PERSPECTIVE AND POETICS IN CURTIUS' GORGEOUS EAST

Diana Spencer
University of Birmingham

ABSTRACT

This article explores the particular significance, for twentieth and twenty-first century understandings of Classics, reception and cultural identity, of the story of Alexander the Great ascribed to Quintus Curtius Rufus. Starting from Deleuze’s models of Time and the nature of Existence, the complex and oppositional nature of Curtius’ narrative is explored, and this leads into a discussion of the inter-relationship between concepts and realities of west and east. Intimate connexions between time, space and geography underlie this reading of Curtius, and the ways in which the Roman self plays off and consciously alludes to a synchronic appropriation of a high-concept ‘Orient’ that is at once Other, Alexander’s and a Roman episteme. The textual colonialism of Curtius’ story relentlessly assumes an intellectual community that will enjoy both the unknowability and the glamour, as well as appreciating the looming disaster, that travelling into the east connotes.

Introduction

... nothing but the stories people tell to keep themselves in power.¹

Re-reading Curtius’ Roman story of an ‘Orient’ apparently undergoing a process of ‘Macedonianisation’ is particularly intriguing in the wake of the twentieth-century’s changing understanding of Classics, strategies for rein-

¹ I would like to thank Acta Classica’s referees for their perceptive suggestions and acute advice; they have enormously enhanced the ways this article works. John Atkinson’s Curtius (and his courtesy) also underlies many of my arguments. Along with John Henderson’s interest, it kept me thinking.

¹ Hamilton 1996:167, on textual colonialism and the making of history.
venturing the discipline, and interest in reception studies. For myself, returning to Curtius after a pause offers an opportunity to think through what might happen when one sets the French philosopher and theorist Gilles Deleuze’s elegant formulation of Time against issues of chronology, poetics and perspective in a text from the classical world that has tended to defy attempts to pin down its date and authorship.

Deleuze suggests two distinct and complete modes of experiencing and conceptualising Time: (a) a cluster of always limited but interlocking Presents, weighty and dimensional; (b) the essentially unlimited and elongated Past and Future which gather up and stream incorporeal events. His definition of Being is likewise twofold: ‘full positivity and pure affirmation, ... and there is (non)-being which is the being of the problematic, the being of problems and questions, not the being of the negative’. Taken together, Deleuze’s doubled conceptualisations of Time and Being relocate History at an interface between individual ethos and cultural value. This looks back, in many ways, to Northrop Frye’s suggestion that a certain point of comprehensiveness exists in each textual historical scheme: once that point has been reached, the history becomes mythical in shape, and also approaches the poetic in structure.

What does this have to do with Curtius? I suggest that by guiding us through Alexander’s East, Curtius has created an engagement with this notion of ‘kinds’ of story. Inevitably, he construes his Orient within the discourse of available, and available Roman, versions – themselves typically dependent upon cultural models derived from Greek accounts. At the same time, Curtius engenders a sense of textual comprehension where the scheme or plot intersects with the ‘myth’ at a point interpretable in terms of Roman

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3 This article has its inception in discussions first aired in Spencer 1997.
5 Deleuze 1994:269.
6 Frye 1963:53-55. In White 1978:85-88, historical situations only acquire meaning through the interpretations provided by the historian and the reader – in effect, a ‘fiction-making operation’. Most importantly for moving towards Deleuze’s model, White comments that: ‘considered as a system of signs, the historical narrative points in two directions simultaneously: toward the event described in the narrative and toward the story type or mythos which the historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of the events’ (88).
7 Whitmarsh 2002 looks at what happens when Greeks (Plutarch in particular) ‘reclaim’ Rome’s culturally imperialising gaze across Alexander’s territory.
nationalistic and Alexander imagery. Looking to Deleuze, we (myself and my model reader) may find that invested in this nexus are some of the ways in which we still bring individual and culturally conditioned approaches to bear not just on Alexander, but also on Rome and the East. In effect, the process of applying a modern consciousness, the layering of critical approaches, popular perceptions and personal concerns, awareness of race-studies, discourses of Orientalism and postcolonial theory, taken together question the solidity of Curtius’ story. By undermining a Curtian grand narrative and refusing to find in it a coherent or even monolithic account of Alexander, a reader may then fashion it, in Deleuze’s sense, into a full and energetic existence. Many texts would be equally appropriate for this treatment, but combined in the Historiae Alexandri there are particular qualities that make it an ideal case-study.

For a start, we do not know for sure when Curtius wrote, nor is he securely identifiable as one historical figure.\(^8\) Moreover, by fixing upon Alexander as a subject, Curtius also wrote himself into modern anxieties about sources, truth and authenticity; anxieties that derive currency from the inaccessibility now of non-fragmentary accounts of Alexander by his contemporaries. If these uncertainties were not enough, then the text’s own headlessness adds a finishing touch. The one site in a text where one might reasonably expect to find some programmatic excursus or disclosure of ‘self’ is shorn off. This instability in the identities of author, text and subject is complemented, I suggest, by the complex array of individual and collective contexts and consciousnesses that (potentially) the text can display. How we understand all of this may be clarified, I think, by Deleuze’s model of a series of interlocking presents. Each reader’s present – and each reader’s version of who and when Curtius was - can, then, be slotted into the extant text’s polychronicity. Moreover, Curtius’ choice of Alexander as a subject – a man famous for having an eye to reputation in the future – and his juxtaposition of Rome’s ‘past’ with Alexander’s posthumous vitality (e.g. at 10.9.3-6) further collapses a series of interlocking pasts and futures into a continuous present.

