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The Greek Reception of Alexander the Great

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τῷ Κωνσταντίνῳ
καὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς φίλοις

Index

Abstract	7
Notes on transliteration and pronunciation	8
Abbreviations	11
Introduction	13
Section one: Modern Greek Alexander-Receptions	26
1. Modern Myth-making. An introduction to Methodology in Folklore Studies	27
2. Folk Alexander: an all-Greek alloy	39
3. The Polysemy of Alexander the Great in Theodore Angelopoulos' film <i>Megalexandros</i>	123
Section two: Ancient Greek Alexander-Receptions	145
4. Ancient Myth-Making of Alexander. Why it still matters	146
5. Ptolemy's Alexander: between historiography and self-description	151
6. Julian's <i>imitatio, aemulatio, and recusatio Alexandri</i>	176
7. Alexander before Alexander: moulding the Macedonian as a <i>Herodotean</i> Persian King	210
Conclusions	244
Appendix I: Pictures	249
Appendix II: Texts	267
Bibliography	282

Abstract

The Greek Reception of Alexander the Great

The present thesis explores how the personality, image, and deeds of Alexander the Great have been interpreted, reshaped, and exploited by the Greeks from Antiquity to the Modern era. The main focus is the understanding of the metamorphosis of the historical persona of Alexander into a god-like mythological figure and a Hellenic national hero, researching the origins of the Alexander-myth and how it operates in response to different historico-political, social and cultural stimuli for the Greeks.

The thesis is structured in two sections: first, the modern, and secondly, the ancient, which, while displaying its variety, also highlight the overall organic nature of the ongoing Greek Alexander-Reception. The first section offers an introduction to the peculiarities of the Modern myth-making of Alexander (chapter one); it explores the reshaping of the Macedonian hero in Hellenic folk production, such as tales, myths, traditions, spells and songs (chapter two), and in Theodore Angelopoulos' debated film *Megalexandros* (chapter three).

The second section discusses the Ancient myth-making of Alexander and its relevance in the twenty-century Greek cultural and political milieu (chapter four); specifically, it focuses on the reshaping and interpretation of the king of Macedon by Ptolemy I (chapter five) and by Julian the Apostate and his entourage (chapter six). This section concludes with a study on the early representations of Alexander, which shows how his contemporary historians borrowed from Herodotus narrative tropes and descriptions of the Achaemenids to explain the Macedonian campaign against Persia, making him a *Herototean*-like Persian king and creating a fictional character that, to a certain extent, dates back before the historical persona.

The case-studies jointly argue that Alexander is a historiographical mirage constantly reinvented by the Greeks, who ascribe to him new deeds, legends, and characteristics according to their historical and cultural needs. The Macedonian hero moves forward into the next period charged with all the previous meanings, which he will deliver to his new audience. In this way, Alexander is both the recipient and the bearer of the Greeks' cultural identity.

Notes on transliteration and pronunciation

The analysis of Greek texts and culture requires the use of vocabulary cited in the original language. Greek words quoted in this thesis are accompanied by a translation at their first occurrence, whereas for subsequent citations only the transliteration is provided. For the transliteration of Ancient as well as of Byzantine and Modern Greek words, I have followed the so-called Erasmian convention,¹ which aims at respecting the actual spelling as much as possible, but does not reflect the historical variation of the sound of the language. For a correct pronunciation of Byzantine and Modern Greek (i. e. of Hellenic literary language and spoken dialects from the sixth century onward), the reader should follow the chart provided here below.

Personal and place names which are famous to the English-speaking audience, such as Alexander and Athens, or Greek words which have passed into English in their original or Latinised form, e. g. *hubris* and *oecumene*, constitute an exception to the methodology adopted. Moreover, for Modern Greek toponyms or people's names, I will respect the transliteration by which they became known to non-Greek scholarship (e. g. *Theodoros* Kolokotronis but *Theodore* Angelopoulos).

Byzantine and Modern Greek Pronunciation (with transliteration in brackets):

Vowels and diphthongs:

A, α	(a)	a as in <i>father</i>
E, ε	(e)	e as in <i>pen</i>
Aι, αι	(ai)	
H, η	(ē)	i as in <i>it</i>
I, ι	(i)	
Y, υ	(u, y)	
Eι, ει	(ei)	

¹ On the Erasmian convention and the story of the pronunciation in England, see Allen (1968) 125-134; for the translation and the pronunciation of Ancient Greek, see Balme, Lawall (2003²) xii-xvi.

