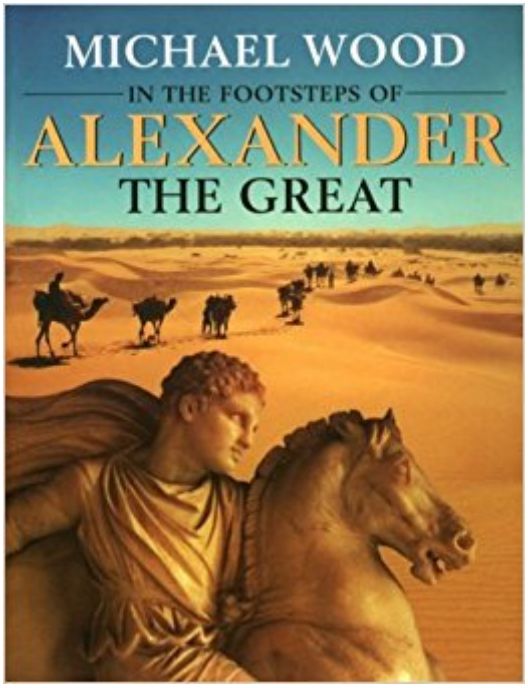
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In The Footsteps Of Alexander The Great: A Journey From Greece To Asia



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Synopsis

Between 334 and 324 B.C. the Macedonian army, led by Alexander the Great, marched relentlessly across Asia. An event of bravery and cruelty, endurance and greed, Alexander’s expedition was a turning point in human history. His conquest opened up contacts between Europe and Asia, unleashing astonishing historical energies that continue to affect the world today. This extraordinary book recreates Alexander’s 22,000 mile, ten-year expedition from Greece to India, following as much as possible the actual route of his journey.Historian Michael Wood traversed seventeen countries, trekking through the Zagros Mountains to find the lost site of Alexander’s battle at the "Persian Gates," drinking black tea in the Hindu Kush, listening to ancient stories of Sikander e Aazem, and crossing the Makran Desert with twenty-three camels. He traveled with Lebanese traders, Iranian pilgrims, Afghan guerrillas, and other local people on a journey that took him through many of the twentieth century’s major trouble spots, including Beirut and Kurdistan.Wood bases his account of Alexander’s conquest on the texts of Greek and Roman historians, but he also reconsiders the Greek adventure in terms of modern ideas on colonialism, orientalism, and racism. The Macedonian conquest, which has mainly been seen through Greek sources, is illuminated for the first time by medieval travelers’ narratives, newly discovered oracles, and prophecies on papyrus or clay tablet.At the heart of Wood’s powerful story is the towering, enigmatic character of Alexander the Great. He ascended the throne at twenty, conquered much of the known world before he was thirty, and was dead by the age of thirty-two. A ruthless politician, brilliant military tactician, devoted son, family man, lover of both women and men, Alexander was known for his extreme generosity as well as his ferocious cruelty. Following in the conqueror’s footsteps centuries later, Michael Wood overhears the words of the fabled Greek mermaid who calls to passing sailors: "Great Alexander still lives!"

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Customer Reviews

"This is a marvelous adventure and a delicious taste of history."--"Publishers Weekly

Michael Wood is a writer and historian living in England. His book, In Search of the Trojan War (1989), was on The New York Times Best Seller list and accompanied a PBS television series. His other books include In Search of the Dark Ages and Domesday: A Search for the Roots of England.

I founfd this to be a very interesting read. The Alexander history was a bit lighter than other biograpies I've read on the subject (not neecessarily a bad thing). The emphasis on place and geography and how it relates to the modern world was fascinating. I'd like to watch the video series.

Michael Wood created a very readable and informative book. I especially appreciated the many maps. I enjoyed the book so much I'm now going to try to find the DVD of the PBS series to watch!

You will visualize part of the greatest story ever told!Conrats Michael on the Great work not just talking about the book but your incredible journey.

I enjoy reading history especially people in the Bible. He was not a nice person, but the history was interesting. I'm Still reading the book

A friend of mine recently asked me for the name of a good introductory book on the life and career of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), King of Macedon and world conqueror. Without hesitation, I recommended Michael WoodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great, the companion book to his magnificent 1997 PBS series retracing AlexanderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s epic march of domination across the known world. Wood is one of the best ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“popularÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• historians today, who writes in a highly evocative and even poetic style. The following passage from the bookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Prologue, describing a scene from WoodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s travels in modern-day Pakistan, provides a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“tasteÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• of the latter: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Up the dim street we heard the