Reading a twenty-first century critique of Curtius simultaneously accesses those multiple presents, whilst acknowledging how the critical apparatus of scholarship emphasises the previousness of Classics as a discipline. This, then, is Deleuze’s vanishing present. As a decapitated text, Curtius’ narrative is particularly susceptible to slipping away from its author’s present. What remains to us – a seven ‘book’ narrative – is a text from Curtius’ future (a

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\(^8\) Baynham 1998:201-19 summarises the ambiguities nicely (and plumps for a Vespasianic date).
future in which it would lose its beginning), and from ‘our’ past: the past that classical scholarship has obsessively attempted to recuperate.

Alii orbes: the space-time continuum

We might read the world represented in the Historiae Alexandri as an entertaining fantasy, some mixture of travel and history, or even as an employment of a world where the intersection between history, exploration and fantasy provides a framework for the transmission of an ethical code. Concentrating on Alexander’s adventures in Persia, I suggest that Curtius’ narrative approaches the last of these in its creation of scenic peoples and places in front of which Alexander can act out his fate. Drawing upon the conventions of history, Curtius also plays upon reader awareness of fantastic archetypes of the Orient, whilst at the same time commenting on the two-way processes of cultural appropriation that shape Roman understanding of empire. Exploring how this reading works in practice, I have concentrated here only on one aspect, viz the integrity of the textual world, guiding the reader from ‘known’ to ‘unknown’ in Alexander’s wake.9

To begin: an overview of the West to East movement of the campaign as it happens in the story. The opening of the narrative in Book 3 makes it clear to the reader that descriptive geography will be a major plot element. As the reader moves through the narrative, experiencing the location of Alexander’s campaign at any given time, (s)he is made aware of the simultaneous positionality of each space and place within the Roman Empire of ‘today’ (particularly in relation to ‘Parthia’), even though when now is remains unclear. In the cosy realms of Book 3 (and until the advance through Parthia in Book 6) Alexander’s successes are all, if not within a version of the Roman Empire, then within its sphere of influence and intellectual appropriation. The land described is all relatively available for travel; Alexander’s footsteps can also be Roman footsteps. Thus at Gordium and the Cilician Gates, the guide-book tone can be explained as an instance of this parallelism between the four Empires: Persian, Alexandrian, Parthian and Roman.10

9 Whitmarsh 2002:186-92 discusses Plutarch’s treatment of West to East narrative momentum.
10 Syme 1995:195-203 suggests how Alexander’s march from Pamphylia over the Termessus defile to Gordium presages Diodorus’ record of Antigonus’ similar adventures (18.41-44), and also Cn. Manlius Vulso’s campaign in 189 BCE where the Roman trod in Alexander’s footsteps (Livy 38.12-15). Horsfall 1985 examines representational conventions on modes of Greek cultural appropriation (of Alexander and of Rome) see Whitmarsh 2002:178.
This contrasts subtly with the dual levels of geographical reception that we encounter in Books 7-9, where the *alii alii* or *other worlds* (9.3.8) which so terrify the troops (and which Alexander longs to explore) are at once both beyond stars and sun (9.4.18) and within the intellectual scope of the Roman *oikoumene*. Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem ('Rome's space is at once both city and world', Fasti 2.684), Ovid pronounces (very much after the *imperium sine fine* or boundless empire promised by Virgil's Jupiter), and on one level, the eastern and even untravelled reaches of Alexander's empire can be subjected to Rome by a Roman facility to catalogue them.\(^{11}\) Nevertheless, when the story enters the further East (or 'Orient'), separate topographical requirements are engendered, not to mention the *Realpolitik* of Roman experiences of empire.\(^{12}\) Further tension may also be embedded in Curtius' provision of a specifically Roman focus for psychological identification: if the Macedonian troops do fulfil this empathetic role, then their unwillingness to continue and their alienation from their leader may have particular shock value and irony, by the time one arrives at that point in the story.

Asia is at once a Roman *provincia* and an area of the Persian/Alexandrian Empires, but Asia has a parallel literary role as a domain where 'wonders' can be experienced. This Orient is mediated back home by accounts derived from imperialising authors, themselves usually agents of invaders.\(^ {13}\) If Alexander conquers this *hyper-*Asia, it still, for Curtius and his audience(s), remains the case that recognising Asia as a Roman episteme always makes it a Roman space first, in any account of Alexander. Similarly, even when submerged in the text, readers are likely to know that in the story's future, as in the narrator's (and even their?) present, Rome has also at this point physically matched Alexander's conquest. When describing the Cilician Gates, the future-present is to the fore:

_Aberta est regio quinquaquinta stadia ab aditu quo Ciliciae intramus Pylas incolae dicunt artissimas fauces, munimenta quae manu ponimus naturali situ imitantès_ (3.4.2).

\(^{11}\) *Verg. Aen.* 1.278-79.

\(^{12}\) Romm 1992:121-71 discusses the tension between the Roman vision of an *orbis terrarum* and the parallel need for 'othered', mythicised regions for aspirational conquest. See also Hardie 1986:64-66 and more recently, Evans 2003. I discuss the impact of this yearning for a para-Augustan Utopia in Horace's *Odes* at Spencer 2006.

\(^{13}\) Nicolet 1991:85-94 sets out Roman exploratory expeditions chronologically from Augustus to Trajan.

\(^{13}\) Romm 1992:83-84 explores this idea.
That place was fifty stadia from the pass by which we enter Cilicia. The Gates, the natives call that extremely narrow defile: fortifications hand-made by us are what its natural formation mimics.