Οι, οι	(oi)	
Ο, ο	(o)	o as in <i>lot</i>
Ω, ω	(ō)	
Ου, ου	(ou)	ou as in <i>soup</i>
Αυ, αυ	(au)	av before voiced phonemes af before unvoiced phonemes
Ευ, ευ	(eu)	ev before voiced phonemes ef before unvoiced phonemes

Consonants:

Β, β	(b)	v as in <i>voice</i>
Γ, γ	(g)	y as in <i>year</i> when followed by sounds ε or ι g ^h as in Spanish <i>Granada</i> when followed by a consonant or a sound other than ε or ι
Δ, δ	(d)	d ^h as in <i>this</i>
Ζ, ζ	(z)	z as in <i>zebra</i>
Θ, θ	(th)	th as in <i>think</i>
Κ, κ	(c, k)	k as in <i>key</i>
Λ, λ	(l)	l as in <i>life</i>
Μ, μ	(m)	m as in <i>memory</i>
Ν, ν	(n)	n as in <i>Nord</i>
Ξ, ξ	(x)	x as in <i>xerox</i>
Π, π	(p)	p as in <i>peace</i>
Ρ, ρ	(r)	r as <i>rigorous</i>
Σ, σ, ς	(s)	s as in <i>silence</i>
Τ, τ	(t)	t as in <i>tea</i>
Φ, φ	(ph, f)	ph as in <i>philosophy</i> - f as in <i>friend</i>
Χ, χ	(ch)	ch as in German <i>ich</i> when followed by sounds ε or ι

kh as in Scottish *loch* when followed by a consonant
or a sound other than ε or ι

Ψ, ψ (ps) ps as in *shops*

Two-letter combinations:

μπ (mp) mb as in *number* when in the middle of a word
b as in *bath* when at the beginning of a word;
when preceded by a consonant;
or when repeated twice in the same word.

ντ (nt) nd as in *endurance* when in the middle of a word
d as in *dignity* when at the beginning of a word;
when preceded by a consonant;
or when repeated twice in the same word.

γκ, γγ (nc/nk, ng) ng as in *angel*, when in the middle of a word
g/gh as in *go* when at the beginning of a word;
when preceded by a consonant;
or when in foreign word.

τσ (ts) ts as in *its*

τζ (tz) dz as in *beads*

Abbreviations

AEMΘ = Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη.

AFLB = *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Bari.*

AJP = *American Journal of Philology.*

AP = *Passio Sancti Artemii (Passion of Saint Artemius).*

AR (α) = *Historia Alexandri Magni (Pseudo-Callisthenes). Vol. I: Recensio Vetusta (α),* edited by G. Kroll, Berlin 1926.

AR (β) = [Ms L] = *The Greek Alexander Romance. The Life and the Deeds of Alexander of Macedon,* edited by R. Stoneman, London 1991.

AR (γ) = *Der griechische Alexanderroman Rezension γ.* Vol. 1: edited by U. Lauenstein, Meisenheim 1962; vol. 2: edited by H. Engelmann, Meisenheim 1963; vol. 3: edited by F. Parthe, Meisenheim 1969.

AR (ε) = *Anonymi Byzantini Vita Alexandri Regis Macedonum,* edited by J. Trumpf, Stuttgart 1974.

ASNP = *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia.*

BNJ = *Brill's New Jacoby,* Leiden – Boston.

CAH = *The Cambridge Ancient History.*

Cl. Phil. = *Classical Philology.*

CQ = *The Classical Quarterly.*

FHG = Müller C. (1841-1872), *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum,* 5 vols., Paris.

FGrH = Jacoby F. (1923-1958), *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker,* Berlin.

G&R = *Greece & Rome.*

GRBS = *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies.*

Historia = *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte.*

HSCPh = Harvard Studies in Classical Philology.

JHS = Journal of Hellenic Studies.

JRS = Journal of Roman Studies.

JÖAI = Jahreshefte des österreichischen archaologischen Institutes.

Laographia = Λαογραφία. Δελτίον της Ελληνικής Λαογραφικής Εταιρείας.

Metz Epitome and Liber de Morte = Incerti auctoris Epitoma rerum gestarum Alexandri Magni cum Libro de morte testamentoque Alexandri, Teubner edition by P. H. Thomas, Lipsia, 1960.

P.Oxy. = The Oxyrhynchus Papyri.

PapLup = Papyrologica Lupiensia.

Phyllada = Veloudis G. (1977), 'Η Φυλλάδα τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου. Διήγησις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνοσ, Athens.

REG = Revue des Études Grecque.

Rhimada = Holton D. (2002), Διήγησις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου (Diigisis tou Alexandrou). The Tale of Alexander. The Rhymed Version. Critical edition with introduction and commentary, Athens [corrected reprint of the 1974 edition, with a new preface].

TAPA = Transaction of the American Philological Association.

ZPE = Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.

