

Newton ideas about gravity and optics. Meanwhile, he seems to take literally, and to reject, the view of John Maynard Keynes that Newton was “the last of the magicians” (3–4). Keynes had bought a portion of the Sotheby’s sale containing, as he soon found, many of the alchemical manuscripts. He considered them totally unscientific. Nevertheless, readers of this journal may think of ways that the term *magician* is appropriate to Newton—for example, Pico della Mirandola’s thesis “magic is the practical part of natural science,” by which the Renaissance philosopher may have meant the element that makes ideas about nature practicable. In the radio talk prepared five years before his essay was posthumously published, Keynes asked, “Why do I call him a magician? Because he looked on the whole universe and all that is in it as a riddle, as a secret which could be read by applying pure thought to certain evidence, certain mystic clues which God had laid about the world to allow a sort of philosopher’s treasure hunt to the esoteric brotherhood” (“Newton the Man,” in John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography* [2010], 366).

A chief difference between the alchemists of Newton’s time and the scientists in the Royal Society of London, to which he belonged, concerned the knowledge that they had acquired. To alchemists, it was known as “natural secrets,” but to scientists it was only valuable when shared openly and made subject to testing by others. The difference was brought home in *The Skeptical Chemist*, by the great Robert Boyle (1661). It may seem strange to learn, in the last chapter, that Newton and John Locke, though members of the Royal Society, swore each other to secrecy when they shared Boyle’s alchemical manuscripts after his death. Perhaps each of them felt, as even the modest Boyle may have done, that if anyone ever discovered the Philosophers’ Stone it should be a man of reason and, preferably, an Englishman.

*Newton the Alchemist* includes ten color plates showing, among other things, material produced by Newman and his associates in the laboratory.

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*Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance.* Su Fang Ng.

Classical Presences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. xiv + 404 pp. \$125.

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As indicated by its title, this book retraces the cultural presence of the mythic Alexander the Great in Britain and Southeast Asia during the early modern period. Situated in the larger enterprise of a global history, it is an important contribution to the unfinished program of writing a world literature, and a shared global intellectual history. The analyses in this book rest on the main argument that early modern imperial rivalries between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, which claimed the same classical heritage, helped

define a vast Eurasian space of circulation and exchange of cultural and political symbols. In this frame, the book focuses on Alexander, and the comparative—or, rather, connected—study of its transformations in two peripheral sites: Britain and Aceh, in Indonesia, which are mapped out as belonging to the same global cultural networks. Of course, today Britain is firmly at the center of early modern scholarship, while Aceh is ignored by most. One of the great achievements of this study is to introduce readers to a lesser-known literary tradition, while making the important case that it shares a genealogy and many features with its more prestigious and more thoroughly studied counterpart in the West.

The first part of the book, after considering the adoption of the shared heritage of Rome in the early modern empires that helped create a Eurasian transcultural sphere, alternates chapters on the English and Malay uses of the Alexander romance. It thus demonstrates the malleability and translatability of the image of Alexander the conqueror, which becomes an ideal trope by which to analyze cross-cultural encounters and grapple with contemporary politics. Looking at the fifteenth-century Malay *Hikayat Iskander Zulkarnain*, chapter 2 examines how the Arabic and Persian versions of the romance reached Southeast Asia through merchant networks, and how the story transformed into a conversion narrative, part of a larger process of Islamization. Alexander was also claimed as an ancestor by Malay dynasties, and historical annals used him to negotiate the encounters with the Portuguese.

Chapter 3 moves to the Christian counterpart—Gilbert Hay's *Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror*—which presents Alexander as a crusader against Muslims, then to later readings of this text, in correlation with British political thinking on empire and in connection with the seventeenth-century expansion of international trade. Chapter 4 turns to Greco-Arab mirrors of princes, which circulated between East and West, where Alexander appears as a philosopher, rather than a conqueror. Parallel genealogies resulted in connected themes in English and Malay literatures, especially when the mirror genre was reactivated to negotiate early modern conflicts and encounters. Chapter 5 prolongs this reflection by reading *Hamlet*, provocatively, as part of a global Arabic literature network, insisting on the intercultural resonances of the play, especially the graveyard scene, which echoes scenes found in the mirrors.

The shorter, second part focuses on less literal connections. It looks for references to Alexander in the construction of monarchical image in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and in an early seventeenth-century panegyric biography of sultan Iskandar Muda. Such allusions are then examined in relation to long-distance trade and voyages in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and in a late seventeenth-century Malay prose romance about the legendary hero Hang Tuah. It is not clear why these analyses of "Alexandrian subtexts" had to be made into a separate part of the book, rather than added to chapters of the first part that expounded similar themes. This choice helps make this book overlong, as do other aspects of the writing: repetition of the same points inside and between chapters, historical information given in specifics that may

seem unneeded for understanding the central issues, and a tendency to summarize other scholars' views beyond what is necessary. This abundance of detail, which showcases the vast research undertaken by Ng, sometimes risks diluting the main arguments in contextual minutiae.

This reservation should not detract from recognizing this book as an often-fascinating contribution to the unfinished task of writing a truly global cultural, literary, and intellectual history of the early modern period, and of mapping out the networks that made possible this Eurasian transcultural sphere, from Britain to Southeast Asia.

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*The Routledge History of the Renaissance*. William Caferro, ed.  
The Routledge Histories. London: Routledge, 2017. xvi + 414 pp. \$285.

The twenty-four essays in William Caferro's collection the *Routledge History of the Renaissance* are a sprawling and fascinating survey of the variety of questions and priorities in Renaissance studies today. The volume stands out for Caferro's relatively laissez-faire conception of the field itself. Most volumes assessing a major field are assembled with an implicit editorial agenda privileging particular arguments, agendas, and topics, such that, in spite of the plurality of authors, the collection displays a particular interpretive point of view or advances a particular claim to significance. Caferro takes a different approach by not seeking to impose thematic unity on the field's plurality.

As a result, the "Renaissance" on offer here—the early modern world, broadly construed—includes essays on some familiar and venerable topics, such as individualism, the cultural consequences of the Black Death, the classical and vernacular linguistic traditions, but also includes new methodologies, like the spatial turn, and a more expansive geographic perspective, with contributions on the long fifteenth century in India, the humanist construction of Ethiopia, Ottoman governance, and Byzantine science, among others. As Caferro explains in the introduction, the volume "does not offer a single new thesis . . . it presents scholarship with all its jagged edges" (4). As a result, the collection will likely be less useful to undergraduates and generalists than to graduate students and specialists, but for the laudable reason that it faithfully reflects the field's complexity and diversity.

Caferro divides the book into four parts. The first, "Disciplines and Boundaries," contains essays by Germano Maifreda, Samira Sheikh, Eugenio Refini, Caferro, and Timothy Kircher on, respectively, economic thought, fifteenth-century India, the Latin and vernacular language question, individualism, and philosophy. The second, "Encounters and Transformations," contains essays by Timothy McCall and Sean Roberts, William Stenhouse, Katherine Crawford, Carina L. Johnson, Samantha