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The Campaigns of Alexander, by Arrian (translated by A. de Sélincourt and revised by J.R. Hamilton), Penguin, 1971

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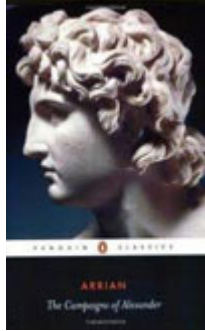
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The Campaigns of Alexander

by Arrian (translated by A. de Sélincourt and revised by J.R. Hamilton), Penguin, 1971

Reviewed by Tiberiu Popa

Few military and political leaders have been quite as inspiring and perplexing as Alexander of Macedonia, better known as Alexander the Great. His conquests changed the political and cultural map of much of the Middle East in profound and lasting ways. There was no shortage of admirers and detractors of the young king in antiquity, which accounts in part for a considerable number of detailed biographies and of literary portraits. Arrian's *Campaigns...* (divided into seven sections or 'books') is not among the oldest, but is certainly among the most interesting and comprehensive attempts to track Alexander's exploits from southern Europe to Egypt, across the Persian empire, to the Ganges and finally to Babylon, where, on his way back to Macedonia, Alexander died in somewhat mysterious circumstances. What makes this narrative especially worth reading is that Arrian himself was a rather prominent military and political figure under the Roman emperor Hadrian, which allowed him to better appreciate Alexander's tactical and strategic genius. One should also note that Arrian is responsible for the survival of Epictetus' ethical doctrine; his exposure to Epictetus' Stoic outlook is manifest in his frequent assessments of the moral significance of some of Alexander's more controversial actions. I would add that one of the most surprising features in his portrayal of the Macedonian king - and king of Asia - is Alexander's insatiable and quasi-scientific curiosity, which had probably made him a worthy student of Aristotle. De Sélincourt's translation renders Arrian's quirky Greek with precision but has also benefitted from Hamilton's revision. Anyone interested in Alexander's personality or in the very complex and somewhat elusive concept of leadership, will take great delight in reading this work.

- Tiberiu Popa is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Butler University.