Introduction

This thesis explores the variety of Greek Receptions of Alexander the Great, by showing several ways in which Greeks assimilated, blended, and made use of the image, history, and deeds of the Macedonian conqueror throughout the centuries. Through Alexander, Greeks are continuously in dialogue with their past: in fact, there are arguably different “Alexanders” for every historical period of the Hellenic people, variously constituted to serve distinct purposes and interests. As if he had always been ruling them since the fourth century BC, Alexander is still the king of their culture, traditions, religion, economy, and politics.

In the wide field of Alexander-Receptions, Greece is not alone: the Achaemenid Empire was conquered by force of arms, but many nations were captivated culturally. The Macedonian’s fame travelled from Spain to China, from Scotland to Ethiopia: soon after his death, Alexander III’s unprecedented deeds gave way to a set of tales,² which in the Middle Ages were reworked according to the cultural needs of different peoples and translated from Greek into several languages, among them Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, English, Scottish, Irish, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian languages,³ Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Ethiopic,⁴ and Malay.⁵

Particularly famous cross-cultural examples of the fictional interpretation of the Macedonian conqueror are: his ascent to the earthly paradise, first attested in the Babylonian *Talmud*⁶ before 500 AD and widely echoed in several European Alexander

² *Alexander’s Last Days and Will*, the *Letter to Aristotle on India* and the *Letter to Olympias*, separate narratives which were incorporated in Pseudo-Callisthenes’ *Alexander Romance* between the third and the second century BC. See Stoneman (1991) 11-14.

³ For an overview of the development and translation of Alexander-tales into different languages during the Middle Ages, see Cary (1967²) 9-74; Mossé (2004) 178-188 (focusing especially on European Alexander-Receptions); Zuwiyya (2011).

⁴ For Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Jewish, African, Indian and Chinese Alexander-Receptions, see the volume edited by Stoneman, Erickson, Netton (2012); Bosman (2014). For an overview of Alexander-Receptions in the Jewish tradition, see Amitay (2010) 108-122.

⁵ For the Malay *Alexander Romance*, see Broadbent (2012) 1-5; Ng (2016) 104-122.

⁶ *Talmud* 32b. Probably copying the idea from Hellenistic sources, Curtius highlights Alexander’s desire to ascend to heaven at IV. 10. 3: [Alexander’s soldiers] “were complaining that against the will of the gods they were being dragged to the ends of the earth; no longer could rivers be approached, nor did stars keep their former brilliance, huge lands and all desert places met them. For the vanity of one single

poems, which were based on the Latin twelfth-century version of the Jewish account entitled *Iter ad Paradisum*;⁷ his flight machine, attested in the Greek *Romance* (β. II. 41) and represented hundreds of times both in Western and Eastern iconography, such as miniatures in manuscripts and church architecture;⁸ and the enclosure of the *Unclean Nations*, Gog and Magog. In the seventh century, in his *Apocalypse*, the Syrian monk Pseudo-Methodius introduced the episode of how Alexander fenced twenty unclean peoples behind iron gates in the north;⁹ via numerous translation of this work, Gog and Magog passed down also into the Quranic tradition, in which Alexander is presented as Allah's envoy and is named the Dhul-Qarnayn ("the two-horned one").¹⁰

Thus, the Alexander *mythicus* exceeded in his achievements the *Last Plans* allegedly conceived by the Alexander *historicus*:¹¹ with his marvellous wanderings he

man the blood of so many soldiers was spent, the native land was despised, Alexander's father Philip was disowned, and with vainglorious thoughts he aspired to heaven (*caelum vanis cogitationibus petere regem*"); IX. 4. 18: [The soldiers lamented to Alexander that] "they were forced to go beyond the constellations and the sun, places which Nature had removed from the sight of the mortals (*Trahi extra sidera et solem cogique adire, quae mortalium oculis natura subduxerit*)".

⁷ Examples of European versions of the *Iter ad Paradisum* are the *Strassburg Alexander*, a German poem written in 1187, and the thirteenth-century French poem *Voyage au Paradise Terrestre*. Cary (1967²) 19-20; 28; 31-32.

⁸ For example, see appendix I, n. 1: fourteenth-century Byzantine bas-relief of the Church of the Peribleptos in Mystras (now stored in the Archaeological Museum of Mystras, under the inventory number 10813). For an overview of the imagery of Alexander's flight to heaven in the art of Western Europe, see Schmidt (1995). Cf. Cary (1967²) 134-135; Stoneman (2008) 114-119; Georganteli (2012) 143-144.

⁹ Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, VIII. On Pseudo-Methodius, see Palmer, Brock, Hoyland (1993) 222-229 with further bibliography; Garstad (2012).

¹⁰ Quran 18. 83-98. For the diffusion of Alexander's enclosure of the Unclean Nations in western and eastern traditions, see Stoneman (2008) 174-179.

