
EUGENE N. BORZA (1935–2021)



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I never met Eugene Nicholas Borza. There has been at least thousands of miles of sea, land and time between (us). But when I saw the sad news of his death, last September 5th 2021, I can hardly avoid feeling as if someone very close to me, a dear fellow, passed away. Then I feared what we were missing.

If I cannot say I ever met Eugene N. Borza, when I was just an early-stage PhD Candidate at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain), in 2001, my supervisor and beloved master, Prof. Bermejo Barrera, told me that he had just obtained some (very short) funds for books for my topic, Alexander and Macedon, so we could make a list of what we should buy for the library. Just three or five titles. The first one was Carol Thomas' *Makedonika*, the collection of papers by Borza. I had never read him much before because the library then was very short on resources concerning other things than Hispania or Greek Religion, but I was sure, and I could feel it in my bones, that I needed to read that book. So, when it came, a wonderful garden of multiple, rich, and complex ideas shocked me. Now, while I try to imagine how Eugene Borza was as a person, I review my own copy of *Makedonika*, and realize how deep and wide Borza's approach to Argead Macedonia has impacted me. He drove the focus to aspects that were far from politics, and offered a kind of cultural perspective in historical terms concerning Macedonia that, while I read it, I still feel a great pleasure in, and a strong aim to keep myself guessing in my interpretation of the Greek and Macedonian past, and of course, the beautiful inspiration that masters can generate in their audience.

Until Eugene N. Borza died, I never knew he was the son of emigrants from Romania, nor a Jazz lover, nor a tireless traveler¹. Since my dear colleagues in Karanos' Staff, Antonio Ignacio Molina and Mario Agudo, decide to start this journal, we have been trying to interview E. N. Borza in order to ask him anything we are willing to know on his view of Ancient History, Historiography, Alexander and Macedonia. How much braver was Eugene Borza if he could even face governments with just the sharp

¹ As Jeanne Reames explains in her delightful obituary to Borza: <https://obits.pennlive.com/us/obituaries/pennlive/name/eugene-borza-obituary?pid=200045774> (visit date: 11/08/2021).

intelligence of a trained, hard-working Classicist's mind in knowing well the extant sources and the deep complexity of interpreting them. One of the main impacts of the Historical School (let me name it with these words) founded by Dell and Borza, under the auspicious leadership of Charles F. Edson, was to consider ancient Macedonians in their own cultural context. The invitation to think of Argead rulers, their people, and the realm as historical subjects, even beyond Alexander, is probably one of the main contributions in Classics we saw in the last half century. With his clear, easy-reading *In the Shadow of Olympus* (1990), he successfully offered a tool for everyone interested in Ancient Macedonia, collecting not only new archaeological material available since the discoveries of Andronikos and others, but also showing a nice way of writing, accessible for anyone.

In fact, although I never did meet Gene Borza, I feel he was very concerned with teaching and approaching tools for discussion as well as the spread of complex knowledge to as many in the public realm as he could. Maybe the best proof can be the introduction to Alexander's studies he wrote for the revised edition of Ulrich Wilcken's *Alexander the Great* (1967). In it, everyone can see Wilcken's wide influence on the view on Alexander among English readers, which is also a kind of contribution we may attribute to Borza. But this is not the unique case: his paper on David Hogarth is absolutely brilliant, and shows at the same time how important for our fieldwork can be the approaches on Modern Historiography. Likewise, the collection of essays titled *The impact of Alexander the Great* (concerning a thrilling question like "Civilizer or Conqueror?") so current to our own days and research projects and works) is clearly an effort to offer, again, different views and themes beyond romanticizing or simple biographical narratives on Alexander. While I read *In the Shadow of Olympus*, I can feel the same aim in the deepest tone of his brilliant masterpiece. When I read him, I feel Eugene Borza was, actually, a book devourer, a lover of literature (and he used to quote *Hamlet* in approaching Alexander!) and a devote admirer of Words. I can see he was one of my kind, as far as I am also just another of his distant pupils.

Borza's mastery lives in every one of us who dedicates with determination to study Argead Macedonia, yet is a silent one. As one of my favorite quotes by Plutarch says, to evaluate the impact and strong heritage of a person, we must not just take into account his deeds, successes, and works, but also the deeds and works of those he had in front of him. I have studied a lot of scholars concerning Alexander from Droysen down to our own days, and the era Borza offered his ideas are, indeed, the hardest about which to say original things. Names such as Hammond, Badian, Green, Bosworth and many more were at the other side of the room at any meeting where Borza explained his thoughts. What a great company, but also a clue of Borza's abilities and impressive new views, able to support these masters's criticism and to offer new readings, new topics, and different approaches to the usual ones. These ideas are nowadays still inspiring us and many other students and scholars around the world. However, if we follow Solon's advice to Croesus, the happiness of a life can only be evaluated at the end, and for what he left behind, Eugene N. Borza is maybe one of the richest scholars in Classics I have ever known. The excellent clue of his legacy is the quality, both human and academic, of his disciples, who I just mention here, T. Howe and J. Reames, editors of an excellent collection of papers in honor of Borza². The contrast between the topics and themes included by C. Thomas in Borza's *Makedonika* and those collected by Howe and

² They were the editors of the book *Macedonian Legacies. Studies in Ancient Macedonian History and Culture in Honor of Eugene N. Borza*, Claremont (2008). This book also includes a full list of Borza's works: v-x.

Reames show the great fertility of the studies on Ancient Macedonia and how Eugene N. Borza helped to open this field to this variety of approaches.

I never met Eugene Nicholas Borza. But even in the distance, he was a main influence and a kind of master for me (as for many others who also never met him), and I still approach Alexander and Macedonia hand with hand with him, hoping his words would help me to a better understanding of my Macedonian Studies.