdrawing their entire population beyond the cultivated area. They preserved themselves, but

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<sup>11</sup> Cartledge 2004: 21. The statement had previously been quoted by Wilcken 1967: 29.

<sup>12</sup> Arr. *An.* 2.3.5-4.5.

<sup>13</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 30.

<sup>14</sup> Arr. *An.* 1.3.5.

their town was looted and then destroyed. Alexander withdrew to the river, piously sacrificed to Zeus, Heracles and the Danube itself, and transported his army unscathed back to camp".<sup>15</sup>

Here Alexander is the man who decides to *ravage the rich corn land*, in other words destroys the Getae's means of earning a living. Now Bosworth makes it clear for the reader that the military act was directed against the whole nation, including women and children, and its consequence was that the whole nation lost both property and dwelling places:

"It was a gratuitous act of terrorism on a helpless people, but it demonstrated yet again the efficiency and ruthlessness of the invaders and proved that the Danube was no defense against them".<sup>16</sup>

Bosworth takes a moralistic tone and calls the military expedition a *gratuitous act of terrorism*, a term loaded with negative connotations. Describing the operation's *efficiency* he also uses the word *ruthlessness*. In doing so he wants to make sure that the reader will reconsider the ethical meaning of the incident. At the same time, he openly questions the heroic stance of Alexander. In this passage Alexander is the evil one, while the Getae are not dangerous and cruel enemies but *helpless people*. He draws a scene where the morally corrupt Alexander and his troops meet the poorly equipped army of a primitive people. This impression is supported by the fact he does not mention the number of Getic troops mentioned in the source.

In contrast, Hammond creates an opposite impression of the incident:

"The fact that the Getae held the far bank with a force estimated at 4,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry did not deter him".<sup>17</sup>

Here Hammond presents the size of the Getic army given by Arrian and builds an impression of a real, threatening army almost as big as Alexander's waiting in position. In Hammond's construction the Getae army forms a great military threat and challenge to Alexander and the Macedonian troops. At the same time, Alexander's courage is presented in a positive way. Alexander is a leader who does not fear or panic in the face of a considerable military threat. Later in his narrative Hammond calls the Getae an *enemy* without making any reference to the civilian population:

"Alexander plundered and razed the town, entrusted the booty to two of his brigadiers, sacrificed on the river bank to Zeus the Saviour, Heracles and the

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<sup>15</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 30.

<sup>16</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 30.

<sup>17</sup> Hammond 1980: 47.

river-god, Ister, for their safe crossing, and returned without the loss of a single man to his main body on the south bank”.<sup>18</sup>

Hammond’s focus is the successful military campaign and he does not express any negative ethical judgements. In Hammond’s view, the Getic people were not Alexander’s target. However, Alexander’s strategic genius and military courage are presented in the words *without the loss of a single man*. Compared with Bosworth’s, Hammond’s overall picture of Alexander is not only positive but even laudatory.

In accordance with Hammond, Freeman (2011) does not present Alexander’s expedition as a terrorist action. Although Freeman does not praise Alexander for his military efforts, there is no negative tone in his narrative. Still, he points out one humane aspect of Alexander that Hammond did not bring forth: “He [Alexander] had no desire to chase the Getae refugees further because his point had been made”.<sup>19</sup> Heckel (2008) calls the operation ‘a show of force’ and he considers it similar to the operation that Alexander later carried out against the Scythians in 329 BCE. According to Heckel, in both operations there was no thought of conquest and these campaigns were strictly pre-emptive.<sup>20</sup> Gabriel (2015) follows explicitly Bosworth’s narrative by referring to his study, and calling the attack as “gratuitous act of terrorism”.<sup>21</sup>

If a scholar’s intention is to analyse the success of a military operation from the point of view of the victorious army, then he must underline certain aspects in the source material. On the other hand, when a scholar aims to present a narrative from the angle of the defeated army, he chooses to stress other parts of the sources. Here we see how Hammond highlights Alexander’s genius as a military commander, while Bosworth wants to remind his readers of the ethical aspects of warfare. Hammond and Bosworth present the Getae episode from different angles, and their chosen angle also has an impact on their image of Alexander. The ancient source, the account of Arrian, is like wax which can be shaped to serve hugely different interpretations. On other words, their narratives offer idealising and anti-idealising image of war of conquest.

## II. SIEGE OF TYRE

Alexander’s military operation against the city of Tyre in the year 332 BCE was one of the biggest undertakings of his Persian campaign. The siege lasted

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<sup>18</sup> Hammond 1980: 47.