distant sound of drumming and chanting. Above us, against a full-moon sky, the dark shape of the open-air temple stood over the village; dying flames licked the sacred stone, and in the shadows were the carved wooden effigies they used in their religion.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great, however, is not simply a tantalizing travelogue of faraway and exotic lands. Michael Wood is a serious historian, who fully analyzes the motives and outcomes surrounding the key events in Alexander the GreatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s extraordinary ten-year and 22,000-mile campaign of world conquest. His analysis of AlexanderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s cryptic and dangerous side trip to the desert oasis at Siwa in Egypt, for example, explores historical considerations rarely touched upon by many modern scholars. Certainly, the young king sought some supernatural confirmation from the oracle at Siwa of his alleged ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“divineÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• parentage, as most of our ancient sources relate. Wood points out that more mundane and pragmatic considerations may well have been at the heart of this perilous journey. Following his overthrow of the hated Persian overlords, Alexander may have sought legitimacy for his right to rule Egypt from the influential temple priesthood at Siwa. In this effort, at least, he was clearly successful: Egypt became one of the more peaceable (and profitable) additions to Alexander's far-flung and often tumultuous empire.Alexander the GreatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s conquests, Wood rightly notes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“was by common consent one of the greatest events in the history of the world, opening up West and East for the first time.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Thus, Greek culture spread rapidly across the Middle East, sustained by the young Macedonian kingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s many colonial settlements in the region. (Kandahar, the site of a strategic American military base in southern Afghanistan, was originally founded by Alexander some 2,300 years ago!) The inevitable blending of Greek and native cultures that followed over the centuries helped to forge the remarkable Hellenistic Age (323-31 BC), the complex historical matrix from which Christianity would later sprout and bloom. Ancient Rome, too, would draw heavily from the wellspring of the Hellenistic eraÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s magnificent cultural heritage.Much recent historiography, however, jaundiced by the totalitarian rule of the twentieth centuryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s many dictators and warlords, has harshly judged Alexander the GreatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s character and legacy. This is in marked contrast to the writings of some earlier twentieth-century historians. The latter often viewed Alexander as an enlightened ruler bearing the many gifts of Greek culture to the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“barbarianÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• peoples of the benighted East -- the ancient equivalent of KiplingÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The White ManÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Burden.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Michael Wood firmly rejects such ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“romanticÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• notions concerning Macedonian imperialism and

colonialism. By the time he reached northern India (326 BC), Wood remarks, AlexanderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“crusadeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• against the Persian Empire had degenerated into a Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“war against the people of Asia.Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• After crushing a brutal and bloody two-year guerrilla war by the tribes of Bactria (northern Afghanistan), the Macedonian conqueror was in no mood to brook opposition from Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“pettyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• maharajas. Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Terror was now the tacticÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Alexander employed to force the subjugation of India, Wood writes. All along the great Indus River, city after city was sacked by the rampaging armies of Macedon, their populations slaughtered or enslaved.At the time of his death (by poison or natural causes) in Babylon at the age of 33, Alexander the Great had carved out the largest empire of the ancient world Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ one broader in width than the continental United States. As Michael Wood discovered during his own remarkable trek across this vast expanse of territory, the memory of AlexanderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s conquests still persists in the Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“great harvest of amazing stories, songs, poems, myths and legendsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• circulating throughout the region. Indeed, readers of the Bible are also familiar with the great Macedonian world conquer: Alexander Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“appears in the apocalyptic visions of the biblical Book of Daniel as The Third Beast who unleashes a bloody tide on humankind.Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• In the West, however, Alexander is often epitomized as a great hero and military strategist; certainly, Julius Caesar and Napoleon were under the spell of his vast achievements as they attempted to forge their own historical and military legacies.I conclude this review with a final reflection by Michael Wood, as he muses over the meaning of his own monumental trek Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“in the footstepsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• of Alexander the Great. Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I could not help but think how history repeats itself: AlexanderÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s deeds, for example, a model for the West. Empires, even when their rulers have gone, leave chains; their thought-worlds persist, their images too powerful and seductive to be rubbed out.Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (One thinks here of modern Pakistanis and Indians playing cricket, a sport beloved by their former British colonial rulers!) In this respect, as an old legend related by Wood proclaims: Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Great Alexander still lives. And rules!Ã ƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•

Wood is a post-graduate Oxford-trained journalist and film-maker who has done a number of specials for PBS in which he tracks historical events in the present-day world. They're popular history of high quality, and since I've been working my way through Mary Renault's "Alexander" trilogy, this seemed a good way to brush up what I knew from my own long-ago classical history

studies. He provides background on Macedon and on Alexander's father, Philip II, who had unified Greece under his rule and was well into planning the liberation of the Greek colonies in Asia Minor when he was assassinated, leaving his son as undisputed king at the age of twenty. It's not going too far to say that Alexander was a charismatic military genius, since the results of each of his major battles, in which he was nearly always heavily outnumbered, show originality and innovation. This applies not only to infantry and cavalry tactics but to the new use of siege artillery and even to elephant-combat, which no one west of the Ganges had ever had to contend with before. As the companion volume to the TV series this is, of course, a heavily illustrated book but the text is also very well done, tracking the Macedonian army along the Mediterranean coast of Asia, down through Palestine and into Egypt, back up into Syria and Mesopotamia, and then into the Persian heartland and on to Sogdia (now Uzbekistan) and India. Along the way, we get detailed treatments of the key battles of Granicus, Issus, Gaugamela, and the Hydaspes, with pictures of what and who are there now. (Not much, usually, or perhaps only a steel mill.) Keeping in mind when this book was written, obtaining access to much of the route through Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan wasn't easy and Woods and his film crew had several times to deal with suspicious border guards and warlords. In any case, he does an excellent job of combining ancient history, current travelogue, and the commentary of 2,200 years' worth of historians. My only complaint, really, is the author's tendency to apply modern morality and humanist ethics to a military conqueror of more than two millennia ago. This is now and that was then. It was a different world with a vastly different world-view. Still, although this isn't the first book I would recommend on Alexander, and it certainly isn't the only one, it's a pretty good overview of nine years that changed the eastern Mediterranean world and culture.

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