**Episode 87: Alexander the Great, with Meg Finlayson**

**Aven:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Endless Knot Podcast where the more we know,

**Mark:** [00:00:04] the more we want to find out

**Aven:** [00:00:05] tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** [00:00:08] and across disciplines.

**Aven:** [00:00:16] Hi, I'm Aven!

**Mark:** [00:00:17] And I'm Mark.

**Aven:** [00:00:18] And today we're going to be talking about Alexander the Great, or as our ten-year-old would say echoing, I think YouTube comments probably? Alexander the Not So Great, Alexander the Merely Middling, it's a whole series of epithets for him. But we're not doing it alone. We're going to be talking to Meg Finlayson, whose work is, at least in part, about Alexander, but in particular about the reception of Alexander the Great.

So we're going to talk about Alexander through the ages and how people have thought about him. So, welcome Meg.

**Meg:** [00:00:49] Thank you very much for having me.

**Aven:** [00:00:50] So why don't you tell us a little bit about who you are and why you're interested in Alexander the Great to start us off.

 **Meg:** [00:00:57] Sure. So I'm a recent graduate in Classics.

I just completed my M.Litt. At the University of St. Andrews in Classics. And prior to that, I worked on an MSC and a BA Hons at University of Edinburgh and University of Winchester, respectively. So I've been studying Classics throughout my university career and for a little bit during my school time, but I kind of fell into Classics a little bit accidentally, really. When I was in school, when I was about 15, 16, what I really wanted to study was Russian literature and Russian history , War and Peace, Dostoevsky. I was a very bookish kid, so I just grabbed the biggest book I could find, War and Peace, and thought, yeah, this is going to be it.

So that was my original plan. But then when it came to choosing subjects in school -I went to school in the UK. You choose different subjects that you're limited to do for the last couple years at school. And the one that I wanted to do, which wasn't actually history, it was Spanish, funnily enough, kind of bizarre.

I couldn't do because of the timetabling issues, they sat me down and said, 'really sorry, we can't make it work, just pick something else'. And I um'd and ah'd about it, and I thought, well, what is the closest thing to history and English literature that you've got. And they were like, 'oh, well the guy who teaches history also teaches Classics'. And I was like, 'okay, what's that?' They were like, 'oh you know, kind of history, it's like ancient history'. So I knew a little bit about it. My school had taught us Latin for one year until the Latin teacher retired. It was just to keep her on the books, I think, just to get her to the pension age.

So I briefly knew about it. So I said, yeah okay. That'll do. And then we picked up Arrian's Anabasis and a bit of Plutarch and started learning about Alexander the Great and his life and his campaigns for one of those modules. And from that moment on, that was kind of it for me, kind of sealed my fate.

And then I almost applied to university to do English literature. Cause that would been going alongside it as well. But then, as fate would have it, I didn't get the university that I wanted to do English at. And I thought, you know what, actually, I'm going to go back to classics since that's worked out well for me.

So by that point, yeah, the deal was really sealed. So it was a bit of a reluctant accidental tumble into it, but here we are. So I started with studying and reading some of the original texts about Alexander's life. And I just thought, my God, this guy's fascinating. He's horrible. He's awful. But he's also very very interesting. And that interest is what has carried me through for the last-God, how long has it been--seven years?

**Aven:** [00:03:37] Yeah. I mean, you're not alone on that. I'd say that a lot of people have found him pretty fascinating over the years. And I think in part, because we both have so many sources and such bad sources at the same time, which is, I think the root of a lot of people's obsessions in classics on the things we have a lot of sources, but not perfect sources on.

**Meg:** [00:03:58] Yeah, it's very interesting to peel back the different layers and find stuff. That's always, I think what the classicists loved to do and ancient historians, archaeologists, just love to go for the bit with a bit of intrigue.

**Aven:** [00:04:09] Mmhmm, mmhmm, where there are questions where you know that none of you are ever going to actually figure out the answers to some fairly major questions, but there's so many things to discuss in not coming to those conclusions.

**Mark:** [00:04:21] And so many of those things accrued in the story right at the beginning.

Right? He becomes legendary while he's still alive. I think I read somewhere a quote, one of his generals, seeing something about some made up love affair in one of the stories.

And he says 'I wonder where I was'.

**Meg:** [00:04:44] Yeah.

**Aven:** [00:04:46] Definitely a legend and a legend in his own time as opposed to so many people. Well, maybe that's a good place to start actually. I'm sure nobody listening doesn't know who Alexander the Great is, but do you want to just give us some really, really basic facts about time, place, lifespan? What do we know? And I don't mean tell us the life story of Alexander the Great, because that's - other people do those podcasts better than us, but just some basic-- Situate us in time.

**Meg:** [00:05:17] We'll be here until 2022 if that was--

**Aven:** [00:05:21] Yeah. exactly.

**Meg:** [00:05:21] I mean, to situate him in his timeframe, I think it's always interesting to consider when he was around. I think when a lot of people -if you pick someone off the street and say 'give me an example of Ancient Greece'. I think one of the first things they think of is this idea of the Parthenon, Socrates running around, the Acropolis. And fighting the Persians.

That's kind of where people tend to gravitate towards is what we see on screen is what we see covered a lot in books in traditional education. They go towards like the fifth century. And the thing that about Alexander is he's timeless and not because the way that his story has become mythologized and imbued with all these additional elements. He almost reads like he could be this tale from almost the Homeric times. And that's a very deliberate facet that I hope we'll talk about a little bit later. But he wasn't really, he was coming around in the mid fourth century.

So he was born in 356 BCE. He was the son of Philip II, who was King of Macedon, which rose really to prominence under his father's reign. So a lot of the information about Alexander now, a lot of it is kind of focused on what their achievements were in tandem. I think we've kind of overshadowed a lot of Macedonian history based on the trials and tribulations of Alexander, but it's good to put him into the context of, he was the son of also somebody who was very illustrious, who was very successful and he kind of came into this world really sort of primed to do good things.

He would have had to be a very lazy person to not do anything good, because he had all of these things put in front of him, a lot of the army innovations, a lot of the wealth was all accrued by his father. So what Alexander is best known for is his campaign against the Persian Empire, his defeat of the Persian Empire and then his subsequent travels further east.

So he began his campaigns very young, which is another part of the excitement and the allure of this character is that he was only 20 years old when his father was assassinated and he took over as King. And the majority of this campaigning was done in his early twenties. He spent the ages of 21 to 26 stomping around the ancient Mediterranean killing people and stealing things.

Very young age--it puts-- when you're-- if you consider that to be a benchmark of achievement, I think we're all kind of underachievers by comparison.

**Aven:** [00:07:47] There's several, there are several stories aren't there of, of classical--later classical figures doing the-- the famous, the one I know is Julius Caesar standing and looking at the monument and being like 'by this age, Alexander was already dead' or whatever, 'by his age' and thinking 'I haven't achieved anything'. So, yeah.

**Meg:** [00:08:05] Yeah-- but by far the best thing that Alexander did in terms of his PR management was to die really, died in his early thirties, I believe at the age of 32, just shy of 33 of this sudden illness. There's some conspiracies onto whether he was poisoned, but it's just- it was a very short and sudden death and he left everything very open-ended because he was in the middle of planning to do all these other things, and hadn't really solidified much. That's one, I guess the downside is, if you could criticize him as a general and a leader, is aside from all the murdering and the stealing, is he didn't really do much of the consolidation. And that's why inevitably after his death, it's what ushers in the Hellenistic Age of these big kingdoms that were once of this theoretical empire that was never quite brought to life because he died before he could manage that step, but he dies very young. Everything is left so open-ended, and in this power vacuum is where you get a number of the very prominent personalities of the Hellenistic Age, the Seleucid Kingdom, the Ptolemies who would have successful mini empires and successful kingdoms of their own in the wake of that.

But it's also very helpful for his image because now he's died at the height and the pinnacle of achievement. And there was no fall from grace, really. He died at the very top of it. And it's in that kind of very quick death, it's a very high, quick turnover of him becoming this mythologized, exaggerated figure and being manipulated by the people that came after him to best suit their purposes as they kind of go on in their own ambitious endeavors.

**Aven:** [00:09:45] I think the, I think it also really matters that he died--I mean, it's gonna sound really trivial--but he died pretty, he died still pretty. And I think when you look at the reception of him later, I think the fact that he was good looking, at least reputed to be good looking and he was still young and basically fit is actually a big part too, of why he's continued to have such a--when you think about the, the ancient emphasis on looks and youth and beauty and also the modern one. I think that's a big part of it too. Had he lived to become old and weary and maybe not so good looking, I don't--I think there would be a difference to his legend.

**Meg:** [00:10:22] Yeah, definitely a lot of it is this appeal and the charisma. His image was, was extremely important and extremely important to how he wanted to craft himself, but also to his later successors, because a lot of what we know of Alexander is created after his death. We don't have any remaining posthumous--sorry, we don't have any remaining images of him that were created during his lifetime. There's a lot of the images that are immediately posthumous. And so it's very difficult to kind of trace back what was his original appearance?

What did he want? Because all these facets of his appearance are all very delicately and purposefully crafted to suit a certain message. We can craft together like a little bit, we could, there are-- in Plutarch he has a description of him, in Aelian and I think in Curtius, he writes a bit about what he looks like.

We know that he wasn't as tall as his other generals because there's a famous scene where after defeat in battle the Persian King Darius III left his wife and his children behind, he had to flee very quickly and leave everything behind. So Alexander got the treasury and he got the royal family.

