

Chapter I

Introduction

According to the ancient sources, Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) followed in the tracks of the heroes of his youth. Though he would have had enough great men to look up to, first of all his father Philip II. (ca. 382–336 BCE), who had led Macedonia out of the shadow of the Greek city states, Alexander opted for different heroes altogether: he clung to the highly imaginative and evocative world of mythical storytelling and its protagonists, whose exploits he heard about in the tales of bards and whose deeds he witnessed on vase paintings. Philip II. had expedited an encompassing renewal of his country, including an urbanization based on Greek models, but Macedonia was archaic enough in that the mythical stories of agonal conflict, daring adventure, and otherworldly combat, could strike a chord with a society very much based on egalitarian, albeit patriarchal and certainly martial principles. To Alexander, the connection to the world of myth had a dimension that exceeded mere analogy between the real and the imagined, for the Argead dynasty into which he was born traced its roots back to Heracles, while the family of his mother Olympias claimed descent from Achilles.¹ One could argue that this purported lineage was a mere promotional act of a dynasty which had for too long stood watching at the sidelines while others defined the politics of the day, but for Alexander the memory of his mythical ancestors loomed large in his upbringing² and figured as a daily reminder of virtues integral to any great leader, including courage, compassion, a questing spirit and faith in the gods.

One could also argue that acts of monarchical self-representation do not necessarily coincide with factual and pragmatic politics, but even in antiquity matters were not that simple – especially when it came to accounting for the immense success of Alexander: at

- 1 Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 2.1; Lysimachus, one of Alexander's elementary teachers, was said to have given Alexander the nickname "Achilleus." On the general connection between Alexander and the Homeric hero cf. Arr. *an.* 1.12; Plut. *Alex.* 5.8, 8.2, 26.1–2; Onesikr. F38.
- 2 Much has been made of the relationship between Alexander and one of his teachers, Aristotle. While many details of the curriculum for the young Macedonian are unknown, it must be assumed that reading exercises entailed Greek drama and epic, including Homer's *Iliad*. According to one tradition, Alexander took one version of the *Iliad* along on his campaign that was edited by Aristotle. Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 8.1–12, also Onesikr. F17 A.

only 18, he succeeded his father and thus inherited not only the Macedonian throne, but also the task of invading Asia. It is still a matter of contention, whether the campaign was solely meant to liberate the Greek city states of Asia Minor from Persian hegemony and to take revenge for the Persian invasion of Greece at the dawn of the fifth century BCE, or whether the agenda also included a foray into Persian heartlands.³ What is clear is that no one could have foreseen the scale – and the eventual success – of this undertaking, which led Alexander's army from the Hellespont all the way to India in only eight years, and which made Alexander the successor of the Persian Great Kings. In 326 BCE, Alexander's campaign had already reached the banks of the river Hyphasis (the modern Beas); Alexander was still tempted to move on, but his troops, tired of fighting and the hardships of a never-ending campaign, mutinied and he turned back, moving up the Indus to the Indian Ocean. After a long march through the Gedrosian desert, Alexander returned to the Persian royal capital Susa in 324, and eventually to the fabled Babylon, which had become his main residence, where he died an early death in 323 BCE.

Already in antiquity, contemporaries and later commentators had trouble explaining the enormous success of Alexander, let alone the character of the enigmatic king, whose military achievements had surpassed everything in recent memory and who had ventured farther than any Greek or Macedonian before him. The only register, or so it seemed, with which to comprehensively grasp and compare Alexander's campaign was the language of myth. According to one particular strand of the ancient tradition, usually following the court historian Callisthenes,⁴ Alexander marked significant stages of his route with allusions to Greek myths, for instance the start of the invasion at the Hellespont, where he visited the graves of the heroes who had fought at Troy, his detour to the famous oracle in the oasis Siwa in 331 BCE, which would later be connected to Alexander's alleged divine kinship, and finally his Indian campaign, where he repeatedly drew on Heracles' and Dionysos' exploits.⁵ It is difficult to ascertain in how

3 The revenge for the Persian invasions in 490 and 481 BCE was part of the agenda of the League of Corinth (or Hellenic League), a federation of Greek states created by Philip II. during the winter of 338/7 BCE after the Battle of Chaeronea. The idea of a Greek invasion of Asia had been formulated for a while, but the scale of such an undertaking was not necessarily clear. On this cf. also Pierre Briant, *Alexander the Great and his Empire: A Short Introduction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 24–41.

4 Already in antiquity, many of the mythical allusions to Alexander were described as mere court flattery, cf. Arr. *an.* 5.3.1; Strab. 15.1.9. Callisthenes accompanied Alexander's campaign from the beginning and had the task of writing an official account of the events. He stylized Alexander into a hero of near-mythical proportions, using a lot of references to divine signs and analogies between the Macedonian king and Trojan heroes (Arr. *an.* 4.10.1; Plut. *Alex.* 7.3; Iust. 12.6.17). He eventually fell from favor and lost his life after an alleged involvement in a court conspiracy. On Callisthenes cf. Waldemar Heckel, *Who's who in the Age of Alexander the Great: Prosopography of Alexander's Empire* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 77–78.

