

STUDENT HANDOUT

Background about Book of the Deeds of Alexander the Great*for The Many Different Sides of War*

Book of the Deeds of Alexander the Great is a French translation of fragments surviving from a manuscript by the first-century Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus. The text, which was translated by the Portuguese and Burgundian humanist Vasco da Lucena in 1468, is one of the main literary sources of our knowledge about the exploits of the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great. In the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the clergy used fabulous tales of Alexander—including his ascent into heaven on the wings of griffins—for purposes of Christian moralizing and preaching. Italian scholars of the fifteenth century, wanting more sound accounts of the deeds of Alexander, turned to Curtius Rufus's text, and his manuscripts were copied for both scholarly and nonscholarly readers. When Vasco da Lucena translated Curtius Rufus's text into French, the prologues and epilogues to his translations revealed his distaste for fantastic tales about Alexander, which he stated "were made up by men ignorant of the nature of things and unaware that all this is false and impossible." In other words, Vasco believed that his historical accounts of Alexander's deeds more precisely represented the truth than prior texts.