Preface to the 1991 Reprint

It is now over twenty-two years since I packed up my working notes and basic texts—Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus, Quintus Curtius Rufus, Justin—and retreated to the then little-known Greek island of Astypálaia to hammer out the first draft of *Alexander of Macedon*. I had immersed myself in Alexander scholarship, English, American, French, German, Italian, modern Greek (Alexander as patriotic ikon, not least under the Colonels, deserves a separate monograph), till I felt near drowning-point. I needed to get away, clear my head, re-establish a sense of perspective and try to see Alexander plain, free from that distracting chorus of conflicting ideological claims. It was, of course, a vain endeavor. Propaganda (some of it self-generated) surrounded the King all his life, and mythification took over the moment he was dead—had, indeed, been developing at an alarming rate during the last few years of his life.

Nevertheless, the circumstances in which I first articulated my narrative left their mark on the book, just as not dissimilar restrictions did on A.H.M. Jones’s brilliant and idiosyncratic study of *Sparta* (1967). In particular, I was forced to focus my attention, far more closely than I might otherwise have done, on the surviving sources as they stood (even the earliest, Diodorus, being some three centuries after the events he described), rather than embarking on a complicated exercise in historiographical *Quellenforschung* designed to extrapolate and evaluate those earlier authors on which our extant tradition drew.

As a working method, this had advantages as well as drawbacks. It meant, among other things, that judgments were frequently based on common sense rather than on scholarly argument or consensus; but I did not think then,
nor looking back, do I think today, that this was necessarily a bad thing. The scholarship in which I had been immersed—above all, the powerful minimalist arguments then being advanced by Ernst Badian—could not fail (as subsequent reviewers pointed out) to leave its mark on me; and, living in Greece, I was more conscious than most of the exciting turn Macedonian studies were taking. But to a great extent *Alexander of Macedon* remained a solitary exercise in textually based historiography, reinforced by the kind of familiarity with Greek landscape, climate, and *mores* that only long residence can bring. These essential characteristics were not fundamentally altered by the very considerable revisions I undertook, between 1971 and 1973, prior to the publication of the present text: revisions carried out in a university department, with full access to academic literature, and designed to provide the scaffolding of scholarly backing and debate that my original draft had very often bypassed.

The result was an interesting hybrid, which, for several reasons unconnected with literature or history (copyright tangles, disagreements among publishers), saw the light of day only as a fat paperback in the U.K., and thereafter—since this one edition went out of print comparatively soon—existed for some years in a kind of ghostly academic limbo, kept just clear of the iniquity of oblivion by a few scholars who were kind enough to find merit in my investigation, and went on referring to it and recommending it to their students. Unfortunately, running down copies became an increasingly hard business. During the last sixteen years or so the idea of a reprint was raised more than once, but only now has the idea finally been brought to fruition, at a point when, some might argue, it is effectively too late.

Because of the long time-lapse, and the progress of Alexander scholarship since 1974, my thoughts have turned increasingly during the last year or two to the idea of a fairly radically revised second edition; and the University of California Press has now agreed to publish such a text when I
have prepared it. The task is an extensive one, and will in all likelihood—granted my other responsibilities—take three or four years to complete.

Much has been accomplished, in many fields, of which I need to take cognizance. The history of Macedonia (to take the most obvious example) has been advanced to a remarkable degree by the labours of Borza, Cawkwell, Errington, Griffith, Hammond, Walbank, and the famous (if still ambiguous) archaeological discoveries made by Andronikos in the Great Tumulus of Vergina (now known to be ancient Aegae, as Hammond had already predicted). New study of Persian and other Oriental archives by scholars such as Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt has shed fresh light on Alexander’s Eastern relations and imperial administration. Inscriptions have been reexamined, coin-issues studied, topography revised; the whole vast problem of military logistics has been put on a fresh footing by my one-time student Don Engels. Any revision will need to take this rich harvest, and more, into account, and I fully intend to do so.

Yet I also think a strong case can be made for reissuing the 1974 edition—never actually published in the U.S.A.—to meet (better late than never) a steady, on-going demand, in colleges and universities above all, while the revised and updated text is in process of preparation. It is of course true that my study as it stands lacks the extra dimension that nearly two decades of fruitful new scholarship (including, incredible though this may sound, the first critical commentary on Arrian ever written) both can and should provide. The usual small but irritating crop of misprints and verbal or factual slips (e.g., “Lyceum” for “Academy” on p. 53 and “headquarters” for “headwaters” on p. 405) still survives to provide satisfying pabulum for particularist critics.

But a recent re-reading of the entire text—accompanied by the kind of fierce and by no means always friendly scru-
tiny that a seminar of ambitious graduate students can be relied on to provide—reassured me in unexpected ways. Here and there, it is true (e.g., in the matter of Philotas: conspiracy by or against?), I have been forced to rethink the issue. Some puzzles (e.g., the first flight of Harpalus) are as baffling as ever. In one major instance, my Appendix on the battle of the Granicus, new studies have convinced me that I was flat wrong. But overall I have found no arguments to convince me that my basic analysis in 1968 of Alexander's character, genius, or motivation was mistaken, and a great deal to support the conclusions—unpalatable to believers in Macedonian rulers as pillars of Völkerrecht and government by law no less than to adventure-struck romantic idealists still clinging wistfully to Tarn's vision of the Brotherhood of Man—that were forced upon me by close study of the ancient sources. It is not without significance, besides, that the Greek island where I embarked on my solitary task happened to be one used by the Colonels as a dumping-ground for royalist officers and thinkers with minds of their own. *Sois mon frère ou je te tue* was a revolutionary joke that I saw being worked out in my daily life at the same time as I was watching Alexander play it against the Thebans, the Greeks of Asia Minor, the defenders of Tyre or Sangala. Looking back, I can see clearly that contemporary events helped in shaping my judgment, just as Syme's verdict on Augustus, conceived during the Twenties at the American Academy in Rome, could not fail to be influenced by the activities of Mussolini's fascists.

There is a tendency among academics to decry this kind of adventitious personal experience as disruptive of objective and dispassionate historiography. I disagree. Thucydides and Polybius knew very well that to write history one must be, however marginally, involved in it. Gibbon saw that the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers had not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire. The Colonels, as it happened, promoted Alexander as a great Greek hero, espe-
cially to army recruits: the Greeks of the fourth century B.C., to whom Alexander was a half-Macedonian, half-Ep improt barbarian conqueror, would have found this metamorphosis as ironic as I did.

Furthermore, a decade spent investigating the Hellenistic age, not least the imperial habits of Alexander’s successors (Diadochoi), the hard-bitten marshals to whom fell the division of the spoils, has sharply reinforced my conviction that Alexander himself was not only the most brilliant (and ambitious) field-commander in history, but also supremely indifferent to all those administrative excellences and idealistic yearnings foisted upon him by later generations, especially those who found the conqueror, tout court, a little hard upon their liberal sensibilities. I am pretty sure that my revised second edition will not substantially alter this verdict. After all, in the broadest sense (however we may quibble over details) the facts of Alexander’s life are not really in dispute. It is, ultimately, our interpretation of them that matters. On that basis I am very happy to see the present text, with all its faults, given a fresh lease of life.

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