5 The sacrifices at Troy were a central element in all ancient sources, cf. Arr. *an.* 1.12.1–3; Diod. 17.3; Plut. *Alex.* 15.8; Iust. 11.5.12. On the oracle Arr. *an.* 3.4.5; also Curt. 4.7.26; Diod. 51.2; Iust. 11.11.9; Plut. *Alex.* 27.4.

far these highly symbolic acts were rooted in historical reality and in how far they were self-representational fabrications meant to blank out the irrational and often violent effects of the campaign. Historiography about Alexander has to contend with a very complex transmission history, since almost all primary sources have vanished and can only be distilled in small fragments from later authors, who often present us with a Roman imperial interpretation of the campaign.⁶ Cultural memory loomed large in how Alexander's march was interpreted: allusions to Alexander's forebears abound in the ancient sources.⁷ Mythical patterning was, as Blanshard puts it, one of the "way[s] in which the journey could be made explicable."⁸ In fact, mythical allusions increased the further east Alexander travelled, so that his route could be brought in alignment with a "mythical topography"⁹ stored in legends that entailed a rich array of associations.

The fact that mythical stories could be used for this interpretative framework as much as verifiable historical events shows that Alexander's feats resonate strongly with forms of cultural imagination, that is they had – and have – to be, on the one hand, integrated into rationalistic frameworks of reference that help in understanding what happened, and they stirred the imagination in that they often transcended this rational impulse. What, to a modern, seems like a paradox engrained in ancient worldviews and questionable explanatory models of classical historiography can, in fact, still be found in modern interpretations of Alexander.¹⁰ And it would certainly be wrong to claim that modern

- 6 The main problem of any Alexander history is the scarcity of primary sources. The foundation of the literary evidence is secondary in nature, that is to say it is based on writings from the Roman period which draw upon the lost contemporary historians of Alexander. The earliest author is Diodorus, a Sicilian historian from the first century BCE, whose work (along with that of the later Curtius Rufus and Justin) is often said to be based on a popular Hellenistic writer, Cleitarchus of Alexandria. We also have Arrian, a writer and politician from the Roman provincial aristocracy in the late first / early second century CE, whose *Anabasis* was primarily based on eye-witness accounts of Alexander's campaign, namely those of Ptolemy, Aristobulos, and Nearchus. The biography of Plutarch (first/second century CE) and the geography of Strabo (first century BCE / first century CE) complete the picture. On the complex transmission history and the problem of the sources cf. also Albert Brian Bosworth, "Introduction," in *Alexander the Great Between Fact and Fiction*, ed. A. B. Bosworth and Elizabeth Baynham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–22.
- 7 See, for instance, how the foray into India is described by alluding to mythical heroes, who were said to have ventured in these regions before. Heracles was the main reference point in this context, cf. Curt. 9.4.1; Diod. 17.83.1, but also Dionysos became an important mnemonic model, cf. Arr. *Ind.* 7.2–9.
- 8 Alastair J. L. Blanshard, "Alexander's Mythic Journey into India," in *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia*, ed. by Himanshu Prabha Ray and Daniel T. Potts (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007), 30.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 10 In one of the most influential modern biographies of the Macedonian conqueror, this mythical strand of the ancient tradition is turned into a key device for deciphering his personality and inner psychology. Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London: Penguin Books, 2006 [1973]). Yet, it also has to be pointed out that this emphatic strand of reception was, at the same time, accompanied by harsh judgments, notably by Ernst Badian. Cf. Ernst Badian, rev. of *Alexander the Great*,

politics and history has rid itself entirely from mythical allusions to Alexander. Quite the contrary: already in his lifetime, Alexander became a quasi-mythical figure himself, a Protean-like character of sorts, who could be made to fit different sociohistorical contexts, cultural stories, and political ideologies in a long period of ever-new reception.

This book traces one particular and powerful strand of such a reception process, namely the cultural reception of the Macedonian conqueror along the north-west frontier of British India during the long nineteenth century. As will be shown in the course of this study, British military strategists, geographers, adventurers, explorers, and archaeologists used Alexander the same way that the Macedonian was said to use his mythical forebears like Heracles or Dionysos. The Britons used Alexander as a way of integrating their forays into unknown territories within an associative cultural framework that connected past and present as well as a way of imbuing their own exploits with a highly evocative register that presented them as standing in a line of continuity with one of the greatest imperial campaigns ever witnessed. Although the main part of the book traces travelers along the so-called north-west frontier and their respective writings over a vast time period that stretches from the late eighteenth to the early decades of the twentieth century, it is remarkable how persistent and static references to Alexander remained.

The temporal framework encompasses the heyday of the British Empire in Central Asia, tracing the gradual expansion of the East India Company's territory into the north of India and beyond what actually counted as "Hindoostan," up to the point when the Company's rule was transferred to Crown rule in the second half of the nineteenth century and finally to the last geographical and archaeological surveys that put an end to frontier exploration in the 1920s and 1930s. Although this era was one of the high points of British imperialism, it was also characterized by manifold local crises and tumultuous events, having to do with the inner-workings and the inherent contradictions of the colonial state as well as with the issue of how British possessions in India could actually be protected against aggression from the north. Even though Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) had actually never visited this part of the world, he nonetheless clearly marked a watershed in the history of what would come to be called the British north-west frontier. One of his strategic schemes included a coordinated attack on British overseas possessions in India; it was to be conducted with the help of Russia and was aimed at weakening the great European adversary of his French imperial army by cutting off the lucrative trade with Asia. Although Napoleon's plans never materialized, they would continue to haunt British colonial officers, strategists, and mapmakers, who would eagerly explore northern routes to India and neighboring territories up until the twentieth century – an area of the world that hitherto had largely been unmapped.

Robin Lane Fox (London 1973), in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 96 (1976), 229–30. The debate is neatly summed up in Pierre Briant, *Alexandre. Exégèse des lieux communs* (Folio histoire 259), Paris: Gallimard, 2016, 400–1 and 470–73.