<sup>19</sup> Freeman 2011: 53-55.

<sup>20</sup> Heckel 2008: 28, 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel 2015: 27.

seven months and it ended in victory for the Macedonians. This episode is used by modern scholars to draw a picture of Alexander as a great commander of his army and a skilled statesman.

In all the ancient texts the direct cause of the siege derives from the negotiations between Alexander and the envoys of the city. Alexander wishes to go to the city and offer a sacrifice to the city's patron god, Melqart/Heracles. The envoys refuse and ask Alexander to conduct his sacrifice in another temple outside the main city. This response angers Alexander and he decides to launch the military operation against the city. This is the way the episode is described in the texts of Diodorus, Curtius and Arrian.<sup>22</sup>

Bosworth and Hammond create an overall picture of the siege and they both analyse and judge Alexander's decisions and leadership in the Tyre campaign. Bosworth starts with criticism:

“He dismissed the ambassadors in anger and prepared to lay siege to the island city. Strategically this was unnecessary. Tyre, like Celanae, could have been left supervised by a garrison on the mainland and held in check by her neighbours' enmity. Eventually she would have to make her peace with the invader. But Alexander's sovereignty had been frontally challenged and he was not prepared to leave the contumacy unpunished. He would sacrifice to Melqart whatever the cost”.<sup>23</sup>

Bosworth makes an effort to give reasons why the siege was *unnecessary*. It was all about Alexander's wounded honour. Bosworth's Alexander has no rational or reasonable motives to start the siege. Instead, Alexander is a reckless leader who does not care about human or material loss. The only thing he is interested in is the punishment of the Tyrian people, who had given him such a disdainful answer.

Hammond's interpretation is quite different:

“Alexander explained to his officers why it was necessary to undertake the Herculean task of capturing Tyre. In fact it cost him some seven months. But it was time well spent. His strategic concept was correct: to consolidate a base of operations which included Greece and the Aegean as well as the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard, before he embarked on a major campaign against Persia”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The descriptions of Diodorus, Curtius and Arrian of the siege are for the most part similar, even though in some details they differ. Curt. 4.2.1-4.4.21; Arr. *An.* 2.15.6-2.24.6; D. S. 17.40.2-17; 17.46.6.

<sup>23</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 65.

<sup>24</sup> Hammond 1980: 112.



In his narrative Hammond does not mention Alexander's anger, and thus he clearly neglects ancient evidence to be found in Diodorus (17.40.2-3.) and Curtius (4.1-5.). Even the most 'favourable' Alexander historian, Arrian, mentions it (2.16.8). In contrast to these authors, Hammond builds an image in which Alexander's decision is due only to his calculations. The decision to launch the siege is *correct* and the seven-month waiting period is *time well spent*. Hammond's Alexander is a rational leader who explains to his generals why this operation has to be carried out. This is totally the opposite of Bosworth's text, where Alexander is a ruthless warlord who does not care about his staff.

In the sources we find different figures regarding the Tyrian losses. Curtius and Diodorus give 6,000 Tyrian dead in the final assault. They also say that after the assault Alexander crucified 2,000 Tyrians on the shore.<sup>25</sup> Arrian says that 8,000 died in the assault without mentioning the crucifixions.<sup>26</sup>

The way the scholars choose to interpret these numbers shows once again their tendency and how they approach Alexander's war of conquest. Bosworth includes the report of the crucifixion of 2,000 Tyrians. According to Bosworth, it was a *grim warning of the futility of resisting the conqueror*.<sup>27</sup> Hammond sees it differently. He sees the crucifixions as *improbable* and compares their plausibility to the reports of marine monsters and omens during the siege.<sup>28</sup>

Arrian and Diodorus report that Alexander sacrificed to Melqart/Heracles in the temple after the siege.<sup>29</sup> Bosworth gives a gloomy meaning to this incident:

"It was a copy of his thank-offering at Soli for recovery from his illness, but this timetheceremonycommemoratedmassslaughterandenslavementandMelqart received a savagely ironical dedication from his self-proclaimed descendant".<sup>30</sup>

Bosworth calls the whole operation a *mass slaughter*. Religion is a pretence for Alexander. In this context his prominent motives are hypocrisy and savagery. Bosworth's study encourages readers to abandon their benign thoughts about Alexander and any idealized or heroic images. For Hammond, on the other hand, the incident contains nothing morally wrong or dubious. Alexander asked the Tyrian envoys for permission to offer a sacrifice in the city and after the siege he finally did what he wanted.<sup>31</sup>

In the majority of studies, the siege of Tyre has been seen as a strategically important operation. Heckel (2008) and Freeman (2011) both present Alexander's

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<sup>25</sup> Curt. 4.4.16-17; D.S. 17.46.4.

