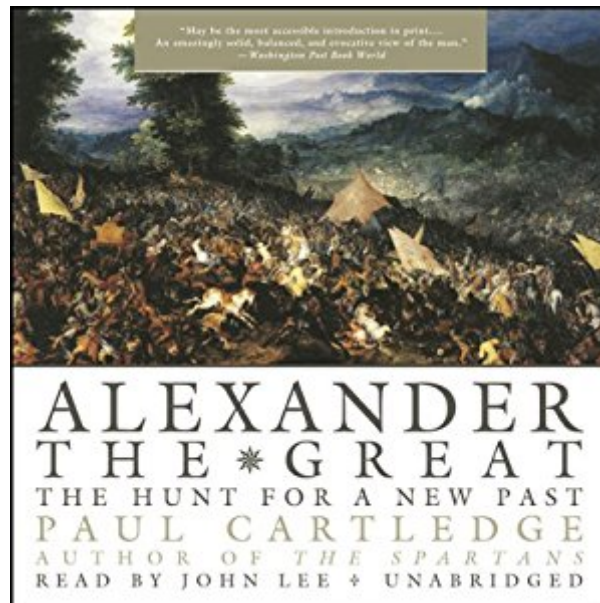


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Alexander The Great: The Hunt For A New Past



Synopsis

Paul Cartledge, one of the world's foremost scholars of ancient Greece, illuminates the brief but iconic life of Alexander (356-323 BC), king of Macedon, conqueror of the Persian Empire, and founder of a new world order. Alexander's legacy has had a major impact on military tacticians, scholars, statesmen, adventurers, authors, and filmmakers. Cartledge brilliantly evokes Alexander's remarkable political and military accomplishments, cutting through the myths to show why he was such a great leader. He explores our endless fascination with Alexander and gives us insight into his charismatic leadership, his capacity for brutality, and his sophisticated grasp of international politics. Alexander the Great is an engaging portrait of a fascinating man, and a welcome balance to the myths, legends, and often skewed history that have obscured the real Alexander. --This text refers to the CD-ROM edition.

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Customer Reviews

Best book on Alexander I have read yet. But, as advertised, it is only best for those who already know the story and stories of Alexander's life and accomplishments. Cartledge is to be commended for being a very logical critic of the genre and of the man himself.

good

This author is so full of his own ideas he hardly takes the time to step down from his cloud to provide evidence for some of his key arguments. Also, he describes the torsion catapult as a

"spring-powered-crossbow," a wholly incorrect statement. He also incorrectly confuses the oblique order and advancing in echelon, constantly throughout the text, which makes it even more confusing. He claims that Cavalry actually have a disadvantage over infantry because their spears weighed less, completely neglecting the fact that the Animal's weight would be added to the thrust. He actually states that the only advantages of cavalry were "speed, cohesion, horsemanship, and courage at close quarters." Ironically, he forgets the most important factor, the factor that made cavalry a devastating weapon for over 2000 years, the size and strength of the animal and its willingness to be ridden. A slightly lighter spear being wielded from horseback being compared to a slightly heavier spear being wielded by a slow, clunky foot-soldier...there is no comparison, the Cavalry will strike with more impetus, delivering a much more powerful blow, not least of all because their spears would be substantially shorter. (ask ANY medieval historian about the advantages of cavalry and you will get the same response...) Besides the numerous lapses of thought and small factual errors (the above are just some of the more egregious lapses of judgement, from a military historian's standpoint) Cartledge is excessively difficult to follow because he bounces all over the spectrum of time. This is alright, if you actually have a reason for it, which Cartledge often does not. This is especially apparent when, in the middle of a chapter discussing Alexander's relationship with his soldiers, Cartledge randomly leads the reader into a completely unrelated paragraph about Alexander's alleged homosexuality, the cult of the Gymnasium, and the homosexuality of the Theban band...then, a paragraph later, returns to his original thesis. (the paragraph is amazingly out of place, so much so that several of my acquaintances who have also read this book have, like myself, raised their eyebrows and said "huh?" So, I'm not alone on this point either.) Cartledge's book is arranged as a series of essays that are thrown together in a hodgepodge manner, and some of the chapters even say (nearly) the exact same thing, border-line verbatim. (which made me feel ripped off, some parts almost seemed copy-pasted from an earlier chapter.) I recommend avoiding this author unless you have already read GOOD book on the man, such as Grotke, Ayrault Dodge, etc. there are literally dozens of good books on Alexander, and this is not one of them. If you are looking for a rough account of Alexander's life, from a man who has a pathetically shallow grasp of military discipline, tactics, strategy, and technology, this book may be for you. If you want a heavily biased account of Alexander from a pompous 'in-his-own-head' scholar, this book may be for you. I suggest, beginners and serious scholars alike however, look elsewhere.

It's not a bad book, it is full of info and is great for reference. Not a very easy book to sit and read for a long time though.

really enjoyed this book more than expected. definately one of those when you are just interested in it and you won't be dissapointed. fast shipping!!

Lane Fox then this and you've got all yer going to get short of a Dead Sea discovery Two.