Even though the texts and the individual biographies of the traveler-explorers who would subsequently explore these unknown regions were highly heterogeneous, the notion of travelling in Alexander's "footsteps" or "tracks" was the most prevalent of literary tropes connected to the memory of the ancient conqueror. Great as the difference was between these travelers, not to mention the difference between themselves and the natives of the regions they visited, the texts analyzed in the course of this book show that the memory of Alexander the Great was both a key device for interpreting the British Empire's historical mission in Central Asia and a symbolic projection that enabled communication between past and present, Briton and native. For although the British explorers, with very few exceptions, felt powerfully superior to virtually all of the local ethnicities they encountered, the memory of Alexander was also a meeting point where European textual knowledge and indigenous traditions merged.

One of the main arguments of this book is that the British travelers' cultural reception of Alexander was based on an immense confidence in the centrality of the ancient sources and of the Eurocentric representations engrained in them; however, the contact with natives and their own traditions of Alexander (or rather "Sikander") as well as the experience of local landscapes and places sometimes channeled back into the reading of these sources, so that the Europeans' memory of Alexander was affected – it became a highly relational device for the discursive framing of cultural identity, for either reinforcing imperial British ideology or challenging it. And, as will be shown, the principal faculty in negotiating the dialectic between the reading of sources and the perception of local spaces and people was imagination – in this way, the British travelers' journey into the regions of the north-west frontier was littered with historical associations, local legends, and a highly imaginative reservoir of cultural images, just the way it had been when Alexander entered these lands himself.

When it comes to accounting for the influence of classical models on the British Empire, the Roman Empire has usually been called upon as the great historical predecessor. While this may be true with regard to administrative and ideological aspects inherent in the colonial project, there were practically no territorial overlaps between the British territory and the ancient Roman Empire. Geographically speaking, Alexander was an even more relevant point of reference. As will be shown in the course of this book, this had to do with the experiential framework of the discovery, exploration, and conquest of northwestern India and its neighboring regions, i. e. the Punjab, modern Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkestan – regions that were as central to geopolitics then as they are now. It was here where the British Empire and Alexander's march overlapped and where the abstract notion of following in his "footsteps" or "tracks" could actually be based on cartographic parallels, military analogies, antiquarian research, cultural inspiration, and finally political power.

Alexander was an over-imposing historical figure upon which conceptions of colonial identity could be based – for the Britons it was clear that they were following in the Macedonian's footsteps because he had been a Westerner (and a European) like

themselves. However, the further the British explorers advanced along the northwestern regions of India they realized that Alexander had already been waiting for them. Only this was a different Alexander than the one they had been familiar with from their ancient source books – he came in the guise of Sikander or Iskander and some local indigenous tribes even claimed direct descent from him. The way the writings of the travelers and explorers reacted to the cultural confrontation between a ‘Western’ and an ‘Eastern’ Alexander will be one of the main themes of this book. And while it is clear that the sources generally reflect a Eurocentric viewpoint and Western bias, it will nonetheless be one of the main contentions of this study that the cultural reception of Alexander the Great has to be conceptualized as a transcultural one, and Alexander as a transcultural and trans-historical figure himself.

1.1 Alexander the Great and the British Empire: Classical Reception in Context

In an article on Alexander the Great for the first volume of *The Cambridge History of India*, published in 1921, the philosopher and historian of the Hellenistic world, Edwyn Bevan (1870–1943), wrote:

The Europeans who had followed Alexander so far into Asia now entered the region in which the armies of the English operate to-day. At that season of the year the hill-country must have been bitterly cold, and probably to some extent under snow. It was the same hill-country whose contours and tracks and points of vantage are studied now by the British commanders; the tough highlander of the Balkans or of Crete climbed and skirmished with bow and javelin in 327 B. C. where the Scottish highlander was to climb and skirmish with rifle and bayonet two thousand two hundred years later.¹¹

The region to which Bevan refers in his article is the stretch of land between the Kabul and the Indus rivers, imprecisely marked as the so-called Durand line by the administration of British India in 1893. Situated between the Khyber Pass and Peshawar, it was not only meant to demarcate the British possessions in the Punjab and India from Afghanistan, but also figured as a strategic geopolitical buffer zone between British and Russian interests.¹² While this area would remain a space of unrest until the end of the British presence in the region, it was, above all, a highly symbolical and prestigious strip of land steeped in a long history of cultural contact and military conflict. Due to

11 Edwyn R. Bevan, “Alexander the Great,” in *The Cambridge History of India, vol. I: Ancient India*, ed. by Edward James Rapson (London: Cambridge UP, 1921), 315. On Bevan cf. also Briant, *Exégèse*, 177–80.

12 Cf. in general on the history of the region and the geostrategic conflict between Britain and Russia Jonathan L. Lee, *The “Ancient Supremacy”: Bukhara, Afghanistan, and the Battle for Balkh, 1731–1901* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

its geographical location and its function as a connecting corridor between India and Central Asia, it had served as the setting of various geopolitical maneuvers and map exercises. Alexander's campaign had been only one of several great military undertakings that would bring the area center stage in the course of history, but for the British it was his name and his invasion of India that served as the great cultural reference point. In the British interpretation, it was the Macedonian who had brought Europe into contact with these zones of the world, and it were the Britons who took it upon themselves to carry this undertaking forward, far beyond the points where Alexander had originally ventured. In Bevan's view, it does not make a difference that Alexander had actually approached these strips of land from the northwest, whereas the Britons had come from their Indian dominions in the southeast – what matters is that both Alexander's army and the British troops were seen as "European," as representing and forwarding whatever values and standards were associated with that marker of cultural identity in a foreign and often hostile environment.