<sup>26</sup> Arr. An. 2.24.4.

<sup>27</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 67.

<sup>28</sup> Hammond 1980: 113.

<sup>29</sup> Arr. An. 2.24.6; D. S. 17.46.6.

<sup>30</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 67.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond 1980: 116.

anger and the crucifixion of 2,000 Tyrians but they do not call into question Alexander’s motives and leadership. Heckel (2008) considers the operation as part of Alexander’s plan to destroy Persian naval power by seizing the ports of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean and the operation itself as a “strategic necessity”. Paul Cartledge (2004), also in line with Hammond, calls the siege a masterpiece of Alexander’s leadership which proves the king’s strategic genius. In contrast, for Ian Worthington (1999) the siege of Tyre represents a prime example of how Alexander’s various sieges were often lengthy, costly and questionable. According to Worthington, the siege was “not necessary” and took place purely because of the king’s personal pride (affronted ego) and regardless of the cost in time and manpower. Similarly, Gabriel (2015) writes: “Alexander’s decision to reduce Tyre and punish its people was produced by his personal rage at having his will thwarted, and not any military calculus”.<sup>32</sup> Here Worthington and Gabriel both more or less follow Bosworth’s interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

Hammond and Bosworth interpret the scene differently and this is not just because they often follow particular sources. In fact, the ancient authors do not make any moral accusations or flattering remarks with regard to the political significance of the siege of Tyre.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, both Hammond and Bosworth express strong judgements –respectively positive and negative– on the value of and ‘justification’ for the military operation. Hammond’s narrative emphatically praises Alexander’s strategic action as formidable, while Bosworth uses the episode to highlight how wretched and irresponsible a leader Alexander was. The two scholars’ goals radically influence the way their narratives are constructed in order to support their divergent interpretations of the nature of Alexander’s leadership.

### III. CAPTURE OF PERSEPOLIS AND BURNING OF THE PALACE

The third event under examination is the capture of Persepolis and burning of its palace. This occurred in 330 BCE. The event is connected to the overall picture of Alexander’s Persian campaign. The city of Persepolis itself had great symbolic value as the location of the Persian Achaemenid court.

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<sup>32</sup> Gabriel 2015: 90.

<sup>33</sup> See Worthington 1999: 39-55; Cartledge 2004: 118-119, 147-148; Heckel 2008: 65-68; Freeman 2011: 129-138.

<sup>34</sup> It is true that according to Curtius Alexander’s anger (*ira*) towards the Tyrian envoys is presented as avoidable behavior. In addition, Curtius calls the crucifixion of 2,000 Tyrians an “awful spectacle” (*triste spectaculum*), which was motivated by the king’s anger (*ira regis*). Cf. Curt. 4.2.5; 4.4.17. However, Curtius’s narrative does not accuse Alexander of bad policy or deny the importance of the military operation.

The ancient sources give conflicting accounts of the episode. According to Diodorus and Curtius, large numbers of inhabitants were killed and some were enslaved when the Macedonians arrived in the city.<sup>35</sup> Both sources describe how the Macedonians savagely plundered and destroyed the property of the inhabitants and barbarously killed civilians. According to Diodorus and Curtius, the burning of the palace was not a part of well-planned strategy but an imprudent and hasty action that took place during a banquet. In this tradition, Alexander, who was drunk, gave his approval to the famous Athenian courtesan Thais, who took up a torch and set the palace on fire.<sup>36</sup>

Arrian's account is quite different. He does not mention anything about the Macedonians' plundering or killing of the inhabitants of Persepolis. According to Arrian, Alexander quickly launched the operation and prevented the fleeing army of the Persians from taking the riches of the city. The burning of the palace/city is presented as an intentional and planned act of revenge because the Persians had burned Athens during the Persian War. In Arrian there is no reference to drinking or banquets. Instead he mentions that Parmenio urged the king to preserve the palace, but the king replied that he wanted to punish the Persians for sacking Athens and for other injuries they had done to Greeks. Interestingly, the burning of the palace is one of the rare passages in *Anabasis* where Arrian was ready to criticise Alexander's action in exacting punishment for old crimes.<sup>37</sup>

Again, the two scholars, Hammond and Bosworth, give totally different interpretations of Alexander's actions. Bosworth follows the tradition of Diodorus and Curtius and describes at length the plundering of the civilians:

