

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND SCIPIO AFRICANUS

by

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ABSTRACT: This article explores some literary and historical connections between the representation of the Roman general and statesman Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus and the famous world-conqueror Alexander III of Macedon (the Great) in Polybius of Megalopolis' fragmentary Book X of the *Histories*. Recourse is made to Polybius' source material, as we understand it, as well as other borrowings that he appears to have used in his writings that deal with Alexander. The inquiry delves further into the primary source material available to Polybius and considers some epistemological issues concerning the order in which the Alexander subject-matter was produced, the agendas and circumstances of those who produced it, along with the political and other agendas influencing both its production and its later reception by the time of Polybius. It is clear that Polybius has used the Alexander material as a kind of template for eulogising his Scipio, but he has had to do so carefully, and not un-problematically, due to the sensibilities of his contemporaries and target audience in the Roman Republic.

As part of his interwoven, biographical material on the character of Publius Cornelius Scipio "Africanus" in fragmentary Book X of his *Histories*, the Greek historian, and erstwhile military leader, Polybius of Megalopolis (c. 200–c. 118 BC) offers often digressive episodes that illustrate the moral superiority of his subject. These will have doubtless been pleasing to those who had a keen interest in his legacy and memory, not the least of which being the Scipio branch of the *gens Cornelia* who were Polybius' patrons in Rome. This article examines the depiction of Scipio Africanus in Polybius' *Histories*, focusing on Book X 2–20, in which the character and behaviour of that famous Roman general are related in terms very similar to those of Alexander the Great after the battle of Issus in 333 BC. A major source of information on Alexander, and one with which Polybius may have had some familiarity, was the now lost histories of Callisthenes of Olynthus (c. 360–327 BC), Alexander's court historian and his first biographer. The work of Cleitarchus of Alexandria (mid to late 4th century BC) and of Ptolemy and Aristobulus may too have supplied Polybius with source material. Versions of this episode have survived in other, later sources, namely Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus and Quintus Curtius Rufus and it is through