So quid's in really, he was really quite lucky on that day. And then the queen mother comes to his tent and throws herself at the feet of who she presumes to be the great King, because he's so tall and so handsome, and starts begging, 'please be nice to us', but it's not actually Alexander it's his best friend, closest companion Hephaistion, who was supposedly the taller and better looking of the two. We know that he was not even the best looking in his own camp, but it doesn't--punching above his weight maybe a little bit in that regards, but that's not really the important factor. The important factor is that for all intents and purposes, he was charismatic. He was good looking. He had all these charismatic traits, even if what we can originally construct is 'Well, you know, maybe he wasn't even the best looking out of his own friends'

**Aven:** [00:12:18] Mmhmm, there's a little bit of the Cleopatra there too, right? The same thing where, what matters is the impact she had on other people, not exactly what she looked like.

**Meg:** [00:12:27] Yeah, absolutely. I think my own thoughts on Alexander aside, I think it's always hard to construct what you think about him as a person, because you don't know him as a person. And I think I can say with some confidence that he must have been a charismatic person because people did, at least at the beginning, want to follow him and want to believe that he would be the best person for the job, even though that might be because they had a sword at their throat, but he was still willing to use his image and use his name positively.

He didn't just get scrubbed out of the annals of history after 10 years as everybody else kind of fought for dominance. So there must have been something in that legend, in that mythos that was worth preserving. And I don't know if it's quite famous, but one of my favorite anecdotes about his successors is that I believe it was Cassander, who was one of his generals slightly later in life would see a statue of Alexander that had been created and put up and supposedly it was so lifelike and brought back such memories that he started shivering and trembling at the site of the statue of Alexander and you think, my goodness, this man must've had such an impact. You try and look at a picture of him 10 years later and have a physical reaction, you think 'well, he must've been quite a person'.

**Aven:** [00:13:43] Yeah. Yeah. One way or another. I suspect being in his, like being around him was--you didn't forget. I think that's the overwhelming impression you get from, from the sources is that whatever else happened, you remembered that you'd been in contact with him.

**Meg:** [00:14:01] Yeah, absolutely.

**Aven:** [00:14:03] Okay, so! So he has this amazing life or at least an impressive life. Legend or no legend, the actual facts of what happened during his lifetime were pretty good, I'll give him that, my considered judgment. What do you focus on in your work, like is it the life of Alexander or the literary impression of him?

What are the things that you're most interested in, in the work you've done?

**Meg:** [00:14:31] So in some of the dissertations that I've written in recent years my first kind of exploration into Alexander and my first piece of original research for my undergraduate dissertation is I looked at the literary portraits of Alexander the Great. So when you read these ancient histories, when you read Arrian, Plutarch, Curtius, Diodorus, all of the big hitters in Alexander historiography, it becomes so clear to you that what you're reading is-- it's not quite, it's something not quite right. It's not quite adding up, but it's a very vivid story.

It's such an interesting story that to me, I think how history is written is also a very important part of studying history alongside what happened. I can't quite put a moment on it, but I think the moment where I had this shift in my studying and my research was the moment I pointed out; it doesn't actually matter if what's happened is true or not. It's why is it written in that way? So one of the things that I looked at was the influence of Homer and heroes on how Alexander's character was constructed, because that's really what we're looking at, especially in these works that are written by first century.

So looking at Curtius, Plutarch and Arrian, we're looking at a construction of a character as much as we are looking at a history of a person and they're always fighting and going upstream. And they're trying to construct these histories really because we're looking at something that's written four centuries after the man has died, it comes into existence in this new Roman empire era.

It's covered in all these other things. It's having to deal with these different battling literary traditions. And what comes out is less of a true history more than it is a reflection of what the Alexander myths stood at at that time, as much as it is trying to capture a moment from history.

So I found it very interesting to look at the debt that was owed to the work of Homer, which is especially apparent in Arrian's work. So in the introduction to Arrian's Anabasis , which is his main work on Alexander, he has this brilliant line where he says he wants to be the Homer to Alexander's Achilles.

**Aven:** [00:16:50] Right.

**Meg:** [00:16:51] He wants to write this kind of epic tale. It's not in verse, it's in prose, but he wants to write this epic tale to immortalize Alexander in the same way that Homer immortalized Achilles. A lot of the way that it's constructed, a lot of the set pieces, some of the language used, you can almost see kind of a Homeric strand.

The descriptions of Alexander's armor while he's in battle is very--he's got a shining shield and it's all very-- we don't quite have a full arming scene, but we almost get there with the provenance of where he's picking up some of these weapons.

And, with Plutarch's biography-- so, I think people give Plutarch a bit of a hard run. Everyone's kind of saying, don't take him with a grain of salt, take him with a massive grit van worth of salt. Which is fair enough, but I do think that he puts forward what is a very interesting biography and it takes a lot of its cues from, from almost Greek tragedy, really? Because the story that he presents of Alexander is almost a tragedy. He has these moments of madness where he's in a drunken rage, and he kills his friends and he has this very prestigious childhood with all these moments of, it's almost like a higher power is intervening in his life.

He sees omens, he sees all sorts of things, which in a deeply religious, deeply sort of superstitious Greek society, of course omens, religiosity was a part of Alexander's life and his campaigns, but it's definitely constructed in a way that makes you see that this is being put together as a coherent narrative.

And it's a different thing for a historian to wrangle with. On the one hand, it's very interesting, it's a brilliant story. That's the reason why these tales have survived, but then you also kind of have to unpick it and think, well, why? I'm not sure that Alexander did go and have dalliances with Amazon princesses.

I'm not quite sure that did happen, but why is that being included in Curtius' history? Well, it's because he's making a statement about Alexander as a figure. He's emphasizing this heroic nature. Why is Alexander crying out and cursing Dionysus as he kills his best friend?

Well, maybe he didn't really see a vision of Dionysus, but perhaps the author is including it because we're meant to read this as a parable for the dangers of over excess. We're supposed to take that away from it. So the Alexander story is almost the vector for other things, and that's kind of what I took away from the Alexander literature.

And that was the overall overarching theory behind that thesis when I was working in undergraduate as well. There's a lot more to these stories than just to dismiss them as 'oh well, it's Plutarch, he's making things up' or, 'oh Arrian's just trying to kind of write a good--spin a good yarn', in a sense.

Those things are true, but it doesn't negate the more interesting and useful things underneath it, which is it's a construction of how Alexander existed at that point in time, which is all we have to work with, really.

**Mark:** [00:19:46] So why do you think Alexander then is such a useful device for authors to reflect whatever their, particular issues in their time is?

**Meg:** [00:20:01] I think because he does so much and he has such an overlap in so many different areas there's a lot that you can map on to him. There's a lot of cautionary tales that you can map onto-- he almost exists as this paradigm of the good general. When he's good, he's good. But when he's bad, he's absolutely terrible.

So if you want to use him as a model of 'this is how you be a good soldier'. You read your Homer, you have a good physical education, you listen to your tutors, you've come from a good strong family, and then you will do good strong things, you can have that moral lesson through Alexander.

He read his Iliad, listened to his dad, loved his tutor, did good stuff. But then if you want to use him as this paradigm of the dangers of excess, it's like, well, you don't drink too much because you'll end up killing your best friend. Don't have too many dalliances with exotic foreign people because you'll end up alienating your friends.

So there's all these other moral lessons that can be tied up in here because he has such a varied career and did such unprecedented things. It's almost hard to find a motif that you almost can't map on to Alexander's life and his travels, cause there's such a diverse breadth of information available, even if not all of it is reliable.

**Mark:** [00:21:24] Certainly that's the impression that I get from the medieval reception of Alexander is, there's sort of two Alexanders, which aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, but there's the heroic explorer adventurous Alexander. And then there's the Alexander as exemplum of pride. But you can do both if you need to.

**Meg:** [00:21:51] Yeah. I think that there's a brilliant first line of this article, it was one of the first articles I read about Alexander and it was, the article-- I think it's Alexander the Good or Terrible. I'll have to go back and find out who it's by and it kind of starts off at --it's point is, I think one of the reasons why Alexander has been so popular and we exhume him time and time again is that we can't decide whether he's the good guy or the bad guy.

That's a fairly simplistic way to look at it, but it's hard. I think it's true because people do fluctuate between deciding good guy, were the things he does, justified, were they okay? Was he really this great person for spreading Hellenic culture and therefore that was worth all the bloodshed or is he this absolutely terrible, awful, tyrannical, Antichrist figure, which he kind of appears-- I think it's perhaps there's some discussion on whether he appears in the Quran as a two horned devil. But the thing is, he's both at the same time, it's almost like, well, you can't reconcile those two sides together.

Can you? But I think it's, you have to, because they are both equally, they come from a similar literary tradition. It's just that he fluctuates between these two poles. That's where I guess my interest in Alexander reception and the history of scholarship comes into as well, because the kind of Alexander that you're going to read about depends so heavily on when it was written and who it was written by.

Because if you look at influential biographies of Alexander from the early 20th century--so I think of W.W. Tarn, who wrote a lot on Alexander. And then if you look at some of the ones that were written a little bit later, in the wake of post-World War II, post-Nazi fascism, they've got very different perspectives on what this figure means. Tarn is a British member of the gentry. So he's very influenced by these ideas of British colonialism. So with that in mind, it's understandable why his version of Alexander is this enlightened almost gentleman and a scholar. He goes to India and he slaughters all these people, but he also introduces them to Hellenism.

So therefore it's not that bad. And you think, well, the British went into the British Raj and killed a load of Indians, but at least they gave them the railways. That's an argument that's been bandied around a lot. So you can see how those two pictures and portraits of Alexander go hand in hand.

But then in the rise of people seeing the consequences of fascism in Europe in the mid-20th century, you then get this kind of rebuttal against Alexander that's like, well, actually he's a bit of a totalitarian dictator. He's, he's horrible. He's awful. It's absolutely just the violent, crazed drunken megalomaniac behavior.

