

**India and Alexander the Great in the EMedE Imagination**  
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**English 3335**  
**Ancient and Medieval World Literature**

***Wonders of the East* MSS**

- London, BL, Cotton Vitellius A.xv (*Beowulf* MS) - early 11th century
- London, BL, Cotton Tiberius B.v - mid-eleventh cent.
  - Bilingual OE/Latin
  - better illustrations than Vitellius
  - Has 5 extra sections not in Vitellius
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614 - mid-twelfth cent.
  - Latin only; well-executed illustrations
  - Has extra 12 sections beyond Tiberius (Isidore)
- Unusual in that it survives in three MSS

**Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE)**

- Son of Philip of Macedonia (384-336 BC/E)
- Student of Aristotle
- Campaigned from 332 to 323 BCE
- 327-323 BCE - final campaign into India (today Pakistan)
  - *Wonders* and *Letter* both contain references to Alexander's travels and beings/wonders/people he supposedly encountered on his travels

**Sources - *Liber Monstrorum***

- Between 650-750 AD/CE
- Anglo-Latin text; 5 MSS
- Several shared descriptions between *Wonders/LM*

**Sources on India**

- Ctesias
  - Greek historian, fifth century BC
  - lived at Persian court and was familiar with Eastern customs (*Letter* heavily relies on him)
- Onesicritus
  - Cynical philosopher
  - went with Alexander to study the nations visited/invaded
  - wrote on the Indians' ascetic habits

**Sources – Epistles to Adrian**

- “Letter of Fermes to Adrian”, “Letter of Pharasmenes to Hadrian” – texts purporting to be from scholars writing back to the Roman emperor Hadrian about wonders they have seen in India
  - Epistolary format – matches with *Letter*
  - Descriptions of marvels – more consistent with *Wonders*

**Sources on India**

- Pliny the Elder (23/4 - 79 AD/CE)
  - 1st century Roman writer
  - *Natural History* - text describing different natural phenomena, races of people, types of creatures and plants
  - Draws on a lot of classical sources - not always the most accurate

### Sources - Pseudo-Callisthenes

- Historical figure - a fellow student of Alexander who was on the campaign with him
- Relevance – some works on the natural features of India attributed to Callisthenes, but most likely not by him

### Sources – Alexander

- Quintus Curtius Rufus
  - Roman historian, first century AD/CE
  - *History of Alexander the Great of Macedonia*
- Arrian
  - Greek historian writing in the Roman Empire (89-170 AD/CE)
  - *Anabasis of Alexander* and *Indika*
  - wrote details of Alexander's campaigns and a description of India

### Sources - Alexander

- Plutarch
  - Roman historian, 46-120 AD/CE
  - *Life of Alexander* — part of his project of writing the lives of famous people
  - Moral history as well as military and political – had some mixed things to say about Alexander's character

### Sources - Alexander

- Paulus Orosius
  - 4th/5th century Christian writer
  - *History against the Pagans* - defending Christianity against charges that it caused the fall of the Roman Empire, like Augustine's *City of God*
  - Was very critical of Alexander
  - Was part of Alfred's translation project

### Sources – Alexander

- Anonymous *Alexander Romance* - second or third century BC
  - most famous Latin translations by Valerius (338) and Leo of Naples in tenth century (*Historia de proeliis*)
  - Most likely source for OE version - we possibly have a late ninth- or early tenth-century translation as the basis for Alexander to Aristotle in the *Beowulf* MS - exemplar uncertain
    - London, BL, Royal 13.A.1 (late 11th)
  - also basis for twelfth- and thirteenth-century courtly romances in French, German, and English