“The private homes of the Persian nobility were sacked without mercy, the men cut down and the women enslaved. It was an act of outrage on a helpless populace and was coldly calculated”.<sup>38</sup>

Bosworth expresses no doubts concerning the validity of the information he has drawn from Diodorus and Curtius. Alexander coldly calculated the looting because he wanted to give material rewards to his troops. Bosworth's interpretation is based on the fact that Diodorus's and Curtius's accounts give an impression of systematic plundering. Bosworth calls Alexander's decision an *act of outrage*. In Bosworth's construction Alexander wants to offer his greedy troops some extra income and he does not care about the human suffering. Alexander's Panhellenic revenge is described as 'propaganda'; in other words, a pretext for barbarous acts. Bosworth has a strong moralistic tone when he condemns the

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<sup>35</sup> Curt. 5.6.2-8; D. S. 17.70.1-6.

<sup>36</sup> Curt. 5.7.1-12; D. S. 17.72.1-6.

<sup>37</sup> Arr. An. 3.18.10-12.

<sup>38</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 92.

incident. Bosworth sees it as probable that Alexander discussed the destiny of the palace with his generals but regards the debate with Parmenio as apocryphal.<sup>39</sup>

Bosworth also considers the tradition concerning the banquets and the role of the Athenian courtesan Thais as historical. According to this tradition, the palace burned down as a result of the banquet arranged by Alexander. During these drunken banquets, Alexander and his guests lit fires spontaneously with their torches. In Bosworth's view, Alexander wanted to conceal this senseless act and embroider the truth by linking it to the Panhellenic revenge motif. It is interesting, though, that Bosworth does not refer here to other traditions. Plutarch, for example, makes reference in his *Vitae* to other traditions and presents the Thais version as disputed.<sup>40</sup>

Bosworth's choice of words stresses that the burning of the palace was condemnable and inexcusable. He calls the burning of the palace an *orgy of destruction*. He also sets forth archaeological evidence. The fact that marks were found on the treasures of Persepolis is proof of the conflagration.

In Hammond's narrative Alexander does not arrange or permit any plundering or lawlessness in the city. Strikingly, Hammond does not even mention the passage of Diodorus and Curtius concerning the plundering and lawlessness of the Macedonians. Hammond decides to follow Arrian's account and no alternative option is given to the reader.

On the contrary, according to Hammond's narrative, Alexander sets up his army's camp outside the city and thus prevents an eruption of lawlessness. Before deciding what to do regarding the palace, Alexander holds a council with his officers at which he discusses the proposal to burn the palace. Hammond once again presents Alexander as a rational leader who pays attention to his subjects and explains his opinions before carrying out his projects. This is the very opposite of Bosworth's Alexander image. Most interesting is the way Hammond depicts the reasons behind the event and its significance:

“In January 330 BC the Achaemenid palace at Persepolis went up in flames by order of Alexander, Hegemon of the Greek League, King of Macedon and King of Asia. It was symbolic of a vengeance which was intelligible, indeed acceptable, in terms of Greek religion (less so, of course, to the Roman Arrian or to modern Christian writers, but Alexander and his commanders were neither Roman nor Christian); symbolic also of vengeance for Persia's past

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<sup>39</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 93.

<sup>40</sup> Plutarch does not describe the capture of the city but he tells the anecdote about Thais (when he mentions the banquets arranged by Alexander) and says that some writers say the burning of the palace was caused by Thais while some say that the work was put forward deliberately (ἀπὸ γυνώμητος). Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 38.1-4.

occupation of Macedonia and now of Macedon's victory over Persia; symbolic finally of the liberation of Asia from Achaemenid rule".<sup>41</sup>

Hammond takes here a clearly apologetic stand. The burning of the palace was *indeed acceptable* because it was a part of the religious practice of the Greeks. This argument is left unsubstantiated. Did the Greek religion really permit the conscious burning of the palaces of the barbarians? Did there exist a single value system in Greek religion concerning the righteousness of revenge?

It is also interesting how Hammond reacts to Arrian's criticism of Alexander. Arrian had said in *Anabasis* that on this occasion Alexander did not act *σὺν νῶ* ('with good sense').<sup>42</sup> Hammond states that Arrian did not accept the burning of the palace because he was a Roman. Was there really a difference between the religious system of the Greeks and the Romans concerning revenge? If there was some known difference, no information is included in the reference. The whole statement rests on a vague assumption of a distinction between the Greeks and the Romans.