Unfortunately (the narrator assures his readers), the antiquity of this area means that many of the rumoured or storied sites and memorials have by now disappeared and nothing remains but rumour: *ceteraque in quibus nihil praeter famam datauerat* (3.4.10). The physical absence of these memorials - very much *monumenta*, in Livy's terms - prove Alexander's faith in rumour as victor over reality, but also indicate how all features of the landscape touching on the 'Alexander-story' can acquire this *fama* by proxy. Rivers and physical features persist, endlessly subject to (re-)integration into evocations of myth, and are transformed into *monumenta* even as the works of man (and man himself) vanish. At least a version of this Cilicia remains available to Romans, and as Cicero replayed Alexander at Issus (*Ad fam. 2.10.3; Ad Att. 5.20*), the Cydnus, site and cause of Alexander's illness, remains as pure and cold as it then was. The modern traveller could still attempt a recreation of *that* incident (*Curtius 3.5.1*).

Book 3 opens with Alexander and his troops at the city of Celaenae in Phrygia, through which, we are told, the storied River Marsyas (made famous by the Greeks) runs. The Marsyas' course, its clarity and beauty, and its benefit as an irrigator of the plains, are described in detail; the hue, according to the narrator, inspired a poetic fancy of nymphs living near its source, entranced by its charm; but no other literary references seem to tie in with this conceit (3.1.14). The obscure poetic nymphs, tied to the river's source by its beauty, enhance a sense of tradition about the river and its

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14 3.4.10. Cf. Casson 1974:235 on Alexander as a focus for heritage-tourism: e.g. the house in Megalopolis built for Alexander (Pausanias 8.32.1); his tomb in Alexandria (e.g. Herodian 4.8.9 on Caracalla's visit); the spring outside Tyre where he dreamed of the city's capture (*Plutarch, Alex. 24.5*); the Phrygian inn where Mithridates made a point of staying because Alexander had lodged there (*Appian, Bell. Mith. 20*); even supposedly remains from army encampments in India (*Periples Maris Erythraei 41*).

15 E.g. *Livy, AV C Praef. 10*, and on the vivid structural relationship between *monumenta* and memory in *Livy* see Jaeger 1997:15-29. As one of the referees commented, without *monumenta*, only *fama* and *fabula* persist; though stories of Alexander make clear that even *monumenta* generate myth (e.g. Curtius 9.3.19).

16 E.g. the strip of land we identify as Homer's Troy becomes Alexander's Troy, Caesar's Troy (particularly intriguingly in Lucan's account; cf. Spencer 2005:52-56, 63-64), Schliemann's Troy, cinema's (most recently, Wolfgang Petersen's) Troy.
anthropomorphic entrance into the city. The aside is concluded with the information that though named the Marsyas as it flows from its mountain source and into the city, once it emerges from the city walls and returns to the plains it becomes a fast flowing torrent called Lycaus, or Wolf (3.1.5). A reader might suppose that the theriomorphic transformation undergone by the river on leaving the city could offer a metaphor for Alexander’s transformation, or that of any general seeking glory in the East. But where does the river’s departure from the city direct the reader?

In Greek myth, Marsyas dared to contest Apollo’s musical supremacy and was flayed for his trouble. Translated to Rome, his prime location under a fig tree by the Lacus Curtius in the Forum Romanum marks his reinvention as an augur and *indiction libertatis*.

Reminding us of Greek Marsyas (and in particular, Greek Marsyas’ transformation into a potentially Roman *lupa*) drags Rome into the Phrygian landscape and vice versa, thereby also emphasizing processes of acculturation and alienation in the heart of the Forum. Plebeian liberty and Marsyas’ Roman connotations of freeing the land from prior claims are tainted by this Hellenising aside, and its association with Alexander. Perhaps a reminder of Marsyas’ ‘posthumous’ transformation from Greek to Roman at Rome, might also make this a signal of Alexander’s narratologically inevitable death and reinvention? It could even illustrate the tension which underlies Curtius’ approach to autocracy. Marsyas in the Forum Romanum speaks out about continuity and social cohesion, but his augural associations also imply a grand narrative to which Rome is subject. Like Greek Marsyas, Alexander is presumptuous in his rivalry with the gods; and like Greek Marsyas, he finds a whole new life at Rome.

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17 Xenophon describes Celaenae (*Anab. 1.2.7-8*). Xerxes had built a palace at the source of the Marsyas on his return from his unsuccessful invasion on Greece; the Maeander flowed past Cyrus’ palace, also in the vicinity. Herodotus (7.26) notes both rivers, and Ovid (*Met. 6.400*) speaks of the Marsyas. Strabo (12.8.15) recounts the Marsyas legend, as does Pliny (*NH 5.106*), and Livy (38.13.5) discusses it in the context of Cn. Manlius Vulsus’ campaign. Syme 1995:335-39 discusses the identification of Celaenae and Apamea with both rivers.

18 A fascinating summary of Marsyas’ statue in the Forum is offered by Richardson 1992:370-71; cf. Coarelli 1999. Small 1982:70-74, 78-79 details the iconography and position of this Marsyas, and discusses his roles at Rome: didact, augur, Phrygian refugee and symbol of ritual freeing of the land. Small 1982:82 suggests that it was only under the Empire that Marsyas’ symbolisation of *libertas* took on specifically political qualities.

19 See Hartog 1988:212-13, 228: we can only comprehend ‘otherness’ when expressed through inversion (anti-sameness), or through comparison between story-world and audience-world. The decision to translate or not to translate is in itself an act of classification (245). Later, Hartog 2001:150-60, 161-98 went on to explore not just Alexander’s
These apparently minor features are emphasised and instantiated by the importance given in the text to naming, even when the names are unlikely to be known. Indeed, a fondness for naming and the allusivity of the words chosen to denote places and define spaces (re-)creates and reifies Curtius’ East, providing weight and dimensionality for the places and things involved. This is evident in Curtius’ treatment of the battle of Arbela (Gaugamela), and is one of the features of Tyre’s fame: Alexander’s fear of the city’s ‘name’ serves to provide it in later years with its reputation for impregnability (4.4.1-2). Mesopotamia follows Asia, the heartland of Darius’ forces and the chosen site for numbering of his troops (3.1.3).20 The Greek mercenaries in his employ urge him to retreat there to its wide plains (spatiosoque Mesopotamiae campos, 3.8.2), a physical area over which Rome aspires to have dominion, but also one characterised at once by open vastness (ideal for Parthian cavalry), spatial integrity, and the confining, and Hellenising nuances (e.g. most famously, Callimachus’ ‘Assyrian river’: Hymn to Apollo 2.108) that ‘Mesopotamia’ signals in its semiotic baggage. Damascus in Syria can be visualised in contemporary context, but at the same time is the place where Darius sends his money and valuables before Issus (3.8.12) and where Alexander later takes possession of that hoard by right of victory (3.12.27).21 The location is familiar, yet when a ‘Persian’ is termed praefectus (3.13.2), but surrenders to a ‘Roman’ Macedonian, a reader might wonder who is submitting to whom? The all-pervasiveness of the Roman filter that articulates this narrative makes Alexander’s world Roman, of course, but it can also

crossover appeal for rethinking Greek colonial and Roman imperial identities, but also, implicitly, how ‘Alexander’ impacts on the processes of universal history.

20 The narrative pivots around the Persian heartland: losing it, Darius loses his authority. Alexander takes the Persian heartland, but does not recognise it as the focus of his campaign, and is forced back there to die. See Romm 1992:54-55 on the Persian world-view in Herodotus. Also Redfield 1985:97-118. His discussion of the Persian/Ethiopian opposition in Herodotus (e.g. 3.20-25) parallels Curtius’ treatment of Persian/ Macedonian (also Romm 1992:54-60), but without the triumph of the ‘Ethiopian’ group.

21 Set in a fertile oasis, Damascus came to represent an Oriental paradise (Strabo 16.7.56; Pliny, NH 5.74). An Aramaean city, its power declined when captured by the Assyrians and made a province in 732 BCE. After Alexander it became part of the Seleucid Empire and was the capital city of Antiochus XII Dionysus (c. 87-84 BCE). In 85 BCE it came under Nabataean protection, and in 64 BCE was annexed by Pompey and made one of the Decapolis Cities (Pliny, NH 5.74). Then in 38 BCE Antony granted it to Cleopatra – along with Coele Syria, part of Judaea, and Arabia (Josephus, Bell. Jud. 1.339-63). It was reannexed by Octavian (31/30 BCE), then ceded by Caligula to Aretas IV of Nabataea (c. 37 CE). Eventually, it was incorporated into Roman Syria c. 62 CE.
remind a reader not to overlook authorial agenda and the kinds of narratological choices which inform decisions when, or when not to, translate.

This almost aporetic, highly allusive effect emphasises the literary and artificial nature of the experience undergone by the reader. It also, however, underscores a kind of 'reality-effect' within its narratology. Two separate discourses run concurrently: the physical places named by Curtius are defined in terms Greek, Roman, or 'other', displaying a process of linguistic imperialism dependent on previous Greek 'naming' of the East. Imposed Greek terms succeed the 'foreign' names that remain viable in situ, but not externally, in a world where they have no cultural dominance; these terms are Romanised in turn to represent Roman territorial conceptions. This is displayed in *Syriæ quam Coelen swear* (4.1.4), 'Syria which they call Coele': physically the region of Syria between Libanus and Anti-libanus, but as a name, a transliteration of Κοίλη Συρία, itself a Greek impression on a Persian Satrapy. Cyprus joined to the province of Cilicia in 58 BCE (4.1.27), Pelasium and Memphis (4.1.30), and Amyntas' abortive attempt to capture the (Imperial?) province of Egypt (4.1.33) are all based on Roman home ground. Lydia, once an empire in its own right (and stoutly defended by Alexander's governor Antigonus, at 4.1.35) forms Darius' first land concession to the invader (4.5.1, 7-8); in Roman times it has become a part of the Province of Asia. The wind that lashes waves onto the shore opposite Tyre is from 'Africa' (4.2.7) - Roman, 'Carthaginian', or Other?

Curtius' promotional blurb on Tyre - it's distant but accessible, and thanks to Roman protection you can go there now - gives a dual sense of the city's history: Alexander is both another vicissitude in Tyre's long story, and at the same time is the story. The long peace and protective guidance that Rome has to offer (4.4.19-21) is partly a negative history, for history-as-narrative; against the fabulous array of invasive armies on offer to the reader, would anyone have bothered with a 'Roman' Tyre story? Weaned, then, of loitering around Tyre, and having swiftly overrun Asia, Alexander contemplates an escape to Egypt (4.4.1). He might be any Roman general, any general making the post-Alexander circuit of eastern power-bases, but as a character in a post-Republican story, even Alexander's trip to Egypt is compromised by its position in Julio-Claudian history. Moreover, as a first- or second-century CE audience could be expected to be aware, a Roman

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22 Curtius notes the *castra Cyri* (3.4.1), where Cyrus had a *status* (stationary camp) when leading an army against Croesus in Lydia; cf. Arrian, *Anabasis* 2.43.

23 And after Pompey and Antony (and Egypt's annexation as an Imperial Province) in particular, visiting Egypt becomes even more fraught, as Tacitus' Germanicus finds out (see e.g. *Annals* 2.59.3).
general travelling to Alexander's eastern hot-spots might be taking a serious political risk, given the cultural significance that Alexander's itinerary continued to signal.

At Issus (3.10.3-10) the narrator characterises national identities through the shifting emphases in his speeches of pre-battle exhortation. The Macedonians, already victors over their European enemies, are ready to take on Asia and the furthest Orient (3.10.4). The rhetoric suggests a strengthening of the connexion between 'past' Asia and Rome's Asia; the Orient (the repository of unknown wealth 'beyond') brimming with spolia waits to be won (3.10.6). The Macedonians' status as terrarum orbis liberatores ('liberators of the whole world') and possession of former and durable valour, means that they can and must impose the ingum (yoke) on their new provinciae (3.10.4-5). For these 'liberators', the last image is of the bonanza, the spolia. The buzzwords that motivate them are specifically Roman. If the Macedonians are at times vehicles for bringing 'Rome' to the East, the fixed and apparently transhistorical attributes that define the Orientals can at times hint at an ephemerality in Alexander's effect. Nevertheless, the affective qualities of Alexander's story are paraded throughout by its ability to bring Latin expression and Roman reinterpretation to bear on these landscapes and their socio-political institutions. Darius defines himself as Asiae rex (4.10.34) straddling Roman and extra-Roman territory: linguistically, then, he can be a Roman rex, but a Roman rex can only have 'barbarians' as subjects (4.16.15). Again, shifting perspective affects the Parthyae, who bring up the rear of Darius' forces at Arbela. These people, the narrator says, then inhabited the lands now held by the Scythian Parthians. Rome's long-term enemy is translated into Darius' rear-guard (4.12.11).

24 For the Greeks the vocabulary is very different. Moore 1995:283-84 comments on Curtius' use of 'Greek' to define the Western forces (8.3.15) as necessary to formalise an East/West opposition.

25 This, even though these places and peoples are often most vividly and enduringly famous because of their brushes with Alexander. Forms of the word barbarus occur 121 times in the text (Dauge 1981:186), but the 'barbarity' envisaged is highly familiar. Dauge 1981:187 notes the wide range of ethnographical sketches offered by the author, e.g. 3.2.1-10, 3.8-25, 8.12 (Persians); 4.6.3 (Bactrians); 5.6.11-17 (Mardians); 7.3.5-11 (Parapamisidae); 7.8-11, 17-18 (Scythians); 7.10.46 (Sogdians); 8.9-20-37 (Indians); 10.10.8-10 (ichthyophagi); indigenous exoticism (e.g. 7.2.22; 8.9.3-30; 9.1.28-30). The Persians remain the barbarous enemy (e.g. 4.1.35; 10.11; 16.15, 25), but are joined by other national groups. The Egyptians, enemies to East and West (4.1.27), are passive and treacherous (4.1.30); cf. Pliny (Pan. 31.2). Antony and Cleopatra are an unvoiced presence, as is subsequent imperial exploitation of Egypt.
The upper course of the River Halys (offered as an eastern boundary for a proffered land-settlement from Darius at 4.5.1) could have stood in as acceptably representative of the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire under the Julio-Claudian emperors, Nero’s sponsorship of Corbulo notwithstanding (Armenia and Mesopotamia only became provinces as such under Trajan).\(^2\) The Roman sphere of influence continued to nudge eastward and retreat westward throughout the 1st century CE, and Darius’ claim that Media, Hyrcania, Bactria, Sogdiana, Arachosia would prove too great a problem for Alexander applies less to this pretender, than to Roman attempts on the region’s new rulers, the Parthians.\(^2\) The Persians and their false security behind the buffer rivers Euphrates and Tigris prove a less than effective barrier to Alexander (4.5.4-5). Would the same prove true in reverse, had Alexander accepted river-bank frontiers? Following the story into Egypt, the reader can stop off at the Macedonian forces’ first halting-site, known (unsurprisingly) as Alexander’s Camp (4.7.2). Furthermore readers and (intellectual) tourists can share Alexander’s own experiences of the hardships of the trek through the desert wastes to Ammon (4.7.6-7). Much incidental, descriptive information on the shrine and village is provided (4.7.20-24), but the Historiae Alexandri would be of little use as an ancient Baedeker (e.g. the ‘here be dragons’ impression of 4.7.18-19). The foundation of Alexandria is described in terms of its ‘present’ nomenclature:

\[\text{elegit urbi locum, ubi \textit{nunc} est Alexandrea, appellationem trahens ex nomine auctoris (4.8.2).}\]

He chose the site for the city where Alexandria is now situated – its naming derives from the name of its founder.

Which comes ‘first’: Roman Alexandria, Ptolemaic Alexandria, or Alexander’s choice of site for his city? There is a sense of the name as both a late, commemorative addition, and as an integral part of the physical city from its inception.

\(^{26}\) Of course, Halys is also simultaneously a River god outwitted by the Nymph-then-City Sinope; cf. Apollon. \textit{Argon.} 2.945-55 and Val. Flacc. \textit{Argon.} 5.109-12. What Curtius might have made of this, we can’t tell, since ‘Sinope’ falls into the text’s opening lacuna.

\(^{27}\) Campbell 1993:216-20, 237 discusses Roman perceptions of Parthia, and contrasts the impression of a policy of intermittent but persistent Eastern aggression, with the reality of a relatively stable frontier. Also see Whittaker 1994:49-59; 70-97; and Isaac 1992:387-94.
Periculosum est praegrae imperium; difficile est enim continere quod capere non possis (4.11.8).

