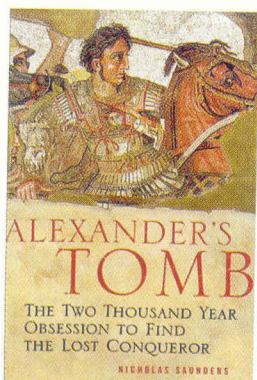


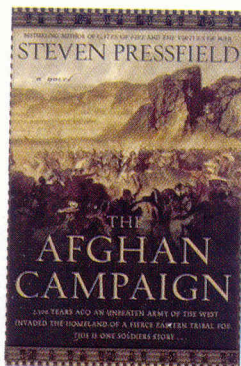
# Alexander's enduring myth

Alexander the Great is acknowledged as one of the greatest commanders in world military history. But it's not just his battle conquests that have made him legend. Tutored by Aristotle, raised amid palace intrigues, twice married but with a reputation for treating his various lovers well, Alexander's life off the battlefield was as adventurous. But what is it about his life—and especially his death—that holds our fascination? **Kathryn Koromilas** looks for the answers into two new books about the legendary king and conqueror.



## The Afghan Campaign

By Steven Pressfield. 368 pages.  
Doubleday (HB), Broadway (pb. June 2007)



## Alexander's Tomb: The Two Thousand Year Obsession to Find the Lost Conqueror

By Nicholas Saunders. 290 pages.  
Perseus Books (May 2007)

Of all the great historical heroes it is Alexander the Great who remains the most intriguing. The genius of his military achievements informs and inspires contemporary warfare, but it is his superhuman character—romantic, multifaceted and mysterious—that keeps the myth ongoing.

Two new books—one, a fictional account of his invasion of the Afghan kingdoms in 330 B.C., and the other, a non-fiction chronicle of the mystery surrounding his final burial place—wrench Alexander out the history books and transform him into unputdownable reading.

The first is Steven Pressfield's *The Afghan Campaign*. Pressfield capitalizes on the easy parallels drawn between Alexander's invasion of what is now modern-day Afghanistan and the problems encountered in the area today "This war is exactly like the war our troops are fighting today in Iraq," Pressfield notes in an interview available on [Stevenpressfield.com](http://Stevenpressfield.com). "Same tactics, same pattern of conflict, same West versus East dynamics."

Pitched as "required reading for anyone who wants to better understand what American and Coalition forces are up against in one of history's most tribal and troubled regions," the novel examines the predicament of war via the Green perspective of first-time soldier Matthias who's just joined Alexander's army. Matthias takes part in Alexander's glorious campaign and undergoes a violent coming-of-age when he confronts the barbarism of the Afghans, embarks on an affair with an Afghan girl and witnesses the brutality of warfare, brutality in which he participates. "Those of us who came out from home as boys," he says, "have become first men and then something closer to beasts or devils."

Pressfield asserts that Alexander's Afghan invasion is the "absolute prototype for the wars

we're fighting today in the Middle East." Alexander's army was the reigning superpower prior to the Afghan invasion and Alexander "was at the peak of his power and self-confidence. Just like us before we invaded Iraq." Alexander believed he could easily "tame" the "savage beasts," in the same way the U.S. was convinced it would. Both armies underestimated their enemies.

While history is often called upon to be the teacher that inspires ethical debates on the dilemma of war in the hope that the horrors of the past are not repeated, Pressfield's novel is more action-packed adventure than anti-war polemic. "This is what war is," Alexander says, "...we've all done things we're ashamed of." Despite the horrors, of course, Alexander surges forward. It is what all military leaders do.

Nicholas J. Saunders, in *Alexander's Tomb: The Two-Thousand Year Obsession to Find the Lost Conqueror*, chronicles the search for Alexander's tomb from antiquity to the present day. The story is a fascinating one of body removal and reburying, tomb plundering, and extravagant archaeological theories. Pharaohs, Christian emperors, and archaeologists around the world are embroiled in the post-mortem tale of the great Alexander.