In Hammond's narrative the burning of the palace was a consequence not of drunken madness but of the pursuit of a reasonable policy. Hammond mentions only that many stories grew up around this spectacular event. After that, like Bosworth, Hammond appeals to the archaeological evidence. According to this evidence, rooms were cleared of their contents, which is, as Hammond claims, proof that the destruction was deliberate, not accidental. In a footnote he explicitly makes reference to the story of Thais, the Athenian courtesan, and says it is thus proved to be mistaken.<sup>43</sup>

Burstein seems to be right that these two scholarly traditions often follow their 'favourite' sources.<sup>44</sup> However, it is not just about following one source over another. Indeed, a remarkable factor is that these scholars do not report or make any reference to the rival traditions. Hammond does not usually mention the vulgate' sources (either in the text or in the notes) and Bosworth treats Arrian's statements in the same way. In other words, Hammond does not criticise Arrian and Bosworth expresses no criticism of the vulgate tradition.

Bosworth's Alexander is a man of destructive impulses who acts barbarously. Hammond's Alexander is always rational and capable of cooperation with his

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<sup>41</sup> Hammond 1980b: 169-170.

<sup>42</sup> Arr. An. 3.18.12.

<sup>43</sup> Hammond quotes from E. F. Schmidt's *Persepolis* (Schmidt 1953), a study on the excavations of Persepolis, 1.157, 220 and 2.3. In the third edition of *Alexander the Great – King, Commander and Statesman* (1989) Hammond made three references to his study *Three Histories of Alexander the Great* (Hammond 1983a: 57, 85, 132). In these passages Hammond supposes that the story of Thais was derived from the account of Cleitarchus and that it belongs to the group of passages that should be rejected as fictional.

<sup>44</sup> Burstein 1997: 42-43.

men. The two scholars describe the same events differently and give them opposite meanings. What Bosworth calls propaganda is for Hammond understandable and rightful revenge. Hammond's tone is apologetic and at some points he even goes beyond Arrian. He is always understanding and ready to present Alexander in a favourable light, while Bosworth has an accusatory and reproachful tone.

Among the more recent research, Paul Cartledge (2004) sees the burning of the palace as a conundrum and cannot find any particular reason why the palace was burnt, since the action did not strengthen Alexander's position as the new Persian king in the eyes of the Persian ruling elite. However, Cartledge, like Hammond, dismisses the Thais anecdote as a scandalous story created at a later date. Heckel (2008), Freeman (2011) and Gabriel (2015) consider it as a historical fact that Alexander subjected the city of Persepolis to looting. Freeman presents his narrative in a tone favourable to Alexander: 'He [Alexander] felt he could no longer constrain his men. Rather than have a riot on his hands, he gave his army free rein to sack the great city of Persepolis, sparing only the palace for himself.' Gabriel (2015) follows the interpretation of Bosworth by stating: 'Once again, Alexander visited a pointless slaughter upon helpless civilians.' When it comes to the burning of the palace, Heckel (2008) and Freeman (2011) leave the question open whether the king deliberately burned it down, while Gabriel (2015) accepting the story of Thais as fact regards the destruction of Persepolis as first clear example of Alexander's use of alcohol affecting his military decision-making.<sup>45</sup>

#### IV. DEATH OF PARMENIO

During the thirteen years of Alexander's reign some conspiracies against the king took place. Something of this kind occurred in the year 330 BCE. There is not much reliable information on those who were involved in the conspiracy, nor on their motives. Nevertheless, Dimnus of Chalaestra was considered to be the leader of the conspiracy and he was executed for treason. Moreover, Alexander's commander-in-chief, Parmenio, who had already served as a commander in Philip's army, was killed (along with his son Philotas) for having taken part in it.

Ancient accounts differ in length and emphasis concerning this event. In Curtius we have the longest and most detailed and dramatic depiction of the events.<sup>46</sup> According to him, Alexander secretly plans and arranges the execution of Parmenio by ordering his officers to travel for seven days in order to kill the unsuspecting general. Arrian's passage is considerably shorter, without

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<sup>45</sup> Cartledge 2004: 99-100; Heckel 2008: 83-84; Freeman 2011: 207-208, 212-214.

<sup>46</sup> Curt. 7.2.11-7. 2.33.

any detailed account.<sup>47</sup> Arrian states that Alexander planned to kill Parmenio because he could not believe that he was innocent and unaware of the conspiracy. Interestingly, in Diodorus it is the Macedonian council that passes the sentence and Alexander only carries out the death penalty they have imposed.<sup>48</sup>

For Bosworth, it was Alexander's private desire to kill his distinguished general Parmenio. Bosworth's Alexander tried to find him guilty at any cost, not to punish a dangerous conspirator who deserved the death penalty but to get rid of a great general who still had an influential position in the army. According to Bosworth, Alexander attempted to obtain a death sentence from the Macedonian council, but he could not get enough evidence. That is why Alexander was reduced to arranging a political assassination.