A very dangerous thing, is too great an empire. For it is difficult to hold what you are not able to grasp.

Unwieldiness of empire is dangerous because what cannot be seized, comprehended and in some sense colonised, cannot be contained. But is this serious advice, intended (by Darius' legates, offering terms to Alexander, or even by 'Curtius'?) to reverberate outside the text? Or is it too relentlessly modelled as advice from a failed empire: propaganda from a doomed enemy? Rome's eastern rivals cannot be equated with this vision of conclusive Oriental defeat by the West; indeed, Persian bitterness in this narrative seems rather to mimic Roman reflections on failure to conquer the enemy (Alexander/Parthia) themselves. The Cilicia and Syria of Darius' exhortation of his troops before Arbela/Gaugamela (4.14.10, 14) are at once the Persian line of retreat/retrenchment, places conquered by Alexander, and provinces of the Roman Empire. As Roman provinces, Cilicia is the more secure: Darius' statement that the Persians could retreat to Syria if rebuffed in Cilicia holds twice true. The direction of the campaign unites the Romans and Alexander against the Persians, whose 'centre' is Persepolis.

The text (composed of ten books) could fall neatly into two halves; Book 5 marks the end of the first and a transition into the world of the other, where the remainder of the story is laid out. The territory of this book provides an introduction to the 'other' land beyond the bounds of Roman prouinciae. The narrator commences by drawing together events in Asia, Illyria, Thrace and Greece. This westward glance focuses audience attention on just how far Alexander has already come, ideologically and geographically, and how remote home affairs (as against Rome's affairs) seem. This plot device also reminds the reader that Alexander is not free to quest at will; he has other responsibilities, but the immanent Oriental other world provokes forgetfulness of duties at home. Through this and other texts, the figure of Alexander is itself subsumed into the idea of the other that lures Romans eastwards in his wake. The march from Arbela takes us through a cultural grey zone; Alexander moves to Babylon and Susa, from Armenia through Mesopotamia, and into Parthia. The geographical digression of 5.1.11-16 suggests a laying of an intellectual claim to the area, but the

[28] Note the similar 'European' introduction to Book 6.
combination of anecdotal hearsay and inaccuracy connotes the miraculous and strange rather than the familiar.²⁹

Curtius places Arabia on the left of the army’s route here, possibly following Strabo (6.1.26; cf. Pliny, NH 6.26.30) who places Arabs in the region between Euphrates and Tigris.³⁰ The possibility of a popular comprehension about the area enhances the sense that the audience is expected to read in shared and even cultural knowledge (as does the ‘well known fact’ of Babylon’s walls being cemented with bitumen from the spring at Menis at 5.1.16). The inhabitants of Mesopotamia may be credited with having given that name to their region (5.1.15), despite the name’s clearly Greek origins. The matrix of language, sense, nationality and cultural modelling provides the area with an intriguingly spurious sense of familiarity: its designated names are Latin-friendly, and it has enough luxurious (eastern) wantonness at once to repel and inflame acquisitive desires. The welcome of Alexander into Babylon stresses alterity of praxis (and thereby also generates a shared cultural currency between author, text and audience): songs are sung *after their own fashion*, they play on instruments *peculiar to themselves* (5.1.22). The wonders of the city are spread before the reader’s gaze (5.1.24-35), but not at random. The marvels on offer can be slotted into previous knowledge from past narratives: the stone bridge, that spans the Euphrates and connects the two parts of the city, is counted as one of the wonders of the Orient (*Hic quoque inter mirabilia Orientis opera numeratus est*, 5.1.29), while the famous hanging gardens are not so alien that they cannot be looked up in Greek tales (5.1.32).³¹

Curtius does not follow Herodotus’ account of Babylon closely enough to make it seem a wholly familiar site. Latinising it, for a start, makes this explicitly an account that is alienated from its subject’s terms. The edge of otherness and wonder that Curtius plays on is also evident in his own narratological programme, and in his detailed evocation he constructs the city in

³⁰ Pliny calls these *Arales Oret*; Strabo names them *Arabes Scenitae*. Pliny, speaking of Nero’s planned expedition into the Caucasus, comments that even those who accompanied Corbulo remained confused about Armenian geography; instead of relying on these military witnesses and accounts, attention should be turned to accounts compiled by those who accompanied Alexander (NH 6.15.40).
³¹ *Super arcem, ululgatum Graecorum fabulis miraculum, penile horti sunt* (‘on top of the citadel, a wonder spread abroad in the tales of the Greeks, are the hanging gardens’, 5.1.32); cf Gellius, *NA* 10.18.4. Herodotus (1.186) and Diodorus (2.8.2-3) describe the bridge.
terms of excess, age and decay.\textsuperscript{32} The description of Babylon is fore-
shadowed by two distinct topoi – Darius’ realisation that his great wealth, 
now rapidly being transferred to Alexander, will hinder its greedy new 
possessor just as it did its old (the Macedonian conquerors are briefly 
envisioned here as rapacious barbarians); and secondly the putrefaction of 
the dead and dying from the battle of Arbela/Gaugamela in juxtaposition 
with a description of Arabia as a land of perfumes, great rivers and bitumen 
springs, and such fertility that death can occur from gluttony on the vast 
quantities of produce. Entering Babylon in the wake of this overkill, Alex-
ander inevitably gluts himself on its over-rich semiotics and becomes – as the 
story then plays out – one more Orientalised inflection of a Roman back-
story.
As Curtius’ Tyre presents an image of the archetypal walled citadel, 
Babylon represents the great corrupting, luxurious, licentious foreign city. As 
if to reinforce the idea of the city’s debilitative powers, the whole commu-
nity surrenders willingly to Alexander, and he is welcomed, riding Darius-
like in a chariot, with silver altars, wild beasts, Magi, musicians, astronomers, 
and impractically caparisoned cavalry. \textsuperscript{33} Having created this image of disturbingly gorgeous magnificence, more akin to the problematic return of a 
triumphant (and Roman) general than the approach of an enemy, the histori-
cal digression shifts the reader into a different temporal scheme, one in 
which Alexander is affected rather than effecting the plot. \textsuperscript{34} The hanging 
gardens are invoked (and the story behind their creation) and, as with the 
Martyrs, their fame from Greek tales. The emphasis on the seeming impreg-
nability of Babylon’s defences highlights the strangeness of their lack of 
resistance, but while from afar this great structure gives the semblance of a 
real forest and mountains, when reached it can be perceived as an illusion. 
As Babylon seems marvellous and beautiful at first, its roots are artifice and 
its reality corruption (cf. Livy 30.14.6-7).
‘Asia’, in Book 5, begins to sound less Roman. \textsuperscript{35} Roman Asia has long 
since been left behind, but as the definition of its Eastern significance

\textsuperscript{32} Unlike Curtius, Pliny (\textit{NH} 6.121) does use Herodotus’ measurements. Atkinson (1994:36-39) discusses possible sources and compares Curtius’ account with Diodorus’, from which it also differs.

\textsuperscript{33} One might even see in this perverted triumph echoes of the notorious pseudo-
triumph (the Donations of Alexandria) associated with Antony’s success in 
Armenia in 34 BCE.

\textsuperscript{34} On the ways in which Roman triumphs partake (with hindsight in the accounts 
of Roman socio-political commentary) in ‘Alexander’ see Spencer: forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{35} E.g. 5.1.1, 39; 4.9; 5.9; 9.4; 10.3.
loosens, Darius also becomes unsure of his myriad subjects' identity; at this point our author inserts one of his rare affirmations of the suggested camaraderie of guide and reader (5.11.10). Alexander is described as entering Parthian country when the campaign moves into Media (5.7.12-8.1), and 'Parthiene' is the destination of those loyal to Darius who flee the Persian army on the king's capture (5.12.18). The introduction of the anachronistically named Parthians forges an immediate Roman identification for the story. The destruction of Persepolis in an area imbricated with Parthian signs makes Alexander on one level at least, conqueror of Rome's enemy, but within Curtius' scheme, narrative sympathy for Darius (and Alexander's rapidly shifting moral status) undercut a clear identification. Curtius treats the disappearance of this glorious capital as a shameful and sordid affair (5.7.8-9), in stark contrast to the opprobrium heaped upon the city of Babylon. Moreover, one might, reading backwards with Curtius, argue that Alexander's devastation of a Parthian Persepolis is what ultimately makes Rome's Parthians so difficult to identify clearly and defeat comprehensively. Intriguingly, we are told that the Scythians were 'then' in possession of the level and fertile part of Mesopotamia (6.2.13); their descendants the Parthians are ultimately a European people he continues, because the Scythians had their origins in Europe (6.2.14). These Scythians, the narrator concludes, are still a dangerous neighbouring power: gravis ad hue aculae (6.2.13) - a kind of para-Persia, providing a link with Alexander's world, but offering a European and therefore worthy enemy. Moreover, while Alexander is all-conquering within the parameters of his narrative, the geo-temporal world of the narrator/reader still contains the same foes.

Asia and Europe are separate worlds, Alexander says (orbis is used, 7.7.14), and conquering both would be an incredible feat; but like Pompey who boasted that he found Asia a province on the edge of Roman dominions, and left it in the middle (Pliny, NH 7.99), Alexander intends to encompass this Asia between the other worlds of the far East, and the homelands of the West. By conquering these Scythians, Alexander claims to be defeating, in effect, a third orbis, and joining together Europe and Asia against the constructs set down by nature (7.7.14). Drawing the conquest of two worlds

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36 The disputed sense of the text here has no bearing on the effect of the personal intrusion.
37 The name 'Parthia' derives from the Seleucid satrapy which traditionally was occupied in 247 BCE by a semi-nomad people of the Dahae (north of Hyrcania). Cf. OCD 1117-18. On Romans and Parthians see Moore 1995:285-300.
38 On Scythians, see Moore 1995:262-75.
together, the narrative demonstrates the ease with which world dominion can be claimed.

Ancient fable, the narrator comments, places the crag on which Prometheus was chained in the Caucasus mountains. These mountains, he further suggests, divide Asia north-south, forming a chain with Mt. Taurus in Cappadocia (7.3.19-22). The narrative reinforces one 'myth' with another: the geographical information offered is no more effective for accuracy, but equally viable as an alternative, discursive, reality. 9 The message of the Scythian envoys is clearly enunciated at the end of the speech, and defines an idea of empire that has as much to do with Rome's relationship with Parthia as with Alexander's story:

'Ceterum nos et Asiac et Europae custodes habeis ... Utrum ne imperio tuo finitimos hos amicos usque, considera.' Haec barbarus (7.8.30).

'Moreover, in us you will have guardians of both Asia and Europe ... Consider whether you would wish there to be enemies or friends bordering upon your empire.' Thus spoke the barbarian.

Scythia offers a friendship of 'equals' - in effect, a Roman client-kingdom - in which they will keep Alexander's borders safe and act as a balancing, friendly state, but still barbarus characterises their spokesman. On the strength of his defeat of these Scythians (no longer Alexander's equals), the narrator tells us, Asia - fact, history, myth and assumption all rolled into one package - was subdued (7.9.17). 40 But Alexander is also 'of the East', and

9 The narrator is actually referring to the Parapanisus mountains, but he suggests they join the Taurus, thus shrinking Asia along an East/West line, and contracting the geographical features and their alignment. The Persian Gulf is called the *Rubrum Mare*, while the Caspian and Hyrcanian Seas are listed as separate bodies of water (7.4.22). The River Tanais of this narrative is not the Don, with which the name is generally equated, but the Iaxartes (e.g. 7.5.36). The confusion is continued when Alexander reaches Bactra (7.4.27). The city of Maracanda is stated to be four days travel from a point probably just at the Tanais (7.6.10). There is an impression of confusion of rivers here because to visit Maracanda after the Tanais (laxartes) would not make logistic sense. Arrian gives a different version in which Maracanda is visited first, before advancing towards the Tanais. Arrian notes the Tanais/laxartes confusion, but plumps also for Tanais (*Anab.* 3.30-4.4). These shifting regions are common to most representations of the East; cf. Syme 1995:46-50 (on Taurus and Masius); Nicolet 1991:68-73 (on the general area).

the tension between Alexander as civilising force, and Alexander as Oriental tyrant, is encapsulated in his meeting with the Scythian envoys (7.8.8-30). The Scythians are *barbari* because of their *feritas*, ultimately, Curtius’ Alexander is *barbarus*, because he cannot exert self-control (over his *fortuna*, his *uanius* and his *auantia*).\(^{41}\)

**Conclusions**

So where does this leave us? Looking back to the versions of leadership offered by the narrative at Issus, we can see how Curtius crystallises the opposition between Alexander and Darius - and West and East - and prefigures the *bouleuvrement* that will be lavishly performed in Alexander’s entry into Babylon. This is denoted most eloquently in the pithy characterisation of Alexander in Book 6 as: *ex Macedoniae imperatore Darii satrapen factus* (‘out of a Macedonian commander, a satrap of Darius was made’, 6.6.10). From the start of the surviving text, Darius is the king/tyrant: elevated, detached from his troops and denied any hope of an *aristia* (indeed, he becomes the object of Alexander’s quest for *spolia opima*). Alexander, conversely, commences as Roman *dux*—and—*miles* par excellence.\(^{42}\)

On high in his chariot in particular (*Darius currus sublimis eminebat*, 3.11.7), Darius is different and distinguished in ways that are particularly transgressive in terms of Roman triumphs. Darius’ chariot recurs as a motif throughout the text, and though the elevation of the protagonist is not always on a chariot, the parallel is clear.\(^{43}\) Although the details of the image do not quite gel with Curtius’ representation, we can see hints of how powerfully the vertical perspective of this highly charged face-off resonates when we read in the iconography of the Alexander Mosaic, surely as implicit in Curtius’ scenography as is the allusion back to the narrative’s (earlier) great Persian marching-order catalogue at 3.3.8-25? There, it was a parade of the hide-bound ideas, pride, and soft effeminacy of the ‘barbarians’ that Curtius stressed. The sensory link with that list is collected up - here at Issus - with Darius’ shameful (*indigorius*) discarding of his *insignia imperii*; these outward signs define Darius’ royalty and mark his role and responsibilities (3.11.11). Implicitly at least, they are problematically saturated with monar-

\(^{41}\) Daugé 1981:550-51 expresses similar views.
\(^{42}\) E.g. 3.2.13-14, 3.2.628, 8, 6.3; cf. the description of Darius and his troops at 3.3.825.
\(^{43}\) E.g. 3.3.15 (Persian marching order); 4.14.9, 26, 15.30, 32 (Darius at Arbela); 5.12.20, 13.15, 23 (Darius’ death cart); 9.10.26 (Bacchanalian procession); 10.2.13-30 (Alexander at mutiny).
chical overtones, but as Curtius' Romanising filter makes clear, they also simultaneously represent Darius' duty of care to his people, and his responsibilities as a commander-in-chief. Throwing away (or even relinquishing) power at an inappropriate moment is as appalling a prospect, in Curtius' story, as assuming power too readily or hoarding it too greedily.

Encapsulated in Darius' magnificent and appalling elevation and katabasis (and Alexander's inevitable and paradigmatic mimesis) are concerns central not just to Roman models of speculative self-fashioning, but also to the kinds of narratological strategies that continue to shape our plurality of understandings of History and Self. To return to my opening suggestions - suggestions shaped very much by John Atkinson's ground-breaking commentaries on Curtius - the strategies used to model a full-length Alexander in Latin in the Historiae Alexandri foreshadow many of the problems that continue to challenge historiographical theory and practice. Curtius' complex, oppositional and dialectic, artificial and (self-)consciously Roman narratorial agenda confronts his audience with glamour and power that both horrify and delight, and with a vision of 'us' that articulates a community of identity and shared values only in the aftershocks of recognising their fragility. Reading and writing about Alexander's achievements can conjure up a world in which Rome has triumphed over almost unthinkable distant realms - as Hamilton calls it, a kind of textual colonialism - but that mythic imperium sine fine has to coexist with the constraints and frontiers that map the realities of Roman experience and practice in the East. This mismatch between layers of imaginary, imaginative and tangible expressions of imperium can find, in Alexander, a meeting-place. As Deleuze might have said, Curtius' Alexander, set adrift without his introductory chapters, is Existence writ large.

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Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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