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## Quintus Curtius

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# Quintus Curtius

## **Abstract**

This book would have been created and read during the 1600's, and throughout the European Enlightenment period. Written in Latin, it was made to be consumed by a wealthy and educated gentleman. This example was donated to the exhibit by Charles Emmons. It is covered in not-so-well-tooled vellum and gold leaf. All in all, it is in good condition with no marginalia, so while the vellum cover in the Renaissance is sometimes used on textbooks or other travel-appropriate tomes, this was probably only in a stationary location for a long period of time. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Quintus Curtius Rufus, Historia Alexandri Magni, Alexander the Great, Charles Emmons, Leiden, Holland

## **Disciplines**

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | Fine Arts | History of Science, Technology, and Medicine | Industrial and Product Design | Intellectual History

## **Comments**

Produced as part of a collaboration between Kay Etheridge's course FYS-188: Exploration of the Marvelous: Art and Science in the Renaissance, and Felicia Else's course ARTH 284: Wonders of Nature and Artifice: The Renaissance Quest for Knowledge.

Original version online at <http://wonder-cabinet.sites.gettysburg.edu/2017/cabinet/quintus-curtius/>

# Quintus Curtius

By Francesca Marie Costa



Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni* (*History of Alexander the Great*), 1658. On loan from the Collection of Professor Charles F. Emmons. The book as it is on display within our exhibition. The special case was created just for this book to ensure that it could be opened without harming the spine.

## Quintus Curtius Rufus' *Historia Alexandri Magni* (1658)

This book would have been created and read during the 1600's, and throughout the European Enlightenment period. Written in Latin, it was made to be consumed by a wealthy and educated gentleman. This example was donated to the exhibit by Charles Emmons. It is covered in not-so-well-tooled vellum and gold leaf. All in all, it is in good condition with no marginalia, so while the vellum cover in the Renaissance is sometimes used on textbooks or other travel-appropriate tomes, this was probably only in a stationary location for a long period of time.

## Who is Alexander the Great?



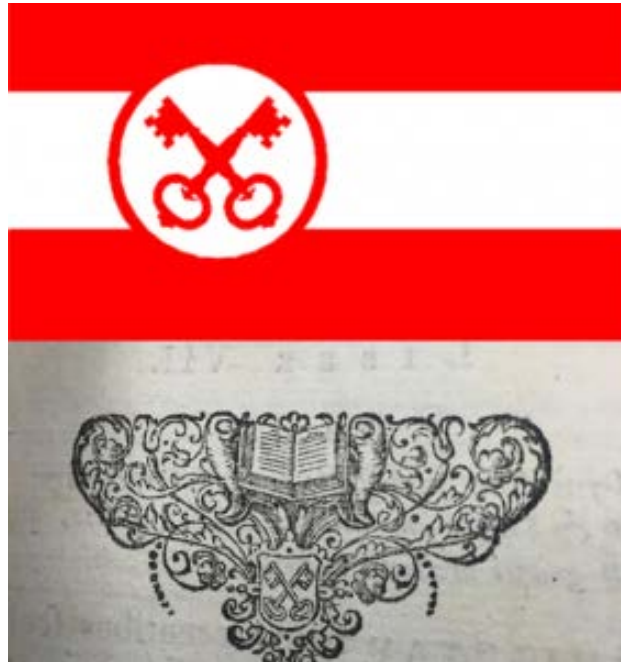
Alexander the Great riding his horse Bucephalus as they both race into the annals of history.

Alexander the Great was a Macedonian conqueror from around 300 BCE. He is famous for being one of the greatest commanders in the ancient world, and served as an example for the Europeans who were smack-dab in the middle of an imperialist spree. Everyone from Augustus, to Kublai Khan, to Queen Victoria knew of his power, and the great armies he was able to control. His touch spanned from the powerful kingdom of Egypt and even was felt as far away as India. He is portrayed as youthful, and on his horse Bucephalus, who was untamed for anyone but him. This horse was like his master in many respects and remains a very famous real animal from antiquity. Alexander is shown with disheveled hair hanging in locks like a lion, almost radiating his ferocity on the battlefield and predatory cunning when ruling his peers.