Alexander is the most often-buried figure in all of history, but with no less than five tombs his final resting place still remains a perfect mystery. The story of burial and reburial begins some time after his death with a power battle amongst Alexander's generals in Babylon 321 B.C. Ptolemy hijacks Alexander's mummified body only to transport it first to Egypt's Memphis for burial, and then later

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Penelope Delta, a scion of the well-known Benaki family, is one of the most revered children's writers in Greece and her novels, written in the early half of the twentieth century, had a great impact on the Greek consciousness. Her historical novels in particular are full of adventure and heroism and have in-

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Set in the year 1044, the protagonists of this historically-convincing and fast-paced novel are two Greek youths of opposing temperament. One—Constantine—is heroic and fearless, while the other—Michael—is more sensitive and vulnerable. Caught up in the intrigue and bloodshed of the long and brutal Greek-Bulgarian conflict, the young men come to learn about the meaning of heroism, sacrifice and revenge. The personal drama that unfolds is interwoven with vivid historical events and as the novel reaches its moving climax, the universal themes of bravery and evil emerge, with no black-and-white answers provided by the author.

A Greek classic which has been reprinted more than forty times, Penelope Delta's *In the Heroic Age of Basil II Emperor of Byzantium* is a historical novel for young adults which covers one of the most fascinating and neglected periods of Greek history, the struggle of the Byzantine Emperor Basil against his arch enemy Tsar Samuel of Bulgaria.



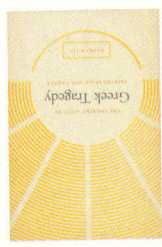
REVIEWED BY ELENA POLYZOS  
 Peter E. Randall Publisher  
 By Penelope Delta (translated by Ruth Bobick), 343 pp.

**In the Heroic Age of Basil II Emperor of Byzantium**

**BOOKS**

According to Saunders, "the search for the tomb is an epic tale whose final chapter remains unwritten." It is precisely here, in this place of mystery and uncertainty that the magnetic interest in Alexander remains enduring. "In this world of history and imagination," writes Saunders in his introduction, "of archaeology and fantasy, Alexander became immortal." Indeed, as Sanders says, "Alexander's tomb is as powerful as an idea as it was as a physical place."

so, just how many tombs did he have? And more to the point, how exactly did he die? If construction of his tomb by Christians in A.D. 391? If corpse finally smuggled to safety prior to the destruction of his tomb by Christians in A.D. 391? If Alexander's resting place is once again disturbed along with numerous other pagan burial sites. And herein lies the ultimate mystery. Was Alexander's tomb is an epic tale whose final chapter remains unwritten." It is precisely here, in this place of mystery and uncertainty that the magnetic interest in Alexander remains enduring. "In this world of history and imagination," writes Saunders in his introduction, "of archaeology and fantasy, Alexander became immortal." Indeed, as Sanders says, "Alexander's tomb is as powerful as an idea as it was as a physical place."



Released this spring, the volume looks at how the ancient *Playing Space and Chorus* is such a wonderful resource. ham Ley's newest work, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy*, works the most essential tutorial on theater. This is why Greek dramatists, especially, offer through their points of their respective crafts. The even set designers have learned the finer works, actors, playwrights, directors, and relatively small body of their extant ancient Greek dramatists. Through the theater without immersing yourself in the—it's impossible to study—or even love—

It's impossible to study—or even love—theater without immersing yourself in the ancient Greek dramatists. Through the relatively small body of their extant works, actors, playwrights, directors, and even set designers have learned the finer points of their respective crafts. The dramatists, especially, offer through their works the most essential tutorial on theater. This is why Greek dramatists, especially, offer through their points of their respective crafts. The even set designers have learned the finer works, actors, playwrights, directors, and relatively small body of their extant ancient Greek dramatists. Through the theater without immersing yourself in the—it's impossible to study—or even love—

REVIEWED BY JENNY VERIVAKIS  
 By Graham Ley, 240 pp. The University of Chicago Press  
**The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus**

spirited generations of young people, bringing to life historical events in a fresh and immediate way. Delta's books continue to be widely read in Greece today and this new translation of one of her most popular works is way overdue. Ruth Bobick's translation manages to capture the spirit and liveliness of the original novel, retaining its fast pace and intensity and will hopefully bring Delta's work to the attention of a wider audience.