Although Bevan's actual aim is to illustrate the history of Alexander, the analogy he develops between Alexander's time and the British empire is no idiosyncratic rhetorical maneuver to illustrate ancient history for his readership with the help of contemporary references, but rather reflects a typical representational practice prevalent throughout the long nineteenth century, from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars up to the First World War, namely to present the memory of Alexander the Great as implicated in Britain's own imperial history. Nowhere was this move clearer, or more nuanced, than along the northwestern regions of British India. As in the case of Bevan, historiography was one means of imaginatively drawing this connection in a line of *translatio imperii*, from Alexander's "Balkan" auxiliaries to the Scottish highlanders, but by the time of the 1920s it had already become a literary trope, developed in travel writing from the late eighteenth century onwards.

It is not easy to highlight a specific point in time when the British fascination with Alexander began, but interest in and references to Alexander certainly grew stronger when the Honourable East India Company, initially a comparatively small joint-stock company founded for trade with the East Indies, gradually switched its focus from trade to territorial expansion and possession in the course of the eighteenth century, and when it eventually came to rule large areas of India with its own private armies, exercising military power and assuming administrative functions.¹³ Bernard Cohn sees the capture of Seringatam in 1799 and the defeat of Tipu Sultan (1750–1799), ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore, as a critical watershed, for it consolidated the Company's rule over great parts of southern and central India.¹⁴ Although the Company's dominion

13 Cf. John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 219–330.

14 Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80.

was still a good distance away from where Alexander had initially operated, the Britons could indeed be said to have accomplished what the Macedonian had tried in vain, namely to take control over vast portions of the Indian subcontinent. This territorial aspect of British power in India, along with the alleged threat of a Napoleonic invasion, reset the Company's focus, bringing the Macedonian's Indian campaign into view in a practical sense: "When at the turn of the nineteenth century, the East India Company's attention was drawn to the Central Asian region, it was," as Lawrence James has observed, to the sources of Alexander "that officials turned for information about the human and military geography of the regions beyond the Khyber and the Amu Darya."¹⁵ Geopolitical interest and classical reception went hand in hand and reciprocally intensified one another as the Britons set their eyes on northern India and particularly the Punjab, first in an economic, later in a military sense as well. It was an analogous process entailing two timeframes and two synergetic effects: the thinking through of present and future strategic blueprints, as well as the harking back on the past as an inspirational source of knowledge for operating in an area where not much intelligence was available.¹⁶

In the time of European colonial expansion, the classical models provided a framework for reflecting on lines of tradition legitimizing imperial endeavors as well as on practical methods of how the process of colonization needed to be shaped in order to be successful. Regarding the example of Alexander the Great for the British self-proclaimed imperial mission, "there was," as Warwick Ball has noticed,

an added attraction to the model when, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the British Empire for the first time overlapped that of Alexander's. Britain extended its empire into the area where the great conqueror had trod before when it expanded into north-western India, particularly after the Sikh Wars of 1845–49 which culminated in the annexation of the Punjab and the extension of British India to the North-West Frontier. For the first time, British regiments fought on the same territory that Alexander's phalanxes had fought millennia before.¹⁷

15 Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 77–78.

16 Cf. Cohn, *Colonialism*, 79.

17 Warwick Ball, "Some Talk of Alexander: Myth and Politics in the North-West Frontier of British India," in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (Groningen: Barkhuis Publ., 2012), 130. The parallel between Alexander's troops, partly made up, by the time of the Indian campaign, of Persian and indigenous groups, and the British troops in India had already been drawn in the nineteenth century. The Scottish historian and travel writer Charles MacFarlane made this connection and compared Alexander's "Macedonian phalanges" to the British troops: George Lillie Craik and Charles MacFarlane, *The Pictorial History of England During the Reign of George the Third, Being a History of the People, As Well As of the Kingdom, Vol. IV* (London: Charles Knight, 1844), 203. As Pierre Briant has shown, this motif had an even longer history in the British debate, however. Cf. Pierre Briant, *Alexandre des Lumières: Fragments d'histoire européenne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 414–15.

It is remarkable how much Ball's quote echoes that of Bevan, drawing the same parallel between the British imperial troops and Alexander's armies. It attests to the success and cultural prevalence of an image developed from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, namely to travel in Alexander's "footsteps" or "tracks." What began as a tentative exploration of possible transfer routes between India and Central Asia, including economic transit, soon turned into a proper geostrategic and military quest for hegemony in that area of the world. And while it is true that British dominions only formally overlapped with Alexander's by the middle of the nineteenth century, the fascination with and interest in his route began much earlier.

This book traces the story of how the cultural metaphor of traveling in Alexander's footsteps came about and what kind of interest it served. By looking at travel writings from the Napoleonic era up to the early decades of the twentieth century, it will systematically analyze the timespan when the British north-west frontier came into being, first as an imaginative realm, later as a geopolitical reality. A study of the cultural reception of Alexander the Great in the British Empire could have entailed other aspects as well, namely representations of Alexander in imaginative literature, exhibitions, or historiography in metropole culture, or the presence of his memory in other parts of Britain's colonial world; but nowhere was the memory of Alexander more immediate than in the first-hand accounts of travelers, explorers, soldiers, and antiquarians who worked and ventured along the north-west frontier. It was here that they truly encountered the past and actively entered into a negotiation with it.

The clear focus on travel writing and literature of exploration as well as the geographic focus on the small strip of British India, where the British and Alexander's empires coincided, adds to an existing field of classical reception studies that have intensively looked at the presence of the Macedonian conqueror in the time of European imperialism. In a number of essays¹⁸ and one path breaking monograph,¹⁹ Pierre Briant has illustrated the reception of Alexander the Great in the Age of Enlightenment, trac-

- 18 Briant published the first article touching on this subject in 1979, but it would remain with him, and from the dawn of the new millennium onwards, he has devoted himself more and more to uncovering the complex reception history of Alexander in the Early Modern and Modern Age. Cf. Pierre Briant, "Impérialisme antique et idéologie coloniale dans la France contemporaine: Alexandre modèle colonial," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 5 (1979), 283–92; Pierre Briant, "La tradition gréco-romaine sur Alexandre le Grand dans Europe moderne et contemporaine," in *The Impact of Classical Greece on European and National Identities*, ed. Margriet Haagsma Pim den Boer and Eric M. Moormann (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2003), 161–80; Pierre Briant, "Alexandre et l'hellénisation de l'Asie: l'histoire au passé et au présent," *Studi Ellenistici* 16 (2005), 9–69; Pierre Briant, "Alexander and the Persian Empire, between 'Decline' and 'Renovation,'" in *Alexander the Great: A New History*, ed. Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence A. Tritle (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 171–88.
- 19 Pierre Briant, *Alexandre des Lumières: Fragments d'histoire européenne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). Briant's book has been partially translated into English: Pierre Briant, *The First European: A History of Alexander in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

ing the roots of the modern Alexander historiography long before 1833.²⁰ Drawing on an impressive amount of sources, Briant has shown how Alexander became integral to Enlightenment thinking in that the history of the Macedonian conqueror allowed for a reflection of “European” ideals in relation to a global context. Not only did Alexander provide a model that could either be appropriated or contested in the time of European colonialization, he also became a foil on which to draw different conceptions of economic exchange, geopolitical strategy, or cultural identity. Briant also looks at British debates, including geographers and travelers that explicitly referred to Alexander and my own inquiry, especially the first part, was naturally shaped by Briant’s rich observations on the subject. However, my study has a different outlook in that it begins where Briant’s study ends, with a stronger emphasis on the nineteenth century.²¹ Moreover, it primarily analyzes texts that were written by authors who came into direct contact with the sites of Alexander’s campaign along the north-west frontier; accordingly, historiography written by scholars that often drew on travel writing, but never visited British India, will predominantly be left out of the analysis.

Phiroze Vasunia is another important influence in that his work cannot only be said to touch on important points for conceptualizing classical reception within an imperial framework,²² but also because his monograph *The Classics and Colonial India* has outlined with great clarity how Alexander figured as a central cornerstone for colonial discourse on British India.²³ His study is especially fruitful in that it discusses historiography as well as travel writing, and also looks at how Indians adapted classical models themselves, transforming and undermining many of the Eurocentric perspectives ingrained in many of the analyzed texts. While Vasunia also looks at other examples of classical reception, including Augustus and Plato, and places his discussion in an Indian political context that traces classical discourse up to the point of the movement of independence, the focus of my own study is on Alexander alone, with a stronger emphasis on modes of knowledge production and the respective role of travelers in reproducing, but also re-imagining notions of Alexander in a colonial context.

20 1833 marks a watershed in the modern historiography of Alexander, since it was the publication year of Droysen’s famous biography of the ancient Macedonian. Johann Gustav Droysen, *Geschichte Alexanders des Großen* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1833).

21 An erudite discussion of Alexander’s modern reception history can be found in Briant, *Exégèse* (see note 10 above). For another comprehensive volume cf. Kenneth Royce Moore (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

22 Cf., for instance, Phiroze Vasunia, “Introduction,” in *India, Greece, and Rome, 1757 to 2007*, ed. Edith Hall and Phiroze Vasunia (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 1–11, and Phiroze Vasunia, “Barbarism and Civilization: Political Writing, History, and Empire,” in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 4: 1790–1880*, ed. Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 131–58.

23 Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

With this focus on travel writing, this book is close to Christopher Hagerman's essay "In the footsteps of the 'Macedonian Conqueror'."²⁴ Hagerman has analyzed how classical Greco-Roman sources were made to serve British conceptions of India as a stagnant country to be civilized, and, more importantly, how Alexander was called upon to legitimize this colonial mission, while at the same time serving as a source of personal inspiration for countless administrators, explorers, and soldiers.²⁵ This latter aspect will also figure prominently in my own study, but it will be integrated into a broader framework that tries, on the one hand, to theoretically account for the representational role of Alexander within a cultural discourse, and, on the other, to look at the textual and social relations which generated, replicated, and transformed the memory of the 'Macedonian conqueror' in the first place.²⁶

By illustrating the long shadow cast by the almost over imposing presence of Alexander's history in the literature of travel and exploration along the regions of north-western British India, this book makes an exemplary case for analyzing how classics and the memory of antiquity became implicated in the project of colonialization and imperialist ideology. It thereby draws on and expands on classical reception studies in general as well as works that have looked at the interplay between classics and empire in particular. In his introduction to the path-breaking collection of essays *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, Mark Bradley has already outlined "the multiple dialogues that developed between classics and colonialism" in Britain's imperial age, and

24 Christopher A. Hagerman, "In the footsteps of the 'Macedonian Conqueror': Alexander the Great and British India," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 16, no. 3 and 4 (2009), 344–92.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, 379–92. Hagerman also extensively deals with the British imperial reception of Alexander in his monograph study *Britain's Imperial Muse*, which undertakes a broad-sweeping approach to classicism in British India in general. Cf. Christopher A. Hagerman, *Britain's Imperial Muse: The Classics, Imperialism, and the Indian Empire, 1784–1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 129–86.

26 There are also studies that make use of a transcultural framework in analyzing the reception of Alexander, but their focus usually lays elsewhere: Cf. François de Polignac, "From the Mediterranean to Universality? The Myth of Alexander, Yesterday and Today," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 14, no. 1 (1999), 1–17; Su Fang Ng, "Global Renaissance: Alexander the Great and Early Modern Classicism from the British Isles to the Malay Archipelago," *Comparative Literature* 58, no. 4 (2006), 293–312; Michael W. Herren, "Constructing the Memory of Alexander in the Early Eighth Century," in *Strategies of Remembrance: From Pindar to Hölderlin*, ed. Lucie Doležalova (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 163–74. On the notion of "collective memory" and the interaction between British interpretations of Alexander and local traditions see also the essays in the volume Himanshu Prabha Ray and Daniel T. Potts, ed., *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007). For articles that frame the indigenous collective memories of Alexander/Sikander along the north-west frontier cf. Ball, "Some Talk of Alexander"; Anna Akasoy, "Alexander in the Himalayas: Competing Imperial Legacies in Medieval Islamic History and Literature," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 62 (2009), 1–20 as well as Omar Coloru, "Alexander the Great and Iskander Dhu'l-Qarnayn: Memory, Myth and Representation of a Conqueror from Iran to South East Asia Through the Eyes of Travel Literature," in *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images*, ed. Eftychia Stavrianopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 389–412.

how “the two exerted a formative influence on each other at various levels.”²⁷ Thereby, classicism underwent various transformations “alongside the evolution of the British Empire,” while “classical ideas and modern imperialism”²⁸ commented on each other. This synchronicity between the formulation of imperial agendas and ideas as well as the development of classicism can be said to be the expression of a dialectical process that revolved around questions of hegemony and ownership. In an abstract sense, this could entail a long history of ideas, which framed European nationalisms in such a way that they could be said to be rooted in the distant past of Greece and Rome,²⁹ including the interpretative authority to use classics in a manner that benefited national interests like overseas expansion and the exploitation of distant countries, which were excluded from the Greco-Roman cultural heritage.

Vlassopoulos has neatly defined the exemplary role of classical discourse as a “cognitive model”, developed “in the intellectual world of eighteenth-century Europeans”, that was used to “make sense of contemporary events and personalities and even predict the course of future developments.”³⁰ This “imaginative dependence of the new upon the old”³¹ was remarkably widespread, exceeding the elitist circles of politicians and academics, and was initially based upon a strong emphasis on the Roman Empire, both in terms of a cultural heritage to be appropriated and an imperial model to be emulated. More than a mere cultural foil upon which own schemes of imperial identity could be drawn, this had an immediate relevance when the British overseas dominions further expanded and Britain could be said to have an empire of its own. Especially with regard to British India, Roman models offered themselves for a reflection on the dynamics and pitfalls of imperial rule.³² However, as will be argued in the course of this book, the memory of Alexander the Great loomed at least as large as Roman forebears in the discursive negotiation of the British Empire in India and its bordering regions, entailing multiple dimensions that included abstract models as well as more practical appropriations for the construction of colonial knowledge and the negotiation of imperial identity.

In this more practical sense, the memory of Alexander served as a central ingredient of a legitimizing discourse that framed the imperial undertaking, in other words, “it

27 Mark Bradley, “Introduction: Approaches to Classics and Imperialism,” in *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, ed. Mark Bradley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

28 *Ibid.*, 9.

29 Cf. Susan A. Stephens and Phiroze Vasunia, “Introduction,” in *Classics and National Cultures*, ed. Susan A. Stephens and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

30 Kostas Vlassopoulos, “Imperial Encounters: Discourses on Empire and the Uses of Ancient History during the Eighteenth Century,” in *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, ed. Mark Bradley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31–32.

31 Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 12.

32 Cf. Richard Alston, “Dialogues in imperialism: Rome, Britain, and India,” in *India, Greece, and Rome, 1757–2007*, ed. Edith Hall and Phiroze Vasunia (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2010), 51–52.

[provided] a seedbed for understandings of (...) the European colonization.”³³ In fact, Alexander’s conquest became a case study for uncovering the inherent connections between military conquest, economic relations, geographical knowledge, antiquarian research, and the coinciding feeling of cultural superiority during British expansion in India and the ensuing geostrategic conflicts along the north-west frontier. In consequence, the classical reception of Alexander was “profoundly implicated in ideologies of empire”³⁴ in that certain elements connected to his history like the geographic and scientific exploration of the conquered regions, the foundation of cities and the construction of transport systems, the circulation and dissemination of Hellenic culture, could be made to comment on Britain’s own endeavors in this region.