¹¹ D. S. XVIII. 4. 3-5. Scholars are divided regarding the veracity of the *Last Plans*: Schachermeyr (1954) 118-140 and Badian (1968) 191-198 are in favour of their authenticity; against it are Tarn (1948) II. 378-398 and Pearson (1955) 450-454; *idem* (1960) 261-262. In my opinion, these plans bear a kernel of truth: surely there are some fictional additions, but it is not unlikely that Alexander had planned the erection of a tomb for Philip II. As Tarn (1948) II. 384-385 argues, the tomb that the Macedonian king had in mind might not be modelled on the shape of a Pyramid, since "Egyptianisation" of Greek culture starts only with Euergetes II in the second century BC in Egypt; nonetheless, a majestic construction dedicated to Philip has to be contemplated as part of Alexander's self-promotion as pious king respectful of his father. Furthermore, Alexander probably thought of a population exchange, in order to integrate the

conquered the entire world and mesmerised it for centuries, by taking an active role in the Jewish, the Islamic, and the Christian creeds. Broadly speaking, Alexander is remembered as a sage in the former two,¹² while in Medieval Christian Europe he is considered a chivalrous king, and he is praised as either an enlightened philosopher-king or a peerless conqueror in Modern times.¹³

The Greek Alexander-Reception, at the crossroads between Eastern and Western cultures, stands out among these two edges (the East and the West, Asia and Europe):¹⁴ both in the Ancient as well as in the Byzantine and Modern era, Greeks have empowered Alexander with new historico-political, cultural and religious values. During periods of struggles – whether the enemies be the Sassanians, the Turks or the Slavo-Macedonians – the great conqueror is called to fight alongside the Greeks and to lead them to victory. Alexander embraces Ancient, Byzantine, and Modern Hellenism, representing the *omnipresent* and *omnipotent* Greek Übermensch.

The Greek Alexander-Reception: an overview

Wandering through the streets of Athens and Thessaloniki, it is impossible to miss Alexander, reconfigured in cheap reproductions of his ancient representations in souvenir shops, wooden puppets, graffiti, stamps and statues.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, the Alexander myth is deeply rooted in Hellenic culture and many different legendary stories about his life have flourished since antiquity. This uninterrupted inventiveness of the Greeks makes their Reception of Alexander so unique and appealing: unlike

Asiatics into the Greek cultural milieu and to repopulate Macedonia, which had sent most of its men fit for military service during the Persian campaign and never fully recovered from this drain of manpower (for Macedon's weakening during Alexander's reign, see Bosworth (1986) 2-11). Concluding, it should not be excluded that Alexander was conceiving a campaign westwards: his uncle Alexander I the Molossian, after being called by the Tarentines in their aid against Lucanians and Bruttii in 334 BC, conquered lands in Magna Grecia (Livy, VIII. 24); moreover, Heracles' Pillars surely had an appeal on the Macedonian conqueror, due to his desire of following in his heroic ancestor's footsteps and mastering all the *oecumene*.

¹² See Amintay (2012) 349-365 for the Jewish lore on Alexander and Asirvatham (2012) 311-326 for the Islamic.

¹³ Cary (1967²) 195; Stoneman (2008) 199-216.

¹⁴ Stoneman (2008) 217-226.

¹⁵ See appendix I, ns. 2-10.

Alexander-Receptions elsewhere, it is not confined to single historical periods or to literary and artistic contexts; rather it embraces the entire history of the Hellenic Γένος¹⁶ – the Greek-speaking people living in mainland Greece and in Asia Minor, as well as the Hellenes of the diaspora. It covers the whole span of human activities, from a projected *Alexanderland* theme park in Northern Greece¹⁷ to high literature, or from the annual marathon run in his name from Pella to Thessaloniki to the market in Alexander-shaped ouzo bottles.¹⁸ Moreover, it is characterised by a strong sense of admiration and ownership of Alexander by Greeks, which can be best summarised by Kostis Palamas' verses “ζῆ καὶ ζώνεται, δικός μας εἶναι πάντα ([Alexander] *lives and he is ever ours!*)”.¹⁹

In the years of his Persian campaign, Alexander achieved a mythical status,²⁰ and later in the Hellenistic period he was regarded as a model of the righteous and wise king in the Cynic philosophical discussion, as a result of his encounter with Diogenes of Sinope²¹ and of the account of the Indian campaign written by his steersman Onesicritus, who was allegedly sent by the king to engage in dialogue with the *gymnosophists*,²² presented as the Indian counterpart to the Cynics. Although in the Stoic and Peripatetic schools Alexander III was at times considered a whimsical

¹⁶ *Genos* is intended as the collective identity in which membership is ascribed by birth, through a (believed) common ancestor. On the difference between *genos* and *ethnos*, cf. J. