

The Narrative Function of the Celtic and Roman Embassies in Arrian's *Anabasis*

At *Anabasis* 7.15.5-6, Arrian reports that the Romans sent an embassy to Alexander near Babylon in 323 BCE (cf. Pliny, *N.H.* 3.57-58). The extensive body of scholarship devoted to this episode has been concerned either with the historicity of the event (references collected by Seibert, 172-3; cf. Bosworth 1988, 83-93), or the degree to which Arrian's account of it flatters one or the other of the parties involved (e.g. Bosworth 2007, 447-8). The focus on these two issues has led scholars to overlook an important correspondence between the diplomatic episode of which the Roman embassy was a part (7.15.4-6) and a strikingly similar series of embassies involving Celts much earlier in the *Anabasis* (1.4.6, cf. Strabo 7.3.8). In this paper, I will show that Arrian has marked the two episodes as a pair using structural and verbal parallels, and I will argue that his purpose was to create a framing device for Alexander's campaigns in order to develop one of his favorite themes: the far-reaching fame of Alexander (cf. 7.30.2).

The episodes are most clearly linked by narrative parallels. Although Alexander receives dozens of embassies throughout the *Anabasis*, the Celtic and Roman embassies are elaborated much more fully than is Arrian's custom, and both occur at crucial moments in his account of Alexander's career: the Celts among a series of delegations from European tribes immediately after Alexander's first campaign (against the Thracians, Triballians, and Getae; 1.1.4-1.4.5), and the Romans among a series of non-Greek tribes from the farthest fringes of the known world following his final campaign (against the Cossaeans; 7.14.1-3). This last also occurs just before his fateful final entrance into Babylon (7.16.5-7.18.6). Both the Roman and Celtic delegations arouse Alexander's curiosity and inspire Arrian to a level of ethnographic commentary not afforded to the other tribes involved.

The two episodes are also linked thematically by Arrian's persistent emphasis on name-recognition, a concern that is most explicitly addressed in his 'Second Preface' (1.12.1-5). There, Arrian not only refuses to give his own name (*onoma*), but forges a bond between Alexander's fame and his own (Moles 166, Marincola 188-189, Gray 182-183). He highlights this bond by offering a catalogue of historical figures whose lives had been treated by famous authors; while naming the subjects, he withholds the names of the authors. However, the issue of name-recognition appears for the first time in the *Anabasis* in the Celtic episode, when Alexander expresses a desire to know that his great name (*mega onoma*) has reached the Celts and beyond. The Celtic response, in a rare moment of humor at Alexander's expense that is absent in Strabo's account, leaves him frustrated at the prospect that his name has hardly traveled beyond the Danube. By contrast, the great mass of embassies that later meet Alexander along with the Romans includes people whose names (*onomata*) Arrian says were to that point unknown to Greeks and Macedonians, a dramatic reversal from Alexander's situation with the Celts. The Romans themselves, whose own growing name was mentioned at 7.1.3, are the centerpiece of this episode, and although Arrian is uncertain of the story's truth, it is not because he doubts, like Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita* 9.18.6), that they had heard of Alexander, but because they used to hate the 'name' of tyranny. This somewhat obsessive discussion of names thus anticipates a famous passage in Arrian's peroration in which he claims that there was no one in the world who had not heard Alexander's name (7.30.2).

Arrian's inclusion of the Roman episode, long debated in modern scholarship and suspected by Arrian himself, has a specific narrative purpose that transcends its doubtful historicity. It closes off the theme of Alexander's achievement of global fame, which began with the Celtic embassy and is prominent throughout the *Anabasis*.

Works Cited

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