

IVÁN TÓTH

The Homer of Alexander the Great — Studies in Arrian of Nicomedia
(PhD Thesis)

In my PhD-thesis I dealt with Arrian of Nicomedia and his famous *Anabasis Alexandrou*, the history of Alexander the Great. In more recent decades a number of intellectual developments come together to reframe how we read the ancient historical texts. Earlier scholars approached the ancient historians most often with a view to determining how reliable they were, in terms of both factual accuracy and impartiality. However in the last thirty years the discipline of history itself has been undergoing a fairly thorough reevaluation. There is today a greater realization that no history can be complete (since selection of what the historian considers important is essential to his presentation), nor can it be free from some, often culturally predetermined, viewpoints. The more sophisticated and nuanced concepts of what history is, have allowed scholars to ask different questions and to examine aspects of the writing of history in antiquity that were previously neglected. The inquiries of the scholars of the ancient world now tend to look away from the traditional questions of reliability and sources and focus instead on the examination of ancient histories as literary artefacts. Although these new scholarly approach have led to significant effects in the research of Herodotus, Thucydides and other Greek historiographers, they have not yet stroken roots in the research of Arrian. Partly I liked to fill this gap in my PhD thesis. For this reason my own approach is decidedly literary. That is not to say of course that I have not considered issues of historical method and reliability important. On the contrary I did, and I had some consideration of these in every chapter of my PhD thesis. Examining Arrian's work my chief interest was the relation between historical text as literature and as history. In other words: I have examined how Arrian builds up his narrative, how he displays the plots and the protagonists of his historical work, and which are the historiographical traditions he follows.

1. *Anabasis* preface.

Arrian's preface to the *Anabasis* is an honourable exception' in the ancient historiography, since in the first few lines of his history of Alexander, the Nicomedian historian openly gives his sources and reveals his methods of his source-criticism for the reader. Nevertheless, the opening of the *Anabasis* is noteworthy not only because it is an honourable exception, but it

provides some important information about the nature of ancient historiography for modern readers. It points out how historiographical traditions might have influenced the historian's approach while he was selecting his sources.

2. Alternative versions in the *Anabasis*.

In general, ancient historiography consists of extended narratives in the third person, nonetheless, it also contains commentary on the narrative by the historian himself: here the narrator refers to the process of gathering information, interprets the events for the reader, and explicitly directs the reader to think in a certain manner. These narratorial interventions can be found in a quite large number in the *Anabasis*. Arrian mentions his sources and interprets the plots more often than other historiographers in antiquity. Interpreting these narratorial interventions I try to display the epistemological methods of Arrian and I also make an attempt to prove that he follows the narratorial style of Herodotus.

3. Apologia Alexandrou (*Anabasis* 1.7-9).

In 335 BC the young Alexander the Great with his Greek allies besieged Thebes and razed it to the ground. Arrian provides a detailed account on the event that shocked the Greek world, but he, unlike the other historians (Diodorus, Plutarch), tries to exonerate Alexander from the responsibility for the devastation of the city. On the one hand, I make an attempt to display the sophisticated methods of Arrian with which he manipulates his readers by stealth, on the other hand I seek the answer to the question why it may have been important to the Nicomedian historiographer to gloss over Alexander's deeds in Thebes.

4. The Homer of Alexander the Great.

In the second preface of the *Anabasis* (1. 12. 1–5) Arrian emphasizes that Alexander was the second Achilles, so the *Anabasis* has to be a second *Iliad*. I try to display how Arrian uses the formal and rhetorical elements of the epic in order to create his second *Iliad*. I also demonstrate that how this epic *mimesis* and stylistic consideration distorts the historical truth.