Bosworth says that Alexander "[h]ad determined on the eradication of the family and had no intention of letting the father survive the son".<sup>49</sup> Alexander acts here mainly out of a lust for killing and enacts the deliberate plan which he had already developed in his envious and deluded mind.

I would say that Bosworth is here even more critical of Alexander than Curtius. Curtius presents a long, dramatic scene where Alexander first gives instructions for the murder and appoints Polydamas and Cleander to perform the task. These two travel for eleven days wearing 'Arab costume', until they finally meet Parmenio and kill him.<sup>50</sup>

In Bosworth's text the killing is described as Alexander's "reward for a lifetime of service to the Macedonian throne". Bosworth uses the terms "formidable" and "totally ruthless".<sup>51</sup> These may refer to the efficiency and unexpectedness of the plan and to its mercilessness and cruelty because Parmenio had no opportunity to defend himself. There is a strongly ironic and accusatory tone in Bosworth, stronger than we find in the Latin account of Curtius.

When comparing the passage in Curtius and Bosworth, we see that Curtius places Alexander in the background and not as the chief agent. Curtius leaves the question open whether Parmenio was actually driven by a desire for royal power or was merely suspected of being involved in the conspiracy.<sup>52</sup> However, Bosworth quite clearly rejects the possibility that Parmenio would have posed any real threat to Alexander. Instead, Bosworth raises sympathy for Parmenio and questions the motives of Alexander to a much greater extent than Curtius. He states explicitly the reason why Parmenio was killed:

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<sup>47</sup> Arr. *An.* 3.26.1-4.

<sup>48</sup> D. S. 17.80.1-4.

<sup>49</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 102.

<sup>50</sup> Curt. 7.2.11-18.32-33.

<sup>51</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 103.

<sup>52</sup> Curt. 7.2.34.

“His disagreement over policy had become too strong to be tolerated by the increasingly autocratic Alexander, who seized upon the first opportunity to eliminate him”.<sup>53</sup>

In Hammond's account Parmenio was a real threat to Alexander and therefore his killing was understandable. Whether Parmenio was actually found guilty by the Macedonian court he leaves unsaid. Nevertheless, Hammond makes quite clear his opinion on the episode. He quotes Arrian directly to remind his readers that Arrian was especially interested in the case of Parmenio. Otherwise, Hammond asserts that the testimony of Arrian was credible. Hammond says that they (Arrian and the sources he uses: Ptolemy and Aristobulus) were right about the danger.<sup>54</sup> There was a real threat in store for the empire because Parmenio was the commander of a massive army in Ecbatana. Then Hammond gives an overview of the episode related by Curtius and describes it strikingly:

“They killed Parmenio, mercifully unaware of Philotas' death, and they quelled the mutinous reaction of his troops by reading them a statement which Alexander had supplied”.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Hammond even sees traits of mercy in the episode! After this, Hammond approaches the matter from the angle of Alexander:

“After the conspiracy he had a diminished sense of security in relation to his leading officers. His judgement of his men had proved faulty and more sinister was the realization that Philotas, Demetrius, and others – perhaps even Parmenio – had been motivated probably not by personal ambition (for they were at the top already) but by detestation of his policy”.<sup>56</sup>

These officers, according to Hammond, rose in revolt against their well-meaning king, who had already given them a good position in the army. Before the conspiracy Alexander did not have any suspicions about his leading officers, but now his private security was threatened by his ungrateful generals. Once again, Hammond wants to build an image in which Alexander's rule is always good and straightforward, especially regarding his own men. Hammond creates an impression that Alexander, being a good king, commander and statesman, treated his generals well even when they tried to kill their benefactor.

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<sup>53</sup> Bosworth 1988b: 103.

<sup>54</sup> Hammond 1980: 186.

<sup>55</sup> Hammond 1980: 186.

<sup>56</sup> Hammond 1980: 186.



As a comparison, Paul Cartledge (2004) sees the murder of Parmenio as an “undisguised assassination”, which was carried out for reasons of “*realpolitik*”, since the general had great influence in the army. One reason was that conservative and traditional Parmenio was a ‘Philippian’ commander whose way of thinking was an obstacle to Alexander’s temperament and ambitious plans. Freeman (2011) leaves the question open whether Philotas and Parmenio really plotted against Alexander. Yet Freeman tends to present Parmenio’s position in the army as a real threat to the king’s authority.<sup>57</sup> Gabriel (2015) again writes critically that Parmenio was proven warrior something Alexander longed to be. In his narrative the murder of the general shows the king’s developing anger and paranoia which caused tremors of fear through the army and the officer corps.