To be sure, this is not to say that the model of Alexander was integrated into the British imperial mind frame in an all-approving or homogeneous way – quite the contrary:³⁵ as the texts analyzed in this book show, there is not *one* coherent Alexander reception in the British Empire and there are vast differences between the individual authors and their respective subject matter, depending also on the individual predispositions and social contexts. However, they also illustrate that Alexander remained a central vantage point from which the European undertakings in the region along the north-west frontier could be read; the Macedonian could also be turned into the object of comment or critique based on contemporary imperial experience. What many recent theories and models of classical reception have shown, namely that the act of reception is a two-way process and entails its own cultural dynamic,³⁶ finds its confirmation in a close reading of the travel writings analyzed in this book. Thereby, it will be shown, to echo Hagerman, that “the classics made a varied, complex, and surprisingly intense contribution to British attitudes and experiences” in British India.³⁷

33 Stephen Garton, “‘Wild Follies and Ostentatious Displays’: Reflections on Alexander the Great in India and the Question of Collective Memory,” in *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia*, ed. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Daniel T. Potts (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007), 2.

34 Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India*, 33. Briant has shown in how far there could be said to have been a double image of Alexander in Enlightenment historiography, not the least between the European continent and England, because the Macedonian could be used as both “example” and “counter example” in various intellectual debates. Cf. Briant, *Alexandre des Lumières*, 33–63.

35 Alexander’s personality, especially his temperament, the outbursts of violence, and the apparent ‘orientalization’ towards the latter stages of his reign sat uneasily with British audiences. According to Brauer, it was not up until the end of the eighteenth century that favorable characterization gained increasing circulation amongst British audiences – not the least due to own colonial world-views. George C. Brauer, “Alexander in England: The Conqueror’s Reputation in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Classical Journal* 76, no. 1 (1980), 34–47.

36 Cf. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, “Introduction: Making Connections,” in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 4–5. Also Charles Martindale, “Introduction: Thinking Through Reception,” in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, ed. Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 3–6.

37 Hagerman, *Britain’s Imperial Muse*, 156.

More than a mere intellectual practice of an elitist group within British circles, the reception of Alexander reached deeper, however. Vasunia has cautioned us against putting too much emphasis on how Greco-Roman traditions have determined colonial attitudes and how European imperialism has channeled back into reception processes. While he does not contest the overall validity of this model, he nonetheless warns against an inherent oversimplification that “belies the dense interplay of human and institutional actors that were involved in empire, and simplifies the many dynamic interventions, responses, and accomplishments of the colonizers and the colonized.”³⁸ Keeping this cautionary note in mind, my analysis will show in how far the memory of Alexander the Great in the British Empire was negotiated within an interactional framework that included the British travelers, the indigenous groups, and the material traces and landscapes they encountered. As will be argued, the latter can be said to have an agency that both influenced the travelers’ reading and interpretation of the ancient sources, and that could, in turn, lead to new ways of thinking about Alexander as well as the British politics in the regions along the north-west frontier, including a subversion and critique of colonial models on part of some, albeit not the majority, of the authors.

Although this study will thereby focus on the writings of different travelers and explorers, who brought their own personal interests and agendas to bear on their respective memory of Alexander, there are general points that can be made when trying to account for the impact of the reception of Alexander in the British Empire: they concern, firstly, the education and classicism of British colonial culture; secondly, the colonial geography and the construction of knowledge based on the assumption of traveling in Alexander’s “footsteps”; thirdly, military aspects, especially in a strategic sense as well as the desire to emulate the great Macedonian conqueror; fourthly, the fashioning of imperial identity and the discursive ‘othering’ of indigenous groups; and finally the re-negotiation and re-interpretation of Alexander’s model based on the experience of land and people.

All of these aspects will play a role in the following chapters and while the respective emphasis may shift depending on individual predispositions or the timeframe, there can be no question that Alexander’s memory was a multifaceted cultural foil upon which different versions of the imperial reality could be made and remade. It would be an overstatement to assume that imperial agendas were on the mind of all of the travelers and explorers discussed in this study and not every mention of Alexander automatically implies an imperial ideology. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the context of the writings that circulated in the cultural framework of British India were clearly implicated in the colonial project of a progressive British Empire. It

38 Cf. Phiroze Vasunia, “Envoi,” in *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, ed. Mark Bradley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 285.

is from this context that the travel writings emanated and eventually came to comment on a particular experience of the imperial reality, namely of getting in touch with the past that was both familiar and strange: it was familiar in that it could be said to belong to 'European' history, and it was strange in that it entailed worlds (both ancient and contemporary) far removed from the metropolitan center in England.

The connecting link that could be said to bridge the experiential divide between British homeland and foreign colony was, for many, the reading of the ancient sources connected to Alexander's campaign. Here was a historical model that could be said to have mastered the journey from Europe to a distant part of the world, albeit under completely different circumstances. As Hagerman notes, "the journey from Britain to India appears to have intensified the sense of Alexander's relevance to the imperial presence."³⁹ In his view, this went so far "that educated Britons seem almost to have been unable to travel, live, work, or fight in this region without looking for signs of Alexander and the landmarks of his campaigns."⁴⁰ The memory of Alexander became especially attached to the geographical regions, historical sites, and indigenous traditions that were believed to have come into immediate contact with him and his troops.

So it was here, along the north-west frontier, that it did occupy the imagination of colonial culture and imperial forms of representation. In this sense, Hagerman is right to point to the centrality of classical education to British elitist circles.⁴¹ At the East India Company College, later Haileybury College, the training ground for the Indian Civil Service, the curriculum had a strong emphasis on classical education and ancient history with exams regularly including questions on Alexander's campaign.⁴² Due to Alexander's centrality to metropolitan education, the specific form of classicism that evolved around the northwestern frontier in particular could be said to be an upholding of the memory of the Macedonian and its use as a template to imagine their particular place in the history of this region: rather than merely instilling in the Britons a sense that they were the witnesses of a great history, classical education and the classicism along the frontier seem to have reinforced a sentiment that they themselves were the agents of history in the making.