So it's very interesting how, again, he's got so many different facets to his personality that are all, both kind of ridiculously opposite and yet still equally true that the one that kind of rises to prominence so heavily depends on when and where our understanding is situated.

 **Aven:** [00:25:00] When I, the very first year I was teaching as an assistant prof, the first year I had to teach a course called 'The Hellenistic World'.

I would just like to point out that I do Latin poetry. That's my topic. So I was teaching this third year history course called 'The Hellenistic World: From Alexander to Cleopatra' and it was tough. I had never studied that at all. I had this textbook, we had a textbook and I just, I took the textbook that had been used by the prof before me, because knew nothing about it.

And I was always one chapter ahead of the students, that was the only way I got through that year. But the textbook, I think it's, is it Francoise Chamoux or something? It's, something like that. He's French. And the first chapter disposes of Alexander because that-- the textbook's really about the Diadochi and every everything that comes after it.

And the first time it was just, it was nothing but 'Alexander the Great is an amazing man, look at all the wonderful things he did and how he spread all of Hellenistic culture and he is the best, the end and everyone who says he isn't'-- that like, amazing translated from the French prose about 'everyone who thinks he isn't is a small embittered person with no understanding of the greatness of great men and everyone who criticizes Alexander just shows by that his own inability to understand greatness'. I mean, that was my textbook!

**Meg:** [00:26:18] I'm not surprised because some of the things that you will read about him. I think that one of my personal favorites is to look at kind of social media mentions of Alexander, whether it's kind of an overview like in history or something like that. And if they call him Alexander the Third of Macedon, as opposed to the Great, you can bet in the comments, there's going to be a million Greeks going, 'you mean the Great, you mean he's Alexander the Great, he's the Great'.

**Aven:** [00:26:45] Yeah.

**Meg:** [00:26:45] It's so interesting that people get really 'woah', they really rise up and have these such strong opinions. But I think part of that is just because he gets recast to mean so many different things and he--

**Aven:** [00:27:00] Well, yes.

**Meg:** [00:27:00] --gets this new sense of, of nationalism, nowadays in the late nineties onwards, the Macedonian question has become a very--political hotbed now.

And it's the most bizarre. I like kind of talk to people and they go, well, what's new that's interesting about Alexander the Great? Why are you still talking about Alexander the Great? So people have said before, and I'd be like, do you know that you can talk about Alexander the Great in the context of Eurovision?

And they're like, what? And I'm like, well you can, because of the name changes of the former Republic of Macedonia wanted to call themselves Macedonia and the Greeks blocked that. And also there's more to that than just some guy who was around 2,300 years ago, but the name of Alexander gets invoked in these arguments. It's still being used as sort of a nail to hang points off even nowadays. And I think-

**Aven:** [00:27:56] Oh, yeah.

**Meg:** [00:27:56] --part of the enduring interest and why we should still be interested in Alexander the Great, no matter how many biographies get published every year, I've read a depressing statistic. It's like two or something.

Two a year at least for the last God knows how long. But I still think it's worth looking at, because you're not just looking at this man who was--died at the age of 32 and traveled around 2000 years ago, you're looking at how his being and his essence and his mythos has been twisted and turned throughout centuries, millennia, and still finds ways to be relevant.

**Aven:** [00:28:32] Well, and absolutely, I mean, I don't know that we need a biography, more biographies of him, but we need more history--his-- I can't say the word--historiographies of him is what we most, I mean, I would say we need the most, because the, the Alexander the Great question in the same, those things, like all that stuff that was there in the early sources, but is so important now, did he speak Greek or Macedonian?

Are those the same or not? Is the culture he spread Greek or Macedonian? Are those the same or not? The, the framing of those questions meant one thing in the ancient world and means something slightly different now, but is actually an, as you say, an ongoing, vital political and cultural question right now that people care deeply about it.

And so how you frame and how you think about it and how people have thought about Alexander has real-world implications.

**Meg:** [00:29:25] Yeah, definitely. I always think it's fascinating, when I was in Edinburgh for my masters, I never saw this statue and I'm furious because I didn't even know it existed--

My friend who'd lived there for four years didn't tell me. No, it never crossed his mind. So I was so angry, but in Edinburgh, there's a statue of Alexander taming his warhorse Bucephalus.

**Aven:** [00:29:44] Oh, wow.

**Meg:** [00:29:45] And I think, my gosh. We're in like the capital of Scotland, which is so far removed from Ancient Greece and Macedonia.

And yet they have this massive statue of the young Alexander taming Bucephalus. And you just think that the transfer of that story, and what it must have meant and what--the wider story it tells us about I don't know, perseverance or strength or be kind to your pet animals, I don't know.

But the fact that we have these things that are placed in different places that seem so far removed, it's like, well, he must be an important figure for, at least how we-- what we take from the ancient world, how we apply it to ourselves for it to be continually relevant, to have statues put up in the capital of Scotland.

**Aven:** [00:30:36] Yeah. I mean, we can, I want to circle back to, to modern reception later. Cause I think there's some other stuff to talk about for the ancient stuff, but you mentioning Bucephalus reminds me that my first encounter with, first inkling that there was such a thing as Alexander was through, through the story of Bucephalus in the Black Stallion book, which I don't know if that is something that means anything to, especially to a non-American like someone not from North America, but they're a series of books and a movie, there was a movie about it. That are about horse racing and they're from the mid, mid-20th century, the forties, fifties. But they were very, everybody read them sort of thing. Black Beauty and the Black Stallion are the two horse books as a horse obsessed young girl that I read.

It starts off with the young boy who was horse-mad, being told a story by his uncle or father--his uncle--of Bucephalus and there's this little figure. And in the movie they have him imagining Bucephalus jumping out of the arena and all of that, the whole story. And then he goes on to meet a wild Arabian stallion, who he becomes best friends with.

And story goes on from there, but like, that was my--age seven. I read this story about this horse and that was my first encounter with Alexander. So it took me, it was a lot later that I found out who the heck Alexander was, but I knew all about his horse.

**Meg:** [00:31:56] I think it's what he would have wanted. He was very fond of his warhorse.

**Aven:** [00:31:59] Yeah, I think it was perfectly appropriate. Anyway, you looked into the literary reception, is there anything you want to specifically highlight about that or the artistic reconstructions of who Alexander was?

**Meg:** [00:32:15] Yeah. I did that for undergrad and then I kind of moved forward with my studies and I wanted to look at another aspect, another facet of the construction of Alexander. And something that I was very interested in just from an aesthetic point of view is artwork and beautiful sculptures and how do they, how do they look like that, it's so amazing, wow.

And I wanted to look at this image of Alexander because it is such a famous image. It's one that if you have an idea, you can almost instantly recognize because the features are so sort of stylized that it becomes so obvious who he is. When, when you think of Alexander, you think of the leonine hair, you think of the anastole, these are all such iconic features.

So very kind of long sort of curly hair. The anastole is almost, I guess you'd call it like a cowlick, this kind of bit that goes upwards from the forehead and the other particular calling cards is the slightly tilted neck, the slightly parted lips. If you see a portrait from the ancient world, you can kind of really guess, hmm, I think that might be an Alexander because it's so--even if it comes from different places.

So you look at the head that's in the British museum where he's a a little bit dumpy, he's a little bit worn, he's seen better days, but you could still look at it and go, yeah. Okay.

He's got a strong chin and these full lips, this very sort of, it's almost shaggy hair. And then you see an image -- I think of the head that's in the Capitoline, this Alexander Helios, is it Alexander, is it supposed to be Helios, is it an amalgamation of the two? Dunno, but it's kind of got that title. And you can see, well I do still see the resemblance because stylistically there's definitely a similarity.

So what I looked at is a bit of, what are these images? What does this image mean? Why did it become this way? It's obviously not a portrait. He hasn't done the Cromwell 'paint me, warts and all' type thing where he looks exactly how he is. No, no, this is a very deliberate kind of decision, a deliberate choice.

So definitely the impact that it had on what -- the visual language of kingship is so interesting because prior to this, if you were depicting a King, be it the King of the gods, be it the King of Sparta, whoever's supposed to be in this regal Agamemnon on the beautiful vases, they're always depicted bearded.

Quite an important facet of kingship is that you are a mature man. You are powerful, brave. You probably have a beard, right? And even if you don't, you want to look like you have a beard. You think of-- it's a different culture, but I kind of think of the pharaohs and Hatshepsut, and she had a, had a fake beard and that was, she was a pharaoh.

It's very interesting. Then Alexander kind of changes all that. And the beard in terms of the visual language of kingship just disappears for centuries. It doesn't really come back till Hadrian, when he brought it back because he was a Hellenophile. And he was looking to pre-Alexander or maybe because he had a weak chin, I'm not sure.

**Aven:** [00:35:19] With beards it's always hard to tell the motivations.

**Meg:** [00:35:24] With his clean-shaven face. And again, I think it all comes down to how the best thing Alexander ever did for his PR machine was to die. Because as you mentioned, he died a young man, I don't know what age specifically that men were expected to start growing and maintaining their beards.

But you could think, 20 year old Alexander he's just out of his teens, he's still a youth really, by all accounts. I don't know how well he would have been able to grow and maintain a beard.

