

## Friend or Foe: Alexander School Exercises in Postclassical Greece and Rome

In the literary traditions of postclassical Greece and Rome, Alexander of Macedon became a critical *exemplum* to “think with” about kingship and empire. Classicists have long recognized how authors like Livy, Seneca, and Plutarch have shaped the political and philosophical reception of Alexander (Fears 1974, Bosworth 1976, Moore 2018). Several have even described the flexibility of his paradigm as “a bottle [to be] filled with any ‘wine’” (Wilcken 1931, Spencer 2002). But the scholarship to date shows less awareness of how ancient students, who were just beginning to hone their skills of historical and philosophical analysis, encountered the Macedonian in the course of ancient schooling. In this paper, I present the results of the first comprehensive analysis of over thirty Alexander school exercises attested in papyri, educational treatises, and classical literature. I propose that while classical authors preoccupied themselves with the vices and virtues of Alexander as an individual actor, the school sources debate the collective impact of his conquest on the demise of Classical Greece.

This paper begins with a brief introduction to the stages of literate schooling in antiquity, elucidating where in the curriculum of grammatical and rhetorical training Alexander school exercises began to appear. Surviving evidence indicates that the Alexander was the only historical figure to appear consistently in both Greek and Latin school exercises. He also represents a chronological turning-point where Greek declamation themes ended and Latin ones began. This pattern in the school sources is consistent with the historiographical activity of the Imperial period, which shows a “neglect of the era after Alexander that is in striking contrast to the interest in Alexander himself” (Bowie 1970). The paper then turns to my classification of more than thirty Alexander school exercises that span the third century BCE to the fifth century

of the Roman Empire. I propose that these exercises can be sorted into four thematic categories: Alexander's (1) letters, (2) dealings with the Greek world, (3) travel, and (4) death. Unlike the character analyses of Alexander in classical literature, the school exercises emphasize his broader interactions with or impact upon communities of the ancient Mediterranean.

In the final part of this paper, I analyze two declamation themes from the second thematic category (Alexander's dealings with the Greek world). The first is *Minor Declamation 323* attributed to Quintilian, in which an Athenian priest assists Alexander with the dedication of a temple and is later prosecuted for aiding the enemy. In this declamation, the defense rests on the argument that Alexander must not be understood as an *hostis* to Greece but instead the inheritor of "a war against us that was handed down and left by his father [Philip]" (*bellum contra nos traditum ac relictum a patre*, 323.4). This theme frames the imperial conquest of Greece as an inevitable process and Alexander as a nearly accidental agent thereof.

The second theme deliberates on the prosecution of the Messenians because they refused to aid Theban fugitives from Alexander, as attested in Philostratus *VS* 596 and Sopater (8.239 in Walz 1835). This theme encapsulates postclassical disputes about how or whether Greek *poleis* should have responded to Alexander's demolition of Thebes. It also positions the fall of Thebes and the inaction of other Greeks as the inflection point between Greece's Classical past and its colonized present.

Although these exercises have been transmitted in different languages over several centuries, they are united by their collective investigation of Alexander's status vis-à-vis the Greeks (friend or foe) and of the intra-Hellenic conflict that his conquest ignited. Rather than focusing on the (in)justice of Alexander's actions, both themes call attention to the internal political turmoil that stems from imperial colonization. The nostalgia for a pre-Alexandrian past

in these exercises is also consistent with the Second Sophistic's attraction to the culture and character of Classical Greece, and deliberation on its decline (Russell 1985).

This paper will appeal to scholars with interests in ancient rhetoric, education, and the ancient reception of Alexander the Great.

### Bibliography

Bowie, E. L. "Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic," *Past & Present* 46 (1970), 3-41.

Bosworth, A. B., ed. *Alexandre le Grande, image et réalité*. Geneva: Fondation Hardt *Entretiens* 22 (1976).

Fears, J. R. "The Stoic View of the Career and Character of Alexander the Great," *Philologus* 118 (1974), 113-130.

Moore, K. R., ed. *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Russell, D. A. *Greek Declamation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Spencer, D. *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002.

Walz, C. *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 8. Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1835.

Wilcken, U. *Alexander der Grosse*. Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931.