Once again it is evident, as in the other three cases discussed, that Hammond’s and Bosworth’s Alexander images are in conflict. Here again, it is not a matter of the sources followed, as these give a quite similar overall view of the episode. For Bosworth, Alexander’s action is a much more condemnable one and is described in more unfavourable terms even than by Curtius. For his part, Hammond is more apologetic than Arrian himself, who wrote that Parmenio had probably had no part in his son’s plot.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Hammond even sees some traits of mercy in the episode. Therefore, we could state that the differences between the two narratives do not occur only because of the chosen sources. Hammond’s account is very apologetic and favourable to Alexander. At the same time, Bosworth draws a very negative picture of Alexander as a mistrustful tyrant who kills his own men out of lust for killing.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the present analysis we can see how the two views, benign and cynical views, are constructed in Hammond’s and Bosworth’s narratives and continue to be constructed in the scholarly biographies of Alexander published after 2000. It seems that the opposite interpretations of Hammond and Bosworth are partly due to the sources they choose to follow. As Burstein claimed, Hammond relies more often on Arrian and Plutarch who represent favourable accounts towards Alexander and Bosworth leans towards Diodorus and Curtius

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<sup>57</sup> See Cartledge 2004: 69, 140; Freeman 2011: 232-234. Lane Fox 1973: 290 has similarly apologetic tones to Hammond and calls the murder of Parmenio an act of “self-defense”. Fox states: “It is irrelevant to complain that he [Alexander] would have mistaken on his general’s ambition; among Macedonians, the king who waited in crisis in order to be certain would find himself dead first.” In other words, the murder of Parmenio was fully just and reasonable according to Lane’s narrative.

<sup>58</sup> Arr. *An.* 3.26.4.

who contain material more hostile to Alexander. But as we have seen, following certain sources is not an adequate explanation for the existence of two radically different narratives of Alexander.

The material examined show that scholars can take completely different stances towards the historical figures they portray, and these stances inevitably guide their overall interpretations. In creating a certain narrative, and positive/idealizing or critical/anti-idealising image of Alexander a scholar uses certain techniques. (1) The chosen concepts and terms can be seen as a way to promote either pro- or anti-Alexander attitudes. Some criticise, question and condemn Alexander's motives and decisions, while others' choice of words is sympathetic, laudatory and understanding. Other scholars often use adjectives like 'ruthless' and 'gruesome' when they depict certain actions. And when it comes to the military operations, words like 'slaughter' and 'massacre' often occur.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, others almost always describe Alexander's decisions as 'correct' and 'acceptable'.<sup>60</sup>

Another factor (2) is the choice of point of view. Bosworth treats his subject from Alexander's opponents' angle. He presents incidents from the perspective of the Getae, the inhabitants of Tyre and Persepolis, and Parmenio. On the other hand, Hammond tells the story from an angle that underlines Alexander's skills as a splendid king, commander and statesman who always acted in the best possible way.

The third possible factor (3) behind divergent Alexanders might be the aim to challenge/replace the orthodox view, or stance presented in the previous scholarly biographies. In his later work *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph* (1996a) Bosworth called Plutarch's positive creation of Alexander as emotive rhetoric, and wrote that Hammond's image of Alexander as a promoter of the ideal brotherhood of man in *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (1980) is virtually paraphrase of Plutarch.<sup>61</sup> In addition, one could make such a conclusion that Bosworth's *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* can be seen as a response to Hammond since he later in 1996 explicitly criticised Tarn's and Hammond's image of idolised Alexander as now rational, now visionary, now humanitarian.<sup>62</sup> Bosworth follows the same structure of events as Hammond and he gives the opposite interpretation of each episode. When Hammond depicts the Getae forces as a strong military threat, Bosworth builds an opposite picture of the Getae people as victims suffering at the hands of a terrorising army. Again, when Hammond praises Alexander's strategy in the siege of Tyre, Bosworth makes an effort to prove

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<sup>59</sup> See Bosworth 1988b: 33, 112, 121, 135-136.

<sup>60</sup> See Hammond 1980: 53, 169.

