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Interviewed by

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Luisa Prandi (born in 1952) has showed a great interest in Classics and the Ancient World even from her earliest age. Her love for the Ancient Greek world arose during her studies at the University of Milan. As a student of distinguished scholars such as Marta Sordi (1925-2009), Luigi F. Pizzolato (1939-), Giuseppe Billanovich (1913-2000) and Orsolina Montevicchi (1911-2009), she learned from each of them a devotion for the study of the ancient sources that have made, with a great merit, that she becomes one of the best and most recognized scholars on the ancient world. She is, also, a main name in the research of the topic of the Historians of Alexander or *Alexandrographers*. These authors are fundamental for the knowledge of the Macedonian king: as she uses to argue, we cannot write “a single word about Alexander overlooking them”. Writing about Alexander is a such a Herculean task, since there is no other figure of whom there are more historians with extreme contradictions among their accounts. It is almost impossible to say something new about Alexander, but to say about his historians, about whom so few fragments are available, is even more difficult.

Prof. Luisa Prandi’s brilliant versatility is quite a strange attribute among academics: she has showed many times her abilities to work directly with all kinds of sources (especially papyri), but always with a sober, serious, and noncontroversial approach. Readers will find in her a person of carefully taste concerning what to say and how to stress her opinions and views. That seriousness is reflected and witnessed when she writes, since she belongs to that wonderful school of researchers who are aware that theories will pass but the facts (sources) are the ones that remain. From that humility and that certainty, Luisa Prandi presents herself to our readers of *Karanos*.

[Interviewer]: **Let us start this interview saying that we really thank you so much for accepting our proposal for this interview. It is a great pleasure, and an honor, to have the chance to know your opinion of some of the questions of this interview.**

Professor Prandi, can you start by telling us some biographical details about you? How your interest in Antiquity came from? Do you feel a member of any kind of historiographical school or so? Who were your mentors and your main influences during the first years of your career as scholar?

[Prandi]: My passion for classical antiquity was born spontaneously during the years of the high school in my hometown, learning Greek and Latin languages and literatures. Then I studied classics at the Catholic University in Milan. I belong to the “school” of Marta Sordi (like F. Landucci and C. Bearzot). I am grateful to her because she displayed a great sensibility towards the sources and a strong methodology and was a generous teacher. I profited very much from her supervisions. In the 70th she was deeply interested in propaganda topics, so I learned that the first thing to do when researching is always an effort of contextualizing the sources and of understanding their bias, if any. However, I would mention two other scholars in my university: Luigi Franco Pizzolato (Ancient Christian Literature), because he used emphasize, for the benefit of his students, the steps of a sound research, that is examining ancient sources twice, before and after modern bibliography; Giuseppe Billanovich (Medieval and Humanistic Philology), because he was able in such a creative and fascinating manner to show us, fresh-students, the great difference between a high school and a university.

How did you arrive to the Ancient Macedonian and Alexander the Great Studies?

After a period especially devoted to Athenian and Boeotian topics, I wanted to test myself also in some research concerning fragmentary historians. The Alexandrographers appeared (in a pre-*BNJ*¹ time) more suitable and promising than other writers.

How did you first become interested in papyrological studies? I have in mind several works. For example, the paper “POxy LXXI 4808: Contenuti e problemi”², and the book *I papiri e le storie di Alessandro Magno*³.

My feeling with the papyri traces back to the University times when I followed the courses of Orsolina Montevocchi. Sometimes I was in doubt between Papyrology and Greek History. My mother (not a specialist, indeed) told me that Papyrology was a too strange discipline. So, I chose Greek History, without forgetting the papyri. At the beginning of my career, I attended to three International Congresses of Papyrology with great pleasure, and I also wrote about the so-called Papyrus of Alcibiades, which is actually a fragment of parchment! Then I must be grateful to Mario Capasso who gave me the occasion to study the papyri regarding Alexander and to link together these passions. Besides, many fragments of the Alexandrographers I prepared for the *BNJ* come from papyri.

¹ I. WORTHINGTON (ed.) (2012-): *Brill's New Jacoby*, [Online resource], Leiden.

² F. LANDUCCI, L. PRANDI (2013): “POxy LXXI 4808: Contenuti e problemi”, *RFIC* 141: 79-97.