This sentiment was strengthened by the specific geographical connections that could be drawn between the British expansion towards northwestern India and Alexander's historic presence in this region. The metaphor of travelling in Alexander's "footsteps" or "tracks" became a convenient shortcut for expressing the feeling connected to the imperial enterprise. It was not necessarily steeped in an overbearing self-confidence in

39 Hagerman, "In the footsteps of the 'Macedonian Conqueror,'" 379.

40 Ibid., 347.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, 347–51. Also Hagerman, *Britain's Imperial Muse*, 151–59 and Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India*, 22–26.

42 Cf. Phiroze Vasunia, "Greek, Latin, and the Indian Civil Service," in *British Classics Outside England: The Academy and Beyond*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Christopher Stray (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 61–93.

the imperial mission, but it was certainly a way of triggering certain associations and of drawing connections between the present and the past as well as between different authors and texts that drew on this literary trope. More than the realization of geographic coincidence as the essential point of comparison between antiquity and the present, the memory of Alexander was put into service of the colonial construction of knowledge: the ancient sources contained descriptions of the landscapes that could theoretically be used in order to get an overview of a region on which intelligence was rudimentary at best. They would also allow for an accounting of the geostrategic possibility of invading the British dominions in India from the north, particular from the direction of Alexander's route. While this aspect entailed a defensive character, the military emulation of the Macedonian conqueror did not stop here, but became a motivating factor for proving one's masculinity and martial valor in the face of the enemy. Cultural representations of Alexander were therefore integrated into forms of self-representation, and especially military self-representation in British India.

These purported forms of identification with Alexander also became integral to the discourse of cultural identity, especially for framing the apparent difference between colonizers and colonized. In particular, the image of Alexander as an agent and promoter of civilization loomed large and turned into a central point of comparison between his historical conquest and what was ideologically perceived as the British imperial mission in India. Again, the reading and the interpretations of the ancient sources connected to Alexander's campaign were a common point of reference and made up the footing on which a comparison concerning the progressive character of the British and the retrograde or stagnant character of the Indians could be made. This binary view was a central trope, put to use in various texts. It was not only predicated upon an image of the cultural superiority of the Britons and their ancient heritage, but also a highly emphatic reading practice that translated the ancient texts into present experiences – in this way, travelers and explorers could retain their own cultural identity in the face of the 'other', and they could present themselves as the preservers of civilization amidst an alien, and often unsettling environment.

As the reading of the travel writings will show, however, this self-conscious strategy could not always be sustained, since the indigenous people, the historic sites, and the foreign landscapes, exerted a strong fascination on the British travelers that had to be discursively negotiated and kept at bay. Alexander the Great was a welcome reference point in this context, because the ancient sources spoke of a man who had himself been lured by the fascinations of the 'East.' While his 'orientalization' was certainly not approved of by most, it was nonetheless an aspect that brought him even closer to the colonial experience as such. Identity was at stake in literature of exploration and travel, and Alexander was an obvious model upon which certain values and standards could be negotiated.

Finally, this latter aspect ties in with interpretations of Alexander that could be revisited in the course of the imperial enterprise. In the majority of the writings of the

period, Alexander remained a presence, whose name alone could evoke various associations that were unambiguously accepted as historical fact and that largely overshadowed the local particularities of a history before and after the Macedonian – if the regions around the northwestern frontier were treated as having a story, it was predominantly the narrative of the young king from Europe, who brought his troops to the far end of the world, leaving a lasting imprint on the development of civilization in these quarters. It was this uncritical reflection of the memory of Alexander that was appropriated for imperial ideology, because it left enough room for a binary presentation of European and Asian/Indian culture, and because it could be made to fit the present experiences that were seen as a reiteration of the past.

However, the interpretation of Alexander could be far more ambiguous,⁴³ especially when compared with what the explorers found in the places where the Macedonian was said to have ventured. Not only did they struggle to account for his historical presence, but they were constantly concerned to bring their findings in alignment with the reading of the ancient sources. The existence of indigenous traditions connected to Alexander, especially those that purported to be descendants of the Macedonian army, as well as historical traces that stemmed from eras before any European presence in the region, had to be integrated into the reading. Accordingly, a room for dialogue opened up that was not solely dominated by European views of Alexander – that is, one-sided, Eurocentric versions of the story remained possible, but the experience of people and places called for their explanation or justification. The authority of the ancient sources had to be defended against oral traditions;⁴⁴ material traces of objects or buildings had to be correlated with textual evidence. This is what makes travel writing such an interesting object of inquiry in general and of classical reception studies in particular: literature of travel and exploration reflected many metropolitan views of history and was implicated in the creation of an imperial ideology, but it was, if only implicitly, infused with elements that undermined these views at the same time. Uncovering these representational contradictions and the discursive negotiations will be one main task of this book.

43 This ambiguity could entail an assessment of Alexander's character; it could also include a reflection on the nature of Alexander's empire – after all, it was only a transient episode in the history of the region and did not last, cf. Hagerman, "In the footsteps of the 'Macedonian Conqueror,'" 366–67, and Hagerman, *Britain's Imperial Muse*, 76.

44 Cf. Ball, "Some Talk of Alexander," 151–58, for an overview of Alexander-related titles, including translations of the ancient sources, in British Library during the long nineteenth century. On this also Hagerman, "In the footsteps of the 'Macedonian Conqueror,'" 350, n. 16 and 17, who lists editions and translations of the Alexander historians during the nineteenth century.