This is, as other reviewers have already mentioned and discussed, an excellent book. It is also a thoughtful one where the author, with his usual talent, scholarship and accessible writing style, seeks (and very largely succeeds) to come up with an entertaining piece that is targeted at the general reader but may also be useful for specialists. Customers should not that this is NOT yet another biographer of the conqueror or, perhaps to be more accurate, it is not the "usual" and yet another biographer of Alexander. Instead, Paul Cartledge has investigated a number of key themes associated with "Alexander the Great's" life and achievements, and carefully discussed them. I have titled this review "middle of the road" because, in most cases, this is the overall impression that the book gave me. The author strives to keep to the middle ground on just about all of the themes that he reviews. This middle ground opposes the traditional and heroicised view of Alexander, which derives from what Cartledge (and others) have presented as the "official sources" derived from Callisthenes and/or written by eyewitnesses (such as Ptolemy) and which are largely reflected by one of the main remaining sources, and the "modern" view of Alexander, which also draws on surviving sources to some extent and owes so much to Badian. This "modern" view, informed by the 20th century experiences of totalitarian regimes, is much less favorable and even, for some authors (Bosworth, in particular) mostly hostile, with Alexander depicted as a kind of "monster" who did little if any good and whose demise triggered some forty years of fighting between his self-appointed Successors. As already mentioned, Paul Cartledge's piece is a very valuable contribution to uncovering "the truth behind the myth" although, as the author is honest enough to state, discussions and controversies on Alexander will go on and a number of issues will ultimately remain unresolved because so much of the sources have been lost and only fragments of some of the 20 primary sources remain, often as summaries from much later Roman authors or Greek authors writing in Roman times, or as quotations from the same authors. A complement to this valuable piece is now Anson's contributions on "Themes and issues" which, in some cases, are clearly a response to Cartledge's views. Perhaps the main merit of this book is to show that the extreme versions presenting Alexander in either a very favorable or a very negative way are excessive, colored by prejudices and may even, when considering the sources, correspond to specific

agendas. One particularly interesting piece is the demonstration showing that while Alexander's campaigns certainly did have an impact on Macedonia's population, this impact was somewhat more limited than Bosworth has made it up to be and the country was not durably deprived of adult "Makedones" males as a result of his far-flung campaigns. Other points of view may be perhaps more disputable. As Anson has shown in his more recent work, it is doubtful as to whether Alexander can really be portrayed as the "founder of the Hellenistic world" because it is unlikely that he had such an intention and may not have cared about it, unlike some of his Successors who definitely needed to consolidate their respective regimes. While excellent, if only because it shows to what extent our views of Alexander will have to remain somewhat speculative due to the lack of surviving primary sources, the book did however have some limits, and this is regardless of whether you agree with the author's views. The first limit is a consequence of the author's choice to present the outstanding Macedonian monarch in a thematic way. To get the full benefit of Cartledge's insights and views, you probably need to have already a (good) grasp of the period, and of Alexander's "life and deeds" in particular. To be fair, however, this concern has been somewhat mitigated by the author because he has provided a glossary of terms and a comprehensive list of characters with their main claims to fame. Both of these elements are extremely useful. The second limit was perhaps a bit more surprising. The book contains diagrams of all of Alexander's main battles in Asia and of the siege of Tyre. However, the discussion of these is very limited or even almost non-existent at times. Something that was particularly missing was a discussion showing to what extent Alexander's battle tactics reflected his personality and were frequently or even systematically brilliant but very high risk gambles. He could have lost - and almost did lose - his life in just about every encounter. Another such gamble, and the only one on which Cartledge really insists, was his decision to dismiss his fleet and to defeat the Persian naval forces by conquering all of the ports that they could use. As Paul Cartledge shows very well, this, and Alexander's decision to go to Egypt, gave time for Darius to rally and rebuild yet another army. A third - and related - issue is that Cartledge mentions several times to what extent Alexander was fortunate, at least up to 330, because even when he got himself in trouble, he managed to extricate himself and/or the enemy was unable to take full advantage of his difficulties. It is therefore a pity that the author could not be bothered to analyse Alexander's victories at Granicus, Issos and Gaugamela in more detail, because such an analysis would have shown that all three battles were hard fought and their outcome was certainly not predictable. Interestingly also, and until Darius could be captured, none of these victories would really be decisive, however brilliant they were. This relates to the main reason for Alexander's relentless pursuit of Darius after Gaugamela: it was essential to capture the

Persian monarch (preferably) and even kill him if necessary and, more generally, from preventing him from rallying and reforming yet another army from the Persian empire's heartlands and Eastern borders. There are, however, some areas where Cartledge does take sides. One example is that of Alexander's later years where he joins the existing consensus and accepts that Alexander's character became more despotic and took a turn for the worse, even if he refrains from seeing Alexander as a paranoid alcoholic, as another author has. Another example is the depiction of Alexander as always wanting and needing "more" and wanting and needing to be in a class of his own, as a hero and then as a living god. This is also a theme revisited by Anson's work and it is particularly interesting to read both books in parallel and compare the views of both authors. Four strong stars.

I enjoy historical books, but this one was just too hard to follow. I listened to the book on audio using the Overdrive App and the narrator was just too hard to follow. In the first 3 chapters the author throws out too many names, dates and places that makes it too difficult to retain or follow history. I actually pulled up a map of the world on the internet when the author spoke of specific dates and place trying to follow the book that way and it didn't help much. I'll be honest this not the typical period in history I normally read or listen to so my level of knowledge for this time period is lacking; however, I do a lot of historical reading and normally can follow a timeline. I was really excited to download this book, and I did learn a great deal from the author's research, just not in the a fashion that was conducive for my ability to completely follow. The author is very talented and smart, but in my opinion, the book needs a do-over providing a much clearer timeline.

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