<sup>61</sup> Bosworth 1996a: 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> Bosworth 1996a: 4-5.

to his readers that the siege was foolish and unnecessary, revealing negative aspects of Alexander's leadership. When Hammond depicts the burning of the palace in Persepolis as an understandable act and a part of Alexander's consistent policy, Bosworth calls it as an *orgy of destruction* without any positive implications. In the same way, the death of Parmenio is seen by Hammond in a sympathetic and acquiescent light, but for Bosworth the whole episode is proof of Alexander's growing tendency towards corrupt autocracy. In the light of these examples, whatever his preconceptions might have been, the outcome of Bosworth's study can be seen as a reaction to Hammond or as a deliberate replacement of the earlier and 'benign' view. Perhaps one could suggest that motive for Bosworth's cynical narrative was to overturn the heroic myth of heroic Alexander sustained by Tarn and Hammond in the level of scholarly narrative.<sup>63</sup>

By their images of Alexander's conquest Hammond and Bosworth (as every historian writing about Alexander) portray certain image of imperialism and autocracy. The Alexanders created in the scholarly biographies are related to author's own views towards imperialism and autocracy. Bosworth's image of Alexander's bloody reign can be viewed as an implicit critique of imperialism where the disputes over power and possessions have caused considerable human suffering. The Iran-Iraq and the Soviet invasion of Afganistan could have had an influence on his critical image of Alexander as a bloody mass-murder whose conquest brought pain and destruction to the eastern people. In contrast, Hammond who had served with distinction in the British army in World War II, fighting with the Greek guerrillas, pays attention to the glorious shade of conquest and military courage.<sup>64</sup> His experiences in war, before being professor of Greek at Bristol University evidently made an impact on the way he constructs his idealising pro-military narratives of Alexander.

According to the hermeneutical approach, pre-understanding, preconceptions and foreknowledge inevitably influence on the process of interpretation.<sup>65</sup> Even as scholars, we cannot (and should not?) get rid of our values and emotions which by all means may entice us to make judgments on the moral character of certain historical figure. Naturally this setting is by no

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<sup>63</sup> There are many examples and it is unnecessary to go through all the passages. To give some examples, Bosworth considers as historical that Batis, the commandant of Gaza, was "executed in gruesome style" by Alexander. Cf. Bosworth 1988b: 68. The story is found only in Curtius. Hammond, however, does not make mention of this episode (Hammond 1980: 118, 293). In addition, Bosworth 1988b: 108-109 regards as historical the massacre of Branchidae, which he describes as "an appalling act of violence against a defenceless population", while Hammond 1980: 298 says in footnote 131 that he has not included it because it is "generally regarded as unhistorical".

<sup>64</sup> He even published memoir of his war service entitled *Venture into Greece: with the Guerillas, 1943-1944* (Hammond 1983).

<sup>65</sup> On the theory of hermeneutics see Gadamer 1985; 1988: 68-78.

means restricted to Alexander studies. In his famous work *The Content of the Form* (1987) Hayden White attested that historical narratives are not found but they are invented. Instead of being a neutral medium for the representation of historical events (or historical figures), historical scholarly narratives impose "a mythic structure on the events it purports to describe".<sup>66</sup> The divergent narratives of Alexander in scholarly biographies are a good example of this process taking place. In the scientific research scholar's opinions can easily affect the way we select and interpret the available source material. The researcher's values, whether deliberately or unintentionally brought out, tend to make a difference when he or she deals with historical acts that have moral or ethical implications. For example, military operations, killings of individuals and the destruction of material possessions might call for moral judgements which can have an influence upon the way he or she portrays a certain historical episode. This can result in very rivalling presentations of the same historical figure.

In addition, it is true that scholars make their judgments and evaluation of king's career in terms of current values.<sup>67</sup> Alexander and his contemporaries most likely would not have recognised the modern western, or democratic standards when making political and moral decisions. Therefore, 'the Alexanders' created and re-invented reflect the contemporary world which they were composed. They are portraits of the values the authors and scholars regard most relevant in the time they write their works. The point is that a scholar should be aware of the ethical factors that tend to influence on his or her research.

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<sup>66</sup> On the ideas of Hayden White, see Herman 2011: 115.

<sup>67</sup> Briant 2010: 139-140 criticizes the fashion to condemn Alexander's conquests out of hand both for political and "moral" reasons. According to Briant "moral" judgements passed on Alexander are inappropriate in the context of historical research. Cf. Anson 2013: 7-8 who writes: "Much of the modern criticism of Alexander comes from an evaluation of his career in terms of current values. While such criticism is certainly a viable approach and much that Alexander did should not be extolled to modern audiences, such censure tends to hold Alexander and his contemporaries to standards they likely would not have recognized."

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