**Aven:** [00:35:52] I mean, if you think about the, the ideological approach to youth and age in the say, Classical Greek period, you have the sort of early twenties is when the beard is expected to start probably coming in in a real way. That's when you cease to be an ephebe, basically. Right? And then, but even if you look to Rome later an adulescentulus, a young man, an adolescent is up till he's 30. So I do think there's that, yeah. That the cutoff for full adulthood is definitely into your thirties. And I can't imagine--

**Meg:** [00:36:27] It kind of becomes this point where it's almost like the existing model of kingship just isn't suitable, so he needs to become something else. And there's some analysis. He draws a lot of his visual aspects of kingship from images of athletes and images of gods. So to be clean shaven and to have long hair is one of these things where it's kind of a youthful. To be a youth in the mortal world is to be perhaps inexperienced. When he became King, there was all these, attempted uprisings because people thought, great, we've got a child on the throne, pretty much. We can get the Macedonians off our backs. And of course that didn't work out, but there must've been this assumed scoffing, you could probably imagine around the debate halls in Athens, 'oh, we'll be rid of those Macedonians soon. He's 20, come on'. So we have to look for this kind of new image of what would be appropriate that is both something powerful, but something that is his reality. So this drawing on these images of, of gods to make his--to keep his hair longer, to keep his face deliberately clean shaven. And part of the interesting aspect of that is that it continues on after his death.

So if you look at, or if you have seen, the Alexander mosaic from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, and you look at that image of his face, which I have on a very large poster on my wall behind me now, thanks to my parents as a Christmas gift.

**Aven:** [00:37:52] Oh, nice.

**Meg:** [00:37:52] If you look at that, you can see that he has-- it's not just he's young and that he cannot grow a beard.

Because if you look at that image, he's got these kinds of sideburns that come all the way down to the bottom of his jaw. There's that implication of, oh no, I can grow facial hair, I'm a man. I'm just choosing to be clean shaven because it's more important to me to be this image of youth and almost semi-divinity.

**Aven:** [00:38:17] By the way I'll put for listeners, I'll put links to some of these images in the show notes, because yeah. If you haven't seen the Alexander mosaic, it's, it's worth looking at.

**Meg:** [00:38:28] It's so interesting that that is what has, what has kept on as part of his legacy and that he had that deliberate change on, what it meant to be seen as a King? Because Caesar, the Roman emperors kept themselves clean shaven. Adult men in the Senate were clean shaven, and we know that, part of that you cannot completely attribute to, to Alexander, but the successors kept themselves largely clean shaven on their coin portraits also.

And they also took on these attributes of Alexander in terms of having their styling, their hair long, not quite as long, but kind of keeping these visual symbols. So it's under Alexander they become something else. Whereas before it'd be something you associated with divinity or with athletes, under Alexander it becomes part of what it means to look like a King is to aspire to be youthful and almost semi-divine.

**Aven:** [00:39:20] Would you say it's an Apollonian specifically divinity that he's aiming or looking at because that's what I think of when I think of the long haired and the-- Zeus is still in statues depicted with the beard, for instance, or, so is it Apollo?

**Meg:** [00:39:37] Yeah, he's definitely looking for an attribution with the younger gods. I mean, Dionysus you get --

**Aven:** [00:39:42] Dionysus, of course. Yeah.

**Meg:** [00:39:44] Dionysus was an important, supposedly an important figure in Alexander's life. His mother had connections to the cult of Dionysus. Dionysus became an important figure throughout Alexander's Indian campaign because in the mythology, Dionysus brought wine from India.

He was one of the only figures in their kind of mythological landscape who'd ever traveled that far, even Heracles hadn't quite reached India, but Dionysus had. So you have instances of him having these massive drinking parties while out on campaign and Dionysus features quite heavily in these, we're told, whether he's dressing up as Dionysus which could be a bit of a slanderous claim that supposedly he was fond of dressing up in kind of these divine guises. So he's only aspiring to that generation of the Olympians, of Apollo and Dionysus and taking on these attributes. But it's one of those things--and it's like the diadem as well.

The diadem previous to Alexander doesn't really have much of a royal connotation. The diadem is something you might see with athletes. Right?

**Aven:** [00:40:50] Right.

**Meg:** [00:40:51] I'm not quite a hundred percent whether the diadem is because of the Dionysus connection. Cause do you see Dionysus with a diadem? Or whether it comes from part of Persian kingship, because in Persian kingship, they also had a sort of almost like a cloth, the tiara almost.

So it's kind of not a hundred percent sure whether this was translated into kingship by Alexander specifically. That's something that I am interested in, but can never quite find a definitive answer for, I think it could be that the origins are a bit ambiguous, but we know that certainly it's not found as a signal of kingship before Alexander, but it is found as a signal of kingship after Alexander. So despite whether it originates from Eastern or Western influences, it's definitely within the nexus of his life, his campaigns that this transformation happens. And again, the diadem is something that you see with athletes who are young men and certainly not kings, and yet it becomes something kingly.

**Aven:** [00:41:44] Hmm. The parallels there to the Roman-- so I don't want to talk too much necessarily about Rome, but when I--Alexander. Alexander was big at Rome. Let's just say they liked him. They thought he was pretty cool. But in particular, when you talk about the statuary, the obvious parallel there, and it's interesting because of who picks up on Alexander as a model, but the obvious parallel just to stick to the statue stuff there , is Augustus, of course, who comes into a Roman tradition, not of kingship, but of leading men.

The leading men of the Republic, a tradition where you see in the portraiture and in the ideology , gravitas and senioritas, those are the important things. You want to be old. You want to have gravitas, you want be respectable and dignitas and all of these things, that's what's important.

And so we see there's that, the veristic style, which is a very misleading terminology, but the older portraiture of the Republic tends to show very much warts and all, to in fact an exaggerated and to our eyes quite comic degree. So you have these statues of prominent men with massive amounts of wrinkles and just sagging flesh and--

 Nobody looks like that actually. So it's it's not really veristic. People used to talk about it as being more true to life. But it's just as ideological as anything else. But what it's trying to portray is age and dignity, because that is what gives you weight as a Senator. After all, the word Senator means old man, you have to be an old man.

But you see in the late Republic a change already that is influenced by the Greek styles, of course, which is what you're talking about, which have their own idealization of youth and beauty. And Alexander is a big part of that. But in particular, when you see Augustus or Octavian, as he is, come to power--while he is in many ways not at all like Alexander , he does have some parallels, of course, in that he comes--he's 18, 19 when Caesar is assassinated and he takes over. He cannot in any way pretend to the dignitas and seniority of the old Republican leaders. Even Antony, who's not all that old, is at least older than him and is mature and does have a beard. And you see that on his coins. In fact, he's presented as bearded sometimes, because he's military. So the military man does wear a beard sometimes. But Octavian can't, he's a young man, he doesn't have any of that.

So he too ends up being portrayed as a very young man. And really then it becomes this cult of sort of youth and beauty and he particularly connects to Apollo, becomes the important figure for him. And you get these images, which then last his-- he doesn't die young.

So he becomes an old man, but the statues stay young for a very, very long time because this has become-- so there too you see a movement and a change that's driven in large part, because nobody's going to believe an image of Augustus or Octavian as a 25 year old with heavy wrinkles, the gravity of an old man.

So he has to go for another and Alexander gives him, Alexander and those models of kingship that you're talking about, give him an image and a way and a language, a visual language for expressing that power, even though he has none of the military credits that Alexander has or any of those things, but he can still sort of-- so you get that, and when you look at Roman statuary and the number of people who have Alexander hair specifically, the Alexander hairline, it's very funny because you could just see it on a whole series of statues and the one that it's the most funny on is Pompey the Great.

Who is, of course, the person who very, who most obviously takes the Alexander myth for himself because he's also Magnus. He gets, he takes the epithet and we have his contemporaries were very clear that he taught, took it as a-- his friends started calling him that, he didn't make up the nickname for himself, of course. But by early, by his mid twenties, he's already going as Pompey the Magnus, which is , many of the contemporaries thought was ludicrous and they thought it was a sign of his pretentiousness.

But he's Magnus because Alexander is Magnus, because that's the term that's used in the Roman period. And so we have these busts of him as a middle-aged man and his face is being portrayed in the older Roman style, with wrinkles, looks like a Roman statesman, but he's got Alexander's hairline.

And it's amazing. It's just this visual representation of how, of what was in flux and what was going on in the late Republic of issues of leadership, of trying to have the Republican senatorial gravitas, but also to be the one singular great general who transforms the world in the same bust, it's great.

**Meg:** [00:47:04] Yeah. I can visualize the one that I think you mean and his hair--

**Aven:** [00:47:07] Yeah, it's the most famous one of him, I think.

**Meg:** [00:47:10] Yeah. It looks a bit, it just looks like he's woken up and then it's all a bit askew. It's almost, I do sometimes wonder, I don't know how much you know about UK politics, but Boris Johnson, the current prime minister is a notorious or should that be infamous lover of classics and classical allusions and his hair is always deliberately ridiculous. And I do wonder is he trying to kind of pull off in a strange, perverse way this Alexander tousled locks and failing miserably. It wouldn't surprise me. Supposedly he does compare himself to Alexander the Great in a very, not charming, very sickly manner, I would imagine.

**Aven:** [00:47:49] Yeah, just wait until we get the leaks of 'his friends call him Magnus, his friends call him Boris the Great'.

**Meg:** [00:47:56] Apparently some of his aides did have him, his nickname in their phone as Alexander the Great, his middle name is Alexander. So I always get dragged into these conversations unwillingly about terrible, terrible people. I tweeted about it recently saying it makes me look bad by association because every time it's in the news that a terrible man, whether it's Jeff Bezos or Boris Johnson is comparing himself to Alexander the Great, I inevitably get sent the article and I have to grit my teeth.

**Aven:** [00:48:27] No, I mean, yeah, I think that's a really good parallel because there's that same attempt to sort of find-- again, Boris Johnson wasn't an elder statesman when he entered the political arena, couldn't go for that model.

So I don't think it's even-- if it's not deliberately Alexander, I think it's possibly motivated by a similar--

**Meg:** [00:48:51] That's my theory. I think it may be one of these little hidden artifices that's very Etonian, there's 'oh, I'm going to mess up my hair to look like Alexander and no one else will get the in-joke, but I will'. So I have a feeling that-

**Aven:** [00:49:05] You've persuaded me, it will make me hate his image on my monitor. Even more.

**Meg:** [00:49:13] Next time you see an image of him where he's looking deliberately tousled as always, just keep it in mind.

**Aven:** [00:49:22] Yeah. It's so interesting. Because Alexander becomes this figure of legend that you're talking about and this exemplar and I mean, Plutarch does it the most obviously by comparing Alexander and Caesar in his Parallel Lives. Rome really does take him on as the exemplar of the great general and the great conquerer. And everybody is to some extent compared to him for good or for bad, because he has all those negative qualities too. Comparing Julius Caesar to Alexander the Great is not purely complementary for a Roman, for sure.

But I thought it's really--I find him quite fascinating as a figure in Roman thought. And we have, there's a poem by Catullus that has this whole ends of the earth trope that's like ' my friends are such good friends, they would go to the ends of the earth'. And I read a nice little article that says the first pair, first stanza's definitely Alexander the Great.

The second is definitely about Pompey and Pompey's eastern conquests. And then the third paragraph has this geographical stuff that explicitly says it's the monuments of Magnus Caesar, of great Caesar. So Magnus is only used in that third stanza, but --so the argument goes --that the other two stanzas are referring to the other two magni, the other two greats.

And it's the only place that I know of where Caesar gets that epithet. So he didn't in the end, that wasn't an epithet that was used for him, but it's being very deliberately comparative. I just liked that, being able to see how the discourse of Alexander as good and bad gets worked into Roman conceptions of their own leaders and transforms, or gives them someone to think with, if that's the thing to say, as the huge expansion, especially during the period of expansion in the late Republic, when people are going out and conquering swaths of land and bringing Roman-ness, whatever that does or doesn't mean at that time.

**Meg:** [00:51:24] Hmm. I can't, I can't quite remember who, where I read it in Diana Spencer's Roman Alexander, which is one of the books I really enjoy on Alexander.

And I know that she didn't come up with this phrasing, she borrowed from somebody else, but I can't remember who the somebody else is. But it adds on, he's referred to as like a wine skin. In that you almost fill him with any kind of wine to have your complete product, that he is just kind of the shell that gets filled with whatever it needs to be filled with to make the point.

And I think that idea when I first read it has really stuck with me. I think the more I think about it, the more I think it's true. It was a very interesting idea to think that he kind of provides this very convenient package. In which you put your own substance in order to use it for whatever purpose you want.

And I definitely think that that's certainly the case with him in the Roman world that he is this package that they can just imbue with their own meaning depending on what they need.

**Aven:** [00:52:25] Yeah. And you can use him to criticize or to praise, for instance , or to do both at once. If you want to sort of be able to speak out of both sides of your mouth, which is, can be useful in certain contexts, especially when you get into the Imperial period.

And then, yeah, it's interesting that when I was-- I assumed that--I looked for stuff and I haven't read that by Diana Spencer. I haven't read that, but I should, because that sounds really interesting and I love her stuff. But I was looking for Antony as Alexander. He seemed like the obvious-- surely people connected Antony with Alexander, or that his own propaganda did. I mean, he certainly connected himself with Dionysus, there's that. And then he ends up with a Ptolemy, and he has the Eastern conquests and that Eastern connection. I didn't see, but I'm going to admit, I did a fairly superficial search, so I may have missed some very, very obvious stuff, but I didn't see a lot of comparisons on that.

And I was a little surprised by that because he seems like such an obvious comparison or connection to Antony, to be used either by himself as a good thing, especially in the East where Alexander's legacy was probably more positive, and as a way of attacking him by Roman sources.

**Meg:** [00:53:47] Yeah. Not to sound like I've only read one book, but I remember Spencer mentioning that when talking about these kinds of Roman Alexanders, but I didn't, I wasn't very convinced. I didn't think there was enough evidence to support that, but it is an interesting question of, well, why or why not?

Because again, it seems like he would be a prime example to use to either to praise or detract, because you could say 'well, he's Alexander because he thinks he's great, but is he really Alexander because he's licentious and drunk and all these other things', which is definitely a side of Alexander that people do and did pick up on.

So it would be a very good comparison point to make. So it is an interesting idea. Definitely. But I'm not sure if they ever did, I can't think of anything that comes to mind that I've read. So it seems like they missed an opportunity.

**Mark:** [00:54:35] The other thing that I was wondering about the construction of Alexander -- you mentioned that the sort of Homeric connection and Alexander as Achilles, but I think the other comparison that can be made is Hercules. And particularly the sort of aspect of Alexander that is Alexander the monster killer.

Cause that was certainly an image of Alexander that was very popular in the middle ages. And so there's Alexander's letter to Aristotle and all these works that talk about the wonders of the East that he saw -- and that also leads me to thinking about modern reception and, is there a place for that Alexander still or are we just making movies about the so-called true history of figures like Alexander.

**Meg:** [00:55:29] The Heracles comparison is very important. I think during Alexander's lifetime that's certainly the mythological precedent that was almost more applicable to him. His royal family, the Argead line in Macedon, they trace their lineage from a descendant of Heracles.

So Heracles features quite prominently in their royal image. So the coins of his father Philip II, coins of his sort of earlier ancestors as well featured the image of Heracles, whether it was literally Heracles' profile with the lion cap or whether it was the club, he was featured on their coinage because he was a known and admired ancestor for Alexander and his father.

Cause the Persian campaign itself, as an idea, had been around for quite a while. Beginning of the fourth century , there was a Spartan king who'd wanted to go on this Persian campaign, but it never took off the ground. And it was originally going to be Philip II's campaign, he was going to be the one who was going to go to Persia, I guess Alexander would be his general, his right-hand man. But he wouldn't be the leading force, that would be Philip. And there is a speech by Socrates who was kind of pro Philip. He was one of the voices that was for him rather than against him, with like the likes of Demosthenes. And in one of these speeches he compares Philip to Heracles saying, 'you're going to be our Heracles and you're going to go and conquer Persia, like Heracles conquered Troy'. The story of Heracles before Achilles conquering Troy. So there is this existing comparison.

And then during Alexander's lifetime, he took on this comparison and openly welcomed it. There's some kind of speaking ancient sources that he may have had a illegitimate son with a Persian noblewoman who may have been named Heracles. So he's taking that on to be a figure of importance to him.

Supposedly he was very motivated by his mythological ancestors. They kind of were an example to emulate, but also to surpass. If there's one defining characteristic about Alexander, it's just this innate and absolutely extreme competitiveness. Supposedly as Arrian and some of the other sources make this comparison quite explicit saying 'well, you know, the only reason he tried to seige the Aornos Rock is because in legend Heracles did it and failed'.

So that's why he dragged his men there to go on this siege. Because he was trying to outdo Heracles specifically by name, because this is one of his named adventures. And we know Alexander's mind. We can't know if that's true, but it's certainly that's how historians did the period considered it.

One of -- my most recent thesis, my M. Lit dissertation that I just submitted in the summer was sort of a case study basis. I looked at the so-called Alexander sarcophagus, which is an absolutely beautiful monument. But it's not the sarcophagus of Alexander at all. It belongs to somebody else entirely, somebody who was an associate of Alexander, supposedly a man called Abdalonymus, who was the last king of Sidon, who was established as king by Alexander, but it gets its name from one of the highly decorated friezes, which is a hunting scene in which we see Alexander on horseback. And the reason why it's been identified as Alexander is because he's wearing this Heracles cap, this lion cap.

**Aven:** [00:58:58] Right.

**Meg:** [00:58:59] And it's very-- cause nobody else is in kind of this divine costuming. Everyone else is very brilliantly exquisitely dressed, but it's such an explicit allusion to a heroic figure. If you were to see that out of context, you would say 'well, it must be Heracles' because you see a picture of a guy with a lion skin hat, you know that's Heracles! That's his defining outfit.

And yet we know that it's Alexander. And there's some, I think it's in a fragment of Athanaeus who mentions that toward the end of his life, when he's supposedly, if you believe kind of the general trajectory of his life, he's kind of spiraling out of control, getting a little bit big for his boots.

He starts wearing this heroic costume as Heracles-- kind of Alexander in the guise of Heracles. And some of his later coinage that was minted during his lifetime there's debate over whether we are meant to read these portraits, which is on the face of it a portrait of Heracles in profile, but are we supposed to read that actually as a pseudo portrait of Alexander? Are we actually looking at what is Alexander's face with a Heracles cap, but it's kind of obscuring it.

So it's a way for him to sneakily put his own face on his coins during his lifetime, which would be a massive massive jump because although Alexander's face was the first to be put on coinage, it would be borderline sacrilegious to put a mortal face of a mortal man on coinage when that's something that been really reserved for honoring the gods or honoring important heroes.

So there's some debate over whether we're supposed to read it as a pseudo-portrait or whether it's just a coincidence because typically Heracles portraits of sort of earlier Macedonian mints. You see again, Heracles with a little, like, stubbly beard. That's how you know it's him. Whereas some of the portraits that were minted late in Alexander's reign and early in the successors who chose to continue the Alexander types, the man wearing the Heracles cap is clearly very youthful.

So is it just an aged-down Heracles because of course you do have the artistic tradition of the young Heracles versus the old Heracles, whether he's he's pre-labors or post labors, or is it the Alexander with the Heracles cap. And there's arguments on either side for what that represents, but Heracles is definitely an important figure for Alexander to emulate during his lifetime. And also one that the successors will continue. They continue putting Heracles caps on portraits of Alexander. If you search for Alexander in the guise of Heracles, there are quite a lot, but also in this time, it's kind of six of one, half a dozen of the other, because images that were produced of Heracles that are intended to be Heracles now kind of look a bit Alexandrian because the two traditions are kind of coming together. Now we have an Alexander-inspired Heracles as much as we have a Heracles-inspired Alexander. So you've got this kind of de-aging of Heracles as well in Hellenistic artistic traditions, but--

**Aven:** [01:01:51] Right, which really opens him up to the claiming of Heracles by some of the Roman emperors in fact, cause you can--you can't help but think of people like Commodus because the youthful Heracles is an easier model for them too. So that's interesting.

**Meg:** [01:02:06] But I think certainly again, why the best thing that Alexander ever did was die young, that suddenly makes the Achilles parallels so much more interesting.

And that's something that Alexander in his lifetime presumably couldn't have anticipated. One would assume that he wanted to live long and continue campaigning for as long as possible. His father Philip was campaigning into his forties, but Achilles would have died, I suppose-- the ages in the Iliad and Homer never really make sense.

But you would guess that the idea is that he left to Troy, a young man, you would guess maybe early twenties, by the end of the war, he's probably early thirties. So he kind of is almost of a similar age, at least a similar life stage. They both die young. They both die in this kind of blaze of glory.

They both die shortly after their preferred companion dies. So the parallels kind of write themselves, but they write themselves posthumously with that knowledge of what happened. And that's why it's such a common comparison point in the later literature, because, Achilles and Alexander exists as a comparative point in Alexander's own lifetime. We know that he was also descended from Achilles on his mother's side. He had these very illustrious ancestors from which he could draw upon when it was useful to him. So when he's campaigning around the Hellespont, he visits the site at Troy, supposedly. He offers sacrifices to the tomb and the temple of Priam, the temple of Athena, he goes on this naked foot race to try and emulate Achilles. So he does do these little things when emulating Achilles deliberately, if we take for fact that this happened, but then he kind of changes who his model is, depending on where it is most appropriate.

So as he moves further on eastward, Achilles is no longer so interesting. Now it becomes more of a 'oh, and now I need to adopt the guise of Heracles' because this was Heracles' stomping ground. And then as he goes even further East, he goes 'well, we know that Dionysus was around here'.

So now I'm going to start dressing up as Dionysus. So he's kind of like a PR mogul. He almost picks images that he knows what will suit better, but definitely this kind of Homeric, Achillean comparison point is a very pleasing one to us in modernity looking backwards because we can see the obvious parallel, whereas Heracles grew to be older, married had children, married again, had more children and that's not quite something that Alexander managed to achieve. So I think Heracles is the more important ancestor in his lifetime, but seeing how the story pans out, I think that's what makes Achilles and the Homeric angle more appealing to us.

**Aven:** [01:04:47] Yeah. Did you want to talk a little bit about Alexander's letter, the letter to Aristotle that you mentioned--

**Mark:** [01:04:54] Well yeah, just in terms of its focus on the monsters and the wonders and Alexander as explorer.

**Aven:** [01:05:01] What is the context for that work? Just to--

**Mark:** [01:05:05] Well, it's, it's a late antiqe Latin original based on originally a Greek text and it gets translated into Old English and it remains popular throughout the Middle Ages because of the monster content.

**Aven:** [01:05:20] Right.

**Mark:** [01:05:20] And so the Old English text is in the Beowulf manuscript, which seems to have been a monster manuscript, all the texts in it, because that's the one thing they have in common is that they have monsters.

**Aven:** [01:05:31] Right. And so then that places, that version of it and what the, well, with the Beowulf manuscript.

Just tell me when that is, Mark! And that's not a famously complicated question or anything, but like eighth century-ish.

**Mark:** [01:05:41] Well, the manuscript itself is quite late. It's probably as late as 11th century by some claims.

**Aven:** [01:05:48] And so this is a letter that purports to be Alexander writing back to Aristotle, right?

**Mark:** [01:05:53] Yeah.

**Aven:** [01:05:54] Cause I'm thinking in terms of that Achillean parallel. One of the things that parallels is the early life of Achilles and his tutors, right? Like the mythical, not the Iliad, but the non-Iliadic tradition, which has him being tutored by Chiron and his various other tutors, and that idea of the youthful hero learning.

And you talked about that earlier, Meg, the youthful hero who learns from the great masters and Aristotle figures importantly into that. Yeah.

**Mark:** [01:06:21] Well, and the way it's sort of framed is that Alexander is writing to Aristotle to say 'look at all the amazing things I've done, you can be proud, I want you to be proud of me. Because obviously I'm just fantastic'. It's not subtle at all in its self-praise.

**Aven:** [01:06:40] 'So I may have learned some things from you, but not modesty'. Yeah. And that's where we get those--no, the ants are in Herodotus-- what some of the monsters he talks about?

**Mark:** [01:06:52] I mean, some that we think we can trace. There seems to be a description of hippopotamuses and crocodiles, but there's also various like, bat-like things and I think very large snakes, there's definitely snakes mentioned a few times. So all kinds of animals of unusual size.

**Aven:** [01:07:17] And does he also describe dog headed people and stuff like that? Or is that in another--I'm trying to remember --

**Mark:** [01:07:24] I get it confused with Wonders of the East because they're in the same manuscript in which monsters-- and there's overlap there for sure. And in fact, Alexander is mentioned by name in Wonders of the East as well. So the, the dog-headed people--

**Aven:** [01:07:38] That might be Wonders of the East.

**Mark:** [01:07:39] That might be Wonders of the East.

**Aven:** [01:07:41] They're all of a piece. Anyway. So that's where Alexander goes. And I don't think any of that, like you say, has a Greek manuscript, not an early--this is completely made up tradition, it's much later.

**Mark:** [01:07:53] No, no, it's completely--yeah.

**Aven:** [01:07:54] Yeah. I don't know if you know anything about the Alexander romances and things like that, Meg, if that's something you've looked at.

**Meg:** [01:08:00] It's not something that I've looked at before, but it's something that I've always had a passing interest in because what I find fascinating is some of the examples of, I don't know what they call them.

I'm sorry, I'm not a medievalist, but the images, these beautiful images, they've got a load in the British Library, of Alexander the Explorer, and there's a really recurring motif of, he's in like a glass jar under the sea?

**Aven:** [01:08:22] Oh, yeah.

**Mark:** [01:08:22] Yes. It's submarine. That's right. Yeah.

**Meg:** [01:08:25] So that's kind of interesting. There's a submarine and he looks like a little medieval King because he's got a little spiky hair and his little hat, and he's all in like lovely red robes, but he's Alexander because he's exploring and he's being dragged along the sea bed in this glass jar looking all the fantastic sea creatures.

And I just think that is so brilliant. I don't know if I can put more scholarly thought on it because it seems so bizarre to me, but I just think it's amazing. There's my favorite one, he's got what looks like a cat and like a cockerel in the jar with him. I don't know why but I just think it's amazing. It's such a spirited image.

I just think that's fantastic.

**Mark:** [01:09:09] Yeah. The submarine thing, it's not in the letter to Aristotle, but it is there in a lot of the medieval sources. They repeat that story.

**Aven:** [01:09:18] That he goes down under the sea--

**Mark:** [01:09:21] Under the sea, yeah.

**Aven:** [01:09:23] And it's that idea of wanting to find out-- curiosity, right?

And of course, speaking of Alexander as a wine skin. The Middle Ages--medieval mind is very happy to do things like take a figure from the ancient world and put them in contemporary clothes. That's how they tend to work all of their, how they think about people for the past is as contemporaries always. There's a historicalness to that.

And so he's a very useful wine skin for them. I love those stories too. You're talking manuscript illuminations, I think, some of the things-- images you're talking about.

**Meg:** [01:10:03] Yeah. I just, I just like looking for them, just seeing them and thinking 'my gosh, they're so brilliant'.

**Aven:** [01:10:11] Yeah. Alexander thought he was all that in its own lifetime. But if he'd understood what he'd become later--

**Meg:** [01:10:15] Look what he's getting up to now! And like I said, if there's anything we can say about Alexander is that he's just fiercely competitive and definitely an authorative nature, whether that's because of this enlightened scholar persona that he gets given or whether it's because he's a tyrant who just wants more places to vanquish. Either way, whatever the motivation, you know that he's an Explorer and that he's a traveler and I would love to--I always say Alexander would be going into space to fight the aliens. That's just something that's in his persona. He's going into the submarine, in a medieval glass jar on string, he would absolutely lead an army into space. I want to know what's out there so I can kill them, rob them or whatever reason.

**Aven:** [01:11:03] Name a planet after myself!

**Meg:** [01:11:05] Yeah!

**Aven:** [01:11:06] I mean, if he's going to space, every planet would be called Alexander. You'd just have Alexander one, two, three, four.

**Meg:** [01:11:13] If you think about, I mean, obviously Star Trek Enterprise is all about being a bit more nice, but I just think if he would be a great Star Trek Enterprise villain, where he's just going to all these planets and naming them after himself--

**Aven:** [01:11:23] Calling them Alexandria--

**Meg:** [01:11:24] I did a little bit of brief research thinking 'is there an Alexander and Doctor Who angle'. and there is a very tiny one, but not enough. I was a bit disappointed. I wish they had--

**Aven:** [01:11:38] That's true. They totally should have gone back to Alexander.

**Meg:** [01:11:43] But it was like an old Doctor Who episode. And then there's been like a couple of radio episodes.

And I think maybe he appears in a couple of the novelizations and that's it. And I was like, no, we need like, full on.

**Aven:** [01:11:55] We need a proper episode already.

**Meg:** [01:11:58] Because if there's anyone that you could take from history to be an explorer figure or a tyrant figure in any century--

**Aven:** [01:12:05] Yes!

**Mark:** [01:12:05] Yes!

**Meg:** [01:12:05] I think Alexander is the perfect versatile model for that.

**Aven:** [01:12:09] Oh, that'd be awesome. Well, on that note, why don't we finish off by talking a little bit about modern reception? We've touched on a number of political and other contexts, but the obvious elephant, if you'll forgive me, in the room is the Alexander movie and other sort of onscreen depictions.

Though I say that--are there other, like, what are the--there's the movie that I'm thinking of, the, not that recent anymore, but recent Alexander movie, are there other major depictions of him?

**Meg:** [01:12:43] Well, there's a 1956 film that whenever I bring this out, nobody believes me at first that Richard Burton was Alexander the Great.

**Aven:** [01:12:53] Hmm, there's an Antony connection for you. Sort of.

**Meg:** [01:12:57] It's kind of gotten lost to the annals of time, I think because it was so bad. It's one of these, I think it was a fairly big budget epic historical drama films from the 1950s, you would have thought it'd be right up there with some of the greats. I think Jason and the Argonauts came out not long after that and then Cleopatra killed it off in the late sixties.

But Richard Burton, quite a big actor, was Alexander in this. No one really watches it. I'm desperate to try and track it down, but I can't find anywhere to watch it. And I don't know how to, but I think it's quite amazing. And then obviously you've got the massive, the elephant in the room, which I think is absolutely fantastic seeing as the great elephant scenes in that film in 2004, Oliver Stone.

But apparently the 2004 Oliver Stone had been in production for a very long time. They'd been thinking about it since the nineties. It was part of, there was originally going to be a different one--I think a film directed by Baz Luhrmann, which was set to have Leonardo DiCaprio as Alexander, which I now can't even envision what that would look like, Baz Luhrmann's Alexander just sounds absolutely.

**Aven:** [01:14:14] Amazing frankly, come on.

**Meg:** [01:14:18] Amazing but wild. And then there was I think, I don't know if it had a theatrical release, I can't think, but there's like a film, Young Alexander with I think-- oh gosh, what was the actor's name? He's the main lead-- Sam Heughan I think he's the main lead in Outlander and things like that.

There was a film, The Young Alexander about him growing up. And that was in 2010, but I don't think it was a big blockbuster. So people are still churning out things about Alexander and he still has a presence on screen. But I think the 2004 film was such a-- even if it, it was a box office flop. I was reading about it recently because I have this idea for a project, which I may not see through, but I want to, where I want to watch the original theatrical release version and then watch the final version because the final version is three and a half hours long.

**Aven:** [01:15:09] And there were multiple in-between, right? He released-- there's at least three. Is it three or four different cuts of the film?

**Meg:** [01:15:16] There's four, because I was trying to sort out the chronology of it because I couldn't find a definitive answer. And so I had to work out my own. There's been four separate cuts of the film and I think if I get it right, the original film was in chronological order.

And then the second release, they took out 10 minutes of footage and put back in seven. So it was slightly different. And then they did another cut, which I believe is the director's. The directors cut was what changed that, but then the ultimate cut is what added in so much length and decided to chop it up and make it not chronological order.

**Aven:** [01:15:56] And make the flashbacks and stuff, right?

**Meg:** [01:15:58] Yeah, huge narrative change. So depending on who you ask, whether they've seen it in chronological order or whether they seen it through kind of flashbacks,

**Aven:** [01:16:05] Yeah, with the Ptolemy narrative.

**Meg:** [01:16:08] Yeah, the Ptolemy narrative, which I found very interesting. Actually, I quite liked the Ptolemy angle.

Like I gasped the loud at the end where Ptolemy goes 'yeah, we killed him'. I was like 'what?!'

**Aven:** [01:16:20] Oliver Stone's all about making the definitive answer to, you know, who killed?

**Meg:** [01:16:24] I've been sitting there for three hours and 20 minutes. And I think my emotions were just frayed by then, that revelation was enough to get me. But it's certainly a very interesting film. I think the history of the film and the backlash of the film, you could almost do a semester-worth course on the film of Alexander the Great, because it was so bizarre. The fact that there was a team of 40 Greek lawyers who teamed up to try and--I dunno what their aim was, whether they were trying to sue or get it to be stopped shown in theaters. They wanted to do something because they felt that they were depicting Alexander as being too homosexual.

But then in a later cut, Oliver Stone added in 40 minutes of footage, which included--half an hour of that was homosexual activity. There was a lot of things that were changed. So it's such an interesting piece of little history on when it came out and how people related that to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where it was taking place on location, which is kind of more of a coincidence than intention, I think, because it'd been in production for a long time previous, but it came at this moment where there was a lot happening in that area of the world.

And there was a lot of -- I think it had a lot of backlash as well on the depiction of the Persians, how they would just an amalgamation of anything vaguely Eastern looking, they look more like the Taliban than they look like ancient Persian--

**Aven:** [01:17:59] Iranians, yeah.

**Meg:** [01:18:00] So that was, it's difficult to say whether it's a good or a bad film.

I always think thinking of things in terms of good or bad is, is not helpful. I think it's a fatally interesting film, but perhaps for all the wrong reasons.

**Aven:** [01:18:14] Well, and that does bring up another, we don't need to get into that deep discussion of it. But one of the other important ramifications of the Alexander story is that East-West, the solidifying of those East-West divisions and--we hinted at it already, but the question of Hellenism and Hellenization, and the clash of civilizations narrative and stuff, which is one might say very different maybe in some of the source texts or than it is in its interpretation three, four hundred years later.

And then again, very different in its interpretation now, but has these really long-term ramifications and any depiction of it on screen by a Hollywood, team is going to inevitably get involved in that ongoing mythologizing of East versus West and where you draw the lines and what, who is Eastern and who is Western and what the civilizations are and come into those problems. And I think it's an interesting movie from that perspective, too. It gives you a particular snapshot of those lines and where they're being drawn and how they're being drawn and, and who sees themselves in the movie and doesn't and all of those things too.

**Meg:** [01:19:33] Hmm. It's a very, it's a very interesting film, because it kind of--it's so visually stunning. I still think you look at it and you can see where the money was spent, the scene where he enters Babylon and it's just hoards of people and the beautiful, bright blue Ishtar Gates and the rose petals. And he's basking in this moment. It does make you feel something, whether it's fury or awe, it really does inspire a deep emotion.

I think it's a bit of a confused film because I think it makes the mistake of trying to put too much in, because you're, as we've spoken about, there's so many facets to Alexander's character and so many aspects that it's so difficult to create a cohesive narrative because the narrative really, isn't kind of cohesive by nature. The sources are flawed.

If you try and put in everything you know, it's not going to make any sense. And I was speaking with-- my brother's in film studies wannabe scholar, he's just finished his master's in film studies. So he knows more about it from a technical point of view than I do, but we were talking about it.

And from his perspective, it's a very good film because he doesn't mind the fact that it's not chronological. He thinks that's interesting. It's avant-garde and cool. Whereas I think it's just got too much in it. I think what I took away from it, especially--I guess it's not really a twist, but to me it was a twist, the twist at the end, where Ptolemy's like 'yeah we killed him'.

Because he was a dreamer and he was going to get us all killed. That's what dreamers do. They just don't--they're not grounded in reality. I thought that was a very interesting angle that I wish had been more prominent throughout.

**Aven:** [01:21:07] Right.

**Meg:** [01:21:08] Because the thing that I took away from it was, I'm tired of seeing Alexander as the hero.

I know arguably that is his role, but I would love to see him as--he's the hero of his own story, but the villain of everyone else's. You see that scene where you've got the Macedonians. I don't know where they are. I don't know where they went that's cold. They must be in the mountains somewhere.

And you see all these Macedonians bundled up and it's snowing and they've got frosty eyebrows and all their men are dying and you just think 'oh my God, Alexander, you monster. Let them go home'. They amalgamate the mutiny between Opis and Hyphasis, which I'm not really angry with because I understand the constrictions of filmmaking.

You have to amalgamate a bunch of battles and a bunch of similar events, right? Because you can't depict every single one and they're arguing with him and I think the character of Craterus kind of says, 'This is enough now. We need to go, look what you've done to us. This is horrible'. There was moments like that, but those are the only two moments within a three and a half hour film plus Ptolemy's reveal at the end. I think it would have been a much more interesting film if that had been a more cohesive and coherent strand. I quite liked the frame narrative of Ptolemy narrating it. I thought, especially with the chopped-up chronology, that made sense because I think it did--I've read interviews of Oliver Stone afterwards and I've read reviews of it and what Oliver Stone says his vision for it was, was to kind of show that history is not what happened. It's how it's written about what happened and how people construct his image. And I think that is the function of Ptolemy as the narration character. And I think that's a really good point. I think that's kind of what I harp on about all the time is we don't actually know Alexander.

We just know his constructed character, but that doesn't mean it's not interesting. And in fact, it's almost more interesting because you get to see so many different perspectives through history. As soon as you let go of this idea of the real Alexander, it opens up so many more opportunities.

So I do think that at the heart of it, Oliver Stone's film has some good pieces. I would just like to remake it and make that strand more apparent because I think that would be a very interesting, perhaps new take on bringing Alexander onto the big screen, is not convincing us that he's a hero, but perhaps showing that he's a hero in his own bubble, but really that bubble didn't help anyone else. He's a villain of everyone else's story. He's a villain to his own people because he drags them around and makes them suffer for 10 years. He is an obvious villain to the Persians because he comes and burns down all of their things. And I could see a brave telling that would probably land me on a couple of hit lists, I would imagine.

**Aven:** [01:23:56] I think it might be a little bit, we would have an interesting reception. Let's say.

**Meg:** [01:24:01] I think what he is, he's the hero of his own story.

**Aven:** [01:24:07] And he gets used as a hero by other people for their own purposes in the same way. Which is not the same as being a hero. Yeah.

**Meg:** [01:24:15] Yeah, I think the film owes quite a debt to the work of Mary Renault and her fiction novels of the fifties and sixties and this kind of very, very romantic, but very brutal landscape that she paints of the ancient world.

I really like Mary Renault's books. I think they are fantastic. But her image of Alexander is definitely one of this, almost like a scholarly soul, he's quite a sensitive soul. Right. He's kind of-- he's a queer individual. He has these very intense, homoerotic relationships with his childhood best friend and this wonderfully exotic, beautiful and patient eunuch that he meets later in life.

So he's, he's almost like a--he's sensitive. But he's also kind of violent, but he's also, kind of intelligent and kind of philosophical and like that--it's a fictional portrayal, but it's definitely based in real world Alexander scholarship. It takes a lot from Tarn, Robin Lane Fox's influential biography of the seventies toed a similar line of 'oh, well, everything he does is quite brilliant'. So I think he can really trace back Oliver Stone's inspiration because the character of Bagoas, who is this Persian eunuch that Alexander had an intimate relationship with later in life, supposedly. It's there in a couple of instances in the original ancient source work, but then again, you get historians who were kind of eliding that for their own reasons. They don't want to talk about that because it's a bit iffy from their perspective. But the fact that he's a fully fleshed character, he has a speaking role. He has a whole sequence. He has a sex scene, which there are many of in the film. One of which is with Alexander's wife, the other is with this Persian eunuch. And this is in Oliver Stone's extended edition with the additional 40 minutes of footage he kind of adds in this whole character arc of this, not a new character, but this character that really rose to prominence in Mary Renault's novel. He's a, he's a protagonist character in those novels.

When outside of that, he only exists in a couple of lines from ancient history. It's kind of Oliver Stone vis-a-vis Robin Lane Fox, who was the advisor for the film, vis-a-vis Mary Renault--it's kind of shades of receptions of receptions.

**Aven:** [01:26:38] Yeah, I think Alexander much like -- even though there are many, many more Hercules movies than there are Alexander movies, you get a similar thing in the various media receptions of Alexander where you get to see visions of masculinity and visions of heroism reshaped by each period. You get a different Hercules in different movies because our ideas of masculinity and heroism change or whatever. And I think the representations of Alexander-- he's a different figure in spite of his connections to Hercules, but you see a sort of similar metamorphosis going on. Who do we think of as, as our visions of manhood?

**Meg:** [01:27:19] Yeah, he's a very, he's a complex -- something that I want to watch, which I don't know if I'll be able to--there's an Indian TV serial called Porus, which is about the Indian King Porus and his defeat of Alexander, supposedly, because there's this Battle of the Hydaspes where Alexander fought Persian King Porus.

One of my best friends whose family's from India, he's Indian, he was telling me, well 'in our folk tradition, Porus won and repelled Alexander from India'. I was like, 'oh, that's interesting'. Because in the sources that we have written down Alexander won, but he just said 'oh, you fought really well, so how about I don't go into your territory and we just call it--'

**Aven:** [01:27:59] Call it quits, yeah.

**Meg:** [01:28:01] 'Call it here. And I'm like King or whatever. You can like, keep everything. And I'll just name a couple of cities and then bounce'. Yeah, okay. It's a very odd-- even though people have spoken about this before, 'oh, did Alexander actually lose the battle'?

And there's evidence to think, well, I don't think he'd be able to get away with naming a settlement on the river Victory if he lost, I don't think you'd be able to get away with that. I know you can lie but there's a lot of evidence and things, well, I don't think he'd get away with it if he lost, but it definitely makes me think there's more to that story than we think, I think I'd say it's probably more of a draw than a victory, I would imagine, but there's---

**Aven:** [01:28:41] Or a victory that he couldn't hold onto, a victory that maybe he won on the battlefield that day, but was well aware there was no way he was going to be able to continue going. Yeah.

**Meg:** [01:28:50] Yeah, so there's this Indian TV program, which I think is there's 300 episodes because when they do programs, they do it like big, it's in detail about everything. It's about Porus, but in order to understand, Porus' victory over Alexander, you have to know about Alexander. So there's characters cast to be his mother, his father, his childhood, him growing up. And I would love to watch it because it looks absolutely spectacular just image-wise, but it's not available to watch in Europe with English subtitles, I'm afraid.

So unfortunately I can't. I'm very interested to see what that story is because that very well may be what I'm looking for, where Alexander is the hero of his own story and the villain of everyone else's.

**Aven:** [01:29:28] Right.

**Meg:** [01:29:28] It's probably going to be a very interesting thing. So I hope one day I'll be able to watch it, but I know that it's, I'm aware that it's out there and that there is kind of media from other regions in other languages that deal with Alexander, talk about Alexander. Cause of course he's not just the property of the English speaking world. There's going to be receptions of Alexander in all these different areas, which unfortunately I'm limited to access, but that's my loss really, cause I'm sure that they are just as rich and just as interesting, but it is fascinating that there is more out there and it looks--I think if you Google Porus TV, then you can just see by the images of Alexander, it's absolutely fantastic. He's wearing this bright blonde wig, these piercing eyes, the costuming is so vibrant. And even if it's not historically accurate, I can sniff the historical accuracy. I think as long as it captures, I guess the vibe is what you're looking for with these things you want to know, you want to get the sense of who he is as a character.

I think that's just as valuable. So I hope to see a lot more Alexander media in the future. I hope Oliver Stone didn't kill off any attempt of a--

**Aven:** [01:30:35] It's really surprising there isn't more. I've got to say, I find it really surprising that there haven't been more movies that there haven't been more-- I don't know what, but that you think he's such, maybe like he's too big a figure and too huge a story to, to feel tackle-able. But it is surprising to me that there's not more about him onscreen. Yeah.

**Meg:** [01:30:59] I think it's just because he's such a big figure. And again, because the 2004 film was so poorly received, I think it's got one star on Rotten Tomatoes.

**Aven:** [01:31:12] That does tend to chill these things--

**Meg:** [01:31:15] not that Rotten Tomatoes is the be-all and end-all--

**Aven:** [01:31:17] Yeah. Imagining telling that story probably does feel like a very--like who but Oliver Stone, who but an epic-- a big budget TV show, like a la Rome or a la Spartacus that dealt with the life of Alexander feels like it could go places. So if you're listening and you have the power to make such things, do do so.

And you can always talk to Meg if you want a specialist advisor--

**Meg:** [01:31:44] Please hire me as your historical advisor, because I have so many--

**Aven:** [01:31:49] --so many thoughts---

**Meg:** [01:31:51] --about how, how we should render it onscreen. And I would say, I said to my brother who's, who's a film studies person. I say if you become a director and we win the lottery not impossible , we're gonna make our own.

**Aven:** [01:32:04] You gotta have goals in life! Seems perfectly reasonable.

**Meg:** [01:32:09] Cause people say 'oh, who would you cast as Alexander?' And I don't know but I do know that I would bring back Colin Farrell to be Philip II.

**Aven:** [01:32:17] Oh, that'd be so good.

**Meg:** [01:32:20] Because now you look at Colin Farrell, he's kind of a matured actor. Now he's got the beard and I think, yeah, that could be a Philip II as a nice little callback, but from what I hear about how Colin Farrell found the filming process and the reaction, I don't think he'd be on board anytime soon. If he hears this.

**Aven:** [01:32:39] Colin, if you're listening, we have a deal!

**Meg:** [01:32:42] I've got an idea for you.

**Aven:** [01:32:47] All right. Well, I think on that note, we should probably wrap it up.

I mean, we can talk about all that, there's a million more things we could talk about, I'm sure. But I think maybe we can leave it there for now. So thank you so much. This has been a really fun conversation about a fun--well, fun slash horrible topic.

Do you want to let people know how, if they want to continue this discussion and/or tap you as historical advisor on an upcoming project, how they can reach you or find you?

**Meg:** [01:33:18] I'm mostly active on, on, on Twitter. That's kind of where I do, I post little threads of information. Just like kind of bite sized research chunks.

So you can find me on Twitter at @agameganon which is supposed to be a pun on Agamemnon and my name, but I, fudged it by one letter. But if you find that, my DMs are always open for discussions about Alexander, or if there's anything interesting that I post, I tend to round up some of my research in accessible little tweet formats.

**Aven:** [01:33:51] That's where I encountered, that's where we know you from. That's why we're having this conversation. So I'll put your Twitter handle in the show notes, for sure. Great. Is there anything else, any upcoming projects?

**Meg:** [01:34:07] Yeah, working on some things. I'm in the process of applying for PhDs at the moment.

It's very difficult time in the best of times. So I'm doing independent research while I'm just trying to survive in this pandemic. So I'm in my little bits and pieces, so nothing's coming up at the moment, but I'm hoping that on the horizon I'll be able to put some of these ideas out . I'm hoping to get some of my previous research essays, my dissertation, if it's not going to be chopped up for publication submissions, hopefully I want to try and get that online in a more long form format.

**Aven:** [01:34:44] Right, right.

**Meg:** [01:34:45] Anything about that will probably be announced on Twitter!

**Aven:** [01:34:48] Perfect! Well then everyone go follow Meg there, and then you will know any important breaking news in the Alexander world. Great. Well, thank you so much.

**Meg:** [01:35:00] Thank you so much for having me. It's been brilliant. I'm so glad to hear a bit more about the Roman side of Alexander and definitely glad to know more about the medieval.

**Aven:** [01:35:10] Yeah. Where things just go right off the rails in a lovely way. All right. Thanks.

**Mark:** [01:35:17] Thanks.

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Thanks for listening.

**Mark:** [01:36:03] Bye.