## Who is Quintus Curtius Rufus?

That is the fun part! We just don't know for sure! There was a Roman noble with that name during the 1st Century AD, but the book itself might have been released under the reign of Marcus Aurelius, over a hundred years later. One theory is that the copy was written under one of the early Emperors, but kept close to ensure the Greeks were not getting any nationalistic ideas from glorifying Alexander the Great. Later on, Greece had long been a part of the empire, so there was no such risk. This was not the only copy of a history of Alexander the Great, and would have been composed three centuries after the conqueror died, so the information within would be inaccurate in different places depending on the sources relied upon. Curtius was more popular during the Medieval period, but still retained some fans during the Renaissance and after.

## History of this Book



Modern flag of Leiden next to 1658 woodcarving equivalent

This book was printed in 1658 in Leiden, Holland. This can be seen by the *Lugduni Batavorum* professed on the cover, which is the Latin name of the city. It was a powerful place during the Renaissance, and today boasts a population of about 120,000 people <sup>1</sup>. The borough's coat of arms also appears on the chapter-end engravings, which are very small and intricately carved woodblocks.



The gold leaf cover of the book compared to an old sign from the same area of the Netherlands, both showing the same heraldry.

These not only show the keys of Leiden, but also an open book (perhaps a representation of this book currently being read) and beautiful flora. On the cover of the book, there is another image pressed into the vellum. This is a woman with chest exposed, holding a fine fabric that is connected to a coat of arms with three fish and two stars. Although some variations of this theme exist, this is the coat of arms of another Borough of the Netherlands called Enkhuizen. This was one of the wealthiest towns in Renaissance Holland, and still has preserved 16th Century walls to prevent against invasion<sup>2</sup>. The population of the city now about 18,500<sup>3</sup>

### Front Cover Page Analysis



The front cover page. Try to find all three hidden faces, the sea monster, and dolphin. Other interesting objects are the trophies in the back, anachronistic mace, ram, fasces, and contemporary flag.

On the front page cover, there is a beautiful engraving that not only gives a plethora of information about the following text, but even can illuminate the reader with an image of what Alexander the Great was remembered as, and how Europeans of the 17th Century thought of themes such as conquest and victory. The seraph on top is heralding the approach of Alexander while crowning the king with a laurel wreath of victory. The curtains on either side of the top corners display this event as if it is a dramatic piece of myth, as it would have been remembered in the same terms as the legendary deeds of King Arthur, or the wise words of King Solomon. He is rearing upon his battle-horse, ready for battle. Below the hooves of mighty Bucephalus is the image of a dethroned king, possibly representing Darius or another monarch deposed by Alexander, and a more Renaissance image of a globe. The message of domination would make itself clear through the work. Small details such as hidden faces would have been a common site in this period, and were a common source of entertainment for all ages.



Naval detail further illustrating the connection between imperialist power over the seas and the conquerors of old.

## Translation of the Text

### English:

Quintus Curtius Rufus' History of Alexander the Great  
 With selected writings of others of Raderus, Frenshemus, Loccenus, Blancardus, and others.  
 The most accurate edition.  
 Given attention CSMD

From Leiden, Holland  
 by Johannes Elsevirius, Academy of Typo[graphy]:  
 CID IDCLVIII

### Latin:

*Q[uintii] Curtii Rufi,  
 Historia  
 Alexandri Magni.  
 Cum notis selectiss. variorum,  
 RADERI, FRENSHEMII*

*LOCENII, BLANCARDI, &c.*  
*Editio accuratissima.*  
*Accurante C.S.M.D.*

*Lugduni Batavorum*  
*apud Iohannem Elsevirium, Acad. Typog:*  
*CID IDCLVIII*

1. <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/netherlands-admin.php?adm2id=0546>
2. <https://www.holland.com/global/tourism/destinations/provinces/north-holland/enkhuizen.htm>
3. <http://population.city/netherlands/enkhuizen/>