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The Contemporary Alexander Romance in Multi-Media: How We Regard and Utilize the Image of Alexander the Great

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Oral Presentation O1.1

THE CONTEMPORARY ALEXANDER ROMANCE IN MULTI-MEDIA: HOW WE REGARD AND UTILIZE THE IMAGE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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The historical figure of Alexander the Great has been shrouded since antiquity by the mythical Alexander. The so-called Alexander Romance is a blend of truth and fiction that has become so intertwined that every element of Alexander's life is touched by the seemingly fantastical. Indeed, Alexander seems a character entirely of legend more on par with tales of King Arthur and the round table than a real historical individual grounded in factual certainty. Because of this mythic quality, the Alexander Romance has continued to survive and inspire the perception of Alexander's character in many cultural traditions by easily adapting to the mores of the times. In the Western culture heavily influenced by the global turn of events in the twentieth century, the Alexander Romance has prevailed in film, historical fiction, the internet, and in academic writings. In the last few years it has become popular for historians to either vilify Alexander as one of the first in a long line of Western military oppressors or to hail him as an early example of multiculturalism. Yet in popular media, the perception of a heroic and romanticized Alexander prevails.

I argue that the Alexander Romance is alive and flourishing today in how we portray and perpetuate the image of the man Alexander. I will detail the progress and evolution of this new Alexander Romance by providing overviews of how Alexander is portrayed by scholars vs. popular culture and how this reflects contemporary Anglo-American notions of what makes a hero. I will approach this chronologically. First I will attack the problem that the Alexander Romance has always provided for scholars and what has gradually evolved into their consensus as to his either heroic or villainous character. Then I will contrast this academic view of Alexander with the popular view of Alexander's heroism by studying his image in the following mediums: fiction, film, and the internet. Each sub-category will be an overview of how that genre contributes to the Alexander Romance and how this reflects contemporary notions of heroism. Historical background information will precede each category. I will focus most of this exploration on the last twenty years.