



CLEITARCHUS

CLEITARCHUS (Gk. Kleítarchos), Greek historian of the 4th century b.c.e., son of the historian [Dinon](#) of Colophon and author of a history of the exploits of Alexander the Great. Almost nothing is known about Cleitarchus' life, though, according to Pliny, he was a “celebrated writer” (*Natural History* 10.136); it is not even clear whether or not he accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaigns. He may have attended the lectures of the Megarian philosopher Stilpon (Diogenes Laertes 11.13; cf. Jacoby, *Fragmente* IIB/1, p. 742 no. 3) and perhaps lived in Alexandria.

His only known work is the fragmentary *History of Alexander* (Jacoby, *Fragmente* IIB/1, pp. 741-52; commentary, IID/1, pp. 484-98); the work is called *Peri Aléxandron historíai* in fragments 1, 17, and 30; *Tà peri Aléxandron* in fragment 2; and *Peri Aléxandron* in fragment 3. In this work the reign and the campaigns of Alexander the Great from his accession to his death, as well as the subsequent funeral ceremonies, were treated in at least twelve and probably fourteen or fifteen books. Only thirty-six small fragments are preserved, from which it may be concluded that the first four books dealt with events up to the battle at Issus and the fifth with the conquest of Phoenicia; fragment 6, on the Indian campaign, is said to belong to book 12 (see Jacoby, in Pauly-Wissowa, XI/I, cols. 638-40). The book is cast in a pretentious literary form; instead of a scientific approach to history, emphasis is on dramatic presentation of events, and there are passages of courtly flattery, particularly of Ptolemy I Soter (r. 323-283 in Egypt). It is generally considered important for tracing the so-called “vulgate tradition” about the life of Alexander,



represented most notably in the accounts of Diodorus Siculus (esp. book 17, which is mainly drawn from Cleitarchus' work), Curtius Rufus, and Justin, and is said to have remained the prevailing version throughout antiquity. L. I. C. Pearson has challenged this established view, however, arguing that, because only a few meager fragments of the text survive, definite statements about Cleitarchus' work and his portrayal of Alexander cannot be justified.

The terminus post quem for the composition of the *History* is the death of Alexander in 323 b.c.e., the terminus ante quem the date (not known) when Ptolemy (d. 283 b.c.e.) completed his memoirs, in which he seems to have said that Cleitarchus was wrong in calling him the savior of Alexander. According to Jacoby (Pauly-Wissowa, XI/1, cols. 625-26) and other scholars who have followed him, Cleitarchus' work was written after those of Onesicritus and Nearchus but before that of Aristobulus, thus at about the turn of the 3rd century b.c.e., perhaps closer to 310 b.c.e. But, as the chronological relation to the works of Aristobulus and Ptolemy remains in dispute, this conclusion cannot be accepted as final. A date ca. 260 b.c.e., proposed by W. W. Tarn and Pearson, or even later seems unlikely, however.

References to Persia and Persian affairs are quite rare in the surviving fragments from Cleitarchus' *History*. He had not himself visited the country and obviously obtained his knowledge of it from written sources, especially from his father's *Persiká* (see, e.g., fragment 10, with description of Babylon and Babylonia). In fragment 5 the "upright tiara" (*orthè tiára*) of the Persian kings is mentioned and in fragment 11 the burning of Persepolis. From fragment 12 it is apparent that Cleitarchus knew the Caspian Sea as an inland sea but thought it larger than the Black Sea. Fragments 15 and 16 deal with Alexander's expedition to Hyrcania (Gorgān) and his meeting with the queen of the Amazons. Because Diodorus (2.7.3) gave the circumference of the wall around Babylon as reported by Cleitarchus (fragment 10), correcting the dimensions given in his main source, Ctesias' *Assyriká*, several scholars concluded that Cleitarchus revised Ctesias' work at the end of the 4th century b.c.e. and that Diodorus drew on that revision, rather than on the original text; according to current opinion, however, it is not necessary to establish such an intermediary between Ctesias and Diodorus.



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(Rüdiger Schmitt)