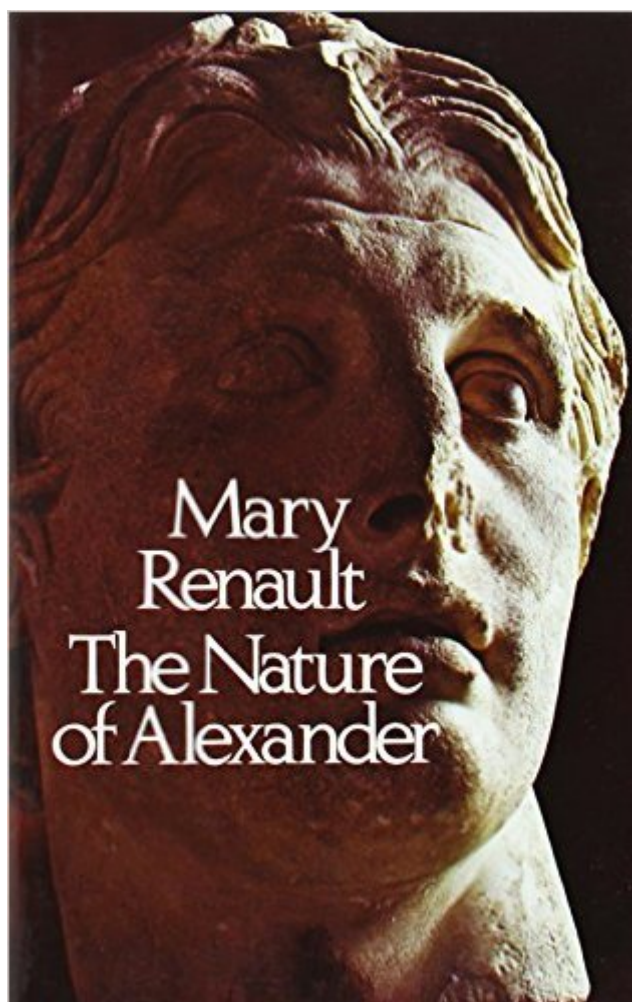


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The Nature Of Alexander



Synopsis

The acclaimed biography of Alexander the Great.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mary Renault is best known for her historical fiction, and she is clearly fascinated by Alexander, who was without a doubt the most towering figure of ancient times. Renault scrupulously researched the texts as background for her novels, and the same scholarship is evident in this excellent bio.

Starting with the legends that grew up around him in his own lifetime and continue down to this day, Renault explores Alexander not only as a king and a general, but as a man, a figure at once simple and complex, for whom the words doubt and failure simply didn't exist. She takes us through his childhood with his battling parents (what a horror his controlling mother Olympias must have been), his mother's possible role in the murder of Philip, and Alexander's subsequent accession to the throne of Macedon and his campaign to liberate the Greek city-states of Asia from Persian domination. Interestingly, as Renault shows us, Alexander didn't set out to Asia to conquer the known world; it was when he saw the quality of the opposition that he realized he could do a much better job of being Great King than the current title holder. Renault based most of her biography on Arrian, whose scrupulously level-headed account of Alexander's life and achievements was based on the writings of Ptolemy, who knew Alexander intimately as a friend, a general, and possibly as his half-brother (Philip's philanderings were notorious and Olympias' reaction can be only too easily conjectured). However, whereas Arrian's pro-western bias shows through when he repeatedly refers to the Persians as "foreigners", although it was the Macedonians and their allies who were invading

a foreign continent, Renault is free of any such insularity.

Last October, I read and reviewed Peter Green's biography of Alexander the Great, ALEXANDER OF MACEDON, 356-323 B.C., to which I gave five stars. It was subsequently suggested to me that Green's book was a "hatchet job", and that I should read Mary Renault's THE NATURE OF ALEXANDER for a more balanced view. Renault's volume is very readable. In factual substance, it seems to my unscholarly eyes to be pretty much the same as Green's. I certainly didn't learn significantly more about Alexander from the former than the latter, though that portion of Renault's narrative concerning Alexander's death was fleshed out a bit more. Renault, however, strikes me as a much more sympathetic biographer. Whether this adds more truth to her version is, and will remain, indeterminable by me. In balance, I think I would choose and recommend Green's biography for the simple reason that he includes over a dozen route maps and battle plans that help the reader put Alexander's accomplishments in better perspective. Renault provides none at all, and the absence of such is a significant omission, in my opinion. Alexander led his Macedonians from the north of Greece to the western border of the Indian subcontinent - the edge of his known world - and almost all the way back again. Twenty-five thousand miles in eleven years! It isn't until you see this plotted on a map of the region that the remarkable accomplishment can be appreciated. THE NATURE OF ALEXANDER reinforced my opinion that Alexander was the greatest military commander of all time and the most charismatic and successful leader of men who's ever lived. At one point, just prior to marching homeward from India, Alexander was gravely wounded by an arrow that penetrated his lung.

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