³ L. PRANDI (2010): *I papiri e le storie di Alessandro Magno*, Roma.

Your first publications were focused on the historians of Alexander the Great. Could you tell us why you find so interesting historians such as Callisthenes and Clitarchus? Which of the two was more significant in your opinion? Can you tell us your opinion about the role and importance of a deep knowledge of the problematics and origins of the ancient sources for Alexander?

I think that the choice fell on Callisthenes because he is the very first Alexandrographer. Then I became very interested in him for more solid reasons: he had close relationship with both Philip and Alexander, so we can follow his career as a writer; we also have some pieces of information about him as an individual, so we can follow his reception through the centuries. No other fragmentary Alexandrographer lies in this peculiar situation. Moreover, if ancient historians, writers, or intellectuals copied and read his *Alexandrou praxeis*, albeit unfinished, until the first/second centuries AD at least, they did decide that Callisthenes was fundamental, and we can only follow them.

Instead, regarding Clitarchus, K. Meister suggested once to me, already experienced after the book on Callisthenes, to face this scarlet pimpernel. I accepted the challenge and so I was condemned to write on Clitarchus during my whole life. This writer is a phantom, actually: nothing about his life, some dissimilar judgements about his work and writing, a medium number of not so meaningful quotations. In front of this outcome, we have some unambiguous clues of a great circulation of his work during Hellenistic and Roman ages.

We cannot but regret the pitiful condition of the Alexandrographers who wrote between fourth and third Century BC. Nevertheless, their works stay as the ground of the entire tradition about him. I do not plead in favor of an always increasing study/knowledge of them and their readers lived in later ages. I rather wonder if we can write a single word about Alexander overlooking them.

Let me ask you, for one of these exceptional historians, Callisthenes of Olynthus. Your book on him is still a masterpiece and a main work for everyone who approaches to Alexander. Was he actually a flatter of Alexander or a true philosopher who defied power?

I cannot deny that I have a penchant for Callisthenes. Therefore, I will answer trying to be as cool as possible. The fragments of his *Alexandrou praxeis* look like the *disiecta membra* of a story written by a witness bearing Greek lenses. Callisthenes went so far as to report a divine sonship of Alexander (a different matter from the deification). The gap between his reading key and the Alexander's aims (very difficult to know, of course, but cultivated without neither Greek nor Macedonian lenses) could not but become more and more large. Staying alive, and not in disgrace, was not simple at the itinerant court of the king Alexander. Moreover, we must take into account that topics like friendship or flattery, philosophy or sophistic, receive a treatment by our sources which depends on the bias of the ancient writers towards Callisthenes (or Aristotle, or Alexander). Perhaps the historian was neither a diplomatic nor a hero, he surely faced an unprecedented situation; maybe he was over-exposed and not so skilled to find an escape.

Another historian very well-known to you is Duris of Samos. Do you think of him as the main source of Diodorus or, on the contrary, was in your opinion Clitarchus?

We cannot doubt that Diodorus depended on Clitarchus in Book 17. However, many detailed pieces of information he reported, related to the behavior of the Greeks in the years of the Asian expedition, would be out of place in a work written by an Alexandrographer. I agree with F. Landucci that this kind of information (already traced back to a hypothetical Greek “mercenary source”) is suitable to a Greek/Macedonian history, like the *Makedonika* of Duris. I tried to demonstrate it in my *Commentary to Diodorus 17*⁴. I am still waiting for an in-depth commentary of Diodorus 16, preferably provided by a scholar who never was engaged with Duris or Clitarchus, because I think that Diodorus, without the possibility to still depend on Ephorus, could have rely on Duris already in this book.

Where the hostility of some sources concerning Alexander could come from?

Alexander the Great, like many other prominent figures, was very controversial during his life, if we refer to his increasing bad relationship with some *philoï* or with his soldiers; or right after his death, if we think to the Successors also fighting to safeguard what each of them deemed to be the true memory of the king; or even through the following centuries, if we consider that from time to time Alexander become modern/relevant like a flag for Greeks enemies of Rome or like a negative/positive model compared to Roman emperors. So, the reasons to appreciate him as well as the ones to blame him were countless. Arrian notably testifies that “is there any other figure of whom there are more historians who are more contradictory of each other” (*Arr. An.* 1.1.2). Every writer, from the fourth Century BC onward, could find personal, historical, ideological motives to present Alexander in a bad light.

Which was the most probable period in which Clitarchus could have written his book? Fourth or third century?

In my opinion, who defends the lowest date (mainly based on *POxy* 4808) fails to discuss all the evidence in favor of the highest one (albeit published in English since 2012, on *Histos*!⁵). I am always waiting for a complete refutation of it, before to change my mind.

I can invite now to read what I write in the Chapter Clitarchus of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Alexander the Great*, edited by D. Ogden⁶. My duty was to present all our evidence in a balanced manner, and I hope to have done it. However, my own opinion is that a high date is compatible with, and helps to explain, a greater number of independent data than a lower or a lowest one.

⁴ L. PRANDI (2013): *Diodoro Siculo. Biblioteca storica. Libro XVII. Commento storico*, Milano.

⁵ L. PRANDI, “New Evidence for the Dating of Cleitarchus (*POxy* LXXI.4808)?”, *Histos* 6: 15-26.

⁶ D. OGDEN (ed.) (2023): *Cambridge Companion to Alexander the Great*, Cambridge [forthcoming].

In your paper “Gli oracoli sulla spedizione asiatica di Alessandro”⁷, you called our attention about several aspects of the visit of Alexander to Delphi and another oracles. Was Alexander's visit to Delphi inspired by his ancestor Heracles? Why are there so many similarities between the consults of Alexander (Plu. *Alex.*14.6-7) and Philomelus (D.S. 16.25.3)?

The counts of the sanctuary record a donation of 150 golden philippeioi between 336 and 335, and we can suppose that a visit to Delphi occurred purely by way, I mean almost by chance, during Alexander's return from Corinth to Macedonia and in a closure period for oracular responses. However, I thank you very much for the question about Heracles because, when I wrote my paper, I did not play close attention to this topic. Our sources say that the hero consulted Delphi at least twice: first time to know if the gods really order him to perform the twelve labors at the command of Eurystheus (D.S. 4 10. 7); a second time to ask for a purification after the murder of Iphitus (Apollod. 2 6. 2). According to Apollodorus, as the Pythia refused to answer him, Heracles began to plunder the temple and to carry off the tripod, planning to institute an oracle of his own. From this episode the well-known struggle for the tripod arose between him and Apollo. Philip also consulted Delphi, about the war against the Persians and in a respectful way, but he received a very dark and funerary answer (D.S. 16.91.2). If Alexander had been eager to establish some good relationship with Delphi, he had to deal with a double negative heritage, mythic and historic, remote, and recent. However, neither Heracles nor Philip is the model of the account of Alexander's visit to Delphi. On the contrary, the story concerning Philomelus, as we know it from Diodorus, is a suitable model (although Philomelus plundered the sanctuary like Heracles, actually, and Alexander did not) because of both his behavior towards the Pythia and her reacting. Plutarch puts Alexander in a not negative light, focusing on the byname *aniketos*, but the consultation appears as a failure barely disguised as a success. The episode is anyway not flattering to the young king, who wants to force the Pythia to prophesy and appears arrogant and abusive. This unfavorable character leads us to hypothesize an anti-Macedonian bias at the root, not any official version.

How can you describe the importance of oracles and divine signals in the history of Alexander?

From the very beginning of his expedition Alexander acts in Asian countries like a worshipper, even in the accounts by the less favorable sources. Always he pays sacrifices and reverence to the gods and heroes, long the way and before and after the battles. The quest for oracles and divine signals belongs to this attitude. What I wanted to emphasize in my paper is that the origin of these signs is geographically external to the Macedonia and the Greek peninsula and related to the Asian territory (in a broader sense). As the case of Delphi shows, or the non-existent consultation of Dodona does, Alexander did not search or did not trust on traditional divine encouragements before leaving. However, he was confident in every portent or sign he met afterwards: among others, the Trojan panoplia loaned by Athena at Ilium, the cutting of the Gordian knot and the paternal salute from Ammon at Siwah, both related to Zeus, as well the steps of his *imitatio* of Heracles (from the sacrifice at Tyrus to the assault to the Aornus rock).

⁷ L. PRANDI (1990): “Gli oracoli sulla spedizione asiatica di Alessandro”, *Chiron* 20: 345-369.

Could be considered the visit of Alexander to Siwah as a turning point in his life? Why?

I come back often to this episode because the pilgrimage to Siwah is very suitable, in terms of methodology, for courses and lectures. Paradoxically, our bipolar tradition suggests in any case its subtle importance. Early sources or witnesses (Callisthenes, Ptolemy and Aristobulus) had very little to say about the oracular consultation, as if Alexander wanted to treasure what he received from the priest. A later account (from Clitarchus, maybe) brings together Egyptian ritual and Greek way of consultation to make a story very rich in choreography, sensational questions and answers concerning power and empire, and depicts a public scene where all the people present can see or hear the consultation. The small fil rouge between them is the topic of an enquiry by Alexander about his own birth, that is his divine filiation. Alexander conquered Egypt also to gain the control of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea before to move towards the hearth of the Persian empire. Instead, the pilgrimage to Siwah, as well as the foundation of the first city named Alexandria, appear as initiatives matching Alexander's longing. I think that the older account is more reliable. However, we have to admit that if the visit to Siwah elicited or enhanced in Alexander a need of some supernatural sanction, he did not stress the response(s). I do not find sure evidence that Alexander requested to the Greeks a divine cult, while he expressly ordered them to provide to the return of their political exiles. Otherwise, we should suppose that many of his authoritative behaviors displayed more and more in the following years stemmed from the consultation at Siwah. What is true is that Alexander never refused or contrasted forms of worship decided by Greek cities.

A large number of Italian researchers have distinguished themselves in recent decades in our field. I am thinking of authors like A. Momigliano, M. Sordi, Bruno Tripodi, Landucci Gattinoni, Giuseppe Nenci, Lorenzo Braccisi, Cinzia Bearzot, G. Squillace or you. How have so many Italian researchers managed to shine in a research field dominated by English speakers? What do you think concerning the increasingly dependence on English papers and books in the study of the Ancient World? Do you guess the English writers and readers concerning Antiquity shall read also Italian studies concerning the Ancient History?

I would put the question, and my answer, in slightly different terms. Classical studies are valuable and cultivated in Italy, now as well as in the past. The difference between old and new generations is that younger Italian scholars frequently chose to publish in English. The negative outcome of the English language "monopoly" is that sometimes, or better many times, the research becomes lame, so to speak. Although many scholars intensively study and write about the ancient world, in Italy as well as in other countries, English writers do not take into consideration the hypotheses, or the proposed solutions published in different languages. We all belong to a common cultural milieu and the knowledge of other languages is a mark of culture. If French, German, Italian, Spanish (alphabetical order) scholars feel the duty of reading English papers and books, also the contrary would be right. Moreover, the monolingualism, especially if the language is not so able to express all the shadows of an argument and all the degrees of a hypothesis, may be a risk or a danger, rather than a facility. A nuanced situation, where more languages can regain the same dignity and the effort of reading an apparently difficult text returns to be a common praxis would be a good goal, I think.

Who are your favorite authors, past and present, in the studies on Alexander and Ancient Macedonia?

The bibliography regarding Alexander is notoriously immense and I found a lot of interesting contributes in the little part I was able to consult. Hence, I would like to mention only three scholars I had the luck to meet in person: Brian Bosworth, Pierre Briant and Gerhard Wirth (alphabetical order).

What advice would you give to the young researchers just starting?

Not to be discouraged, if the academic career appears full of difficulties. It has always been so. Hard study and work to deeply know and master a good methodology, then make statements only if some clue emerges from our sources of information. Be able to value in a critical way the trends of current research: some of them requires creating statistics but, in many cases, we have not enough dates from ancient sources to do that; some other deal with topics relevant today but not enough attested in antiquity. I think that we are authorized, so to speak, to inquire whether the ancient world related himself to such topics, searching for similarities between the ages. What is very important is, again, the methodology. Modern scholars must avoid the risk to overlap our sensibility to the mentality of the past. Last but not least, and not easy, care the personal interests in order to build a distinctive profile, in spite of the need of following applications about disparate topics, showing a good knowledge of the trends of our studies, being interdisciplinary, not neglecting technical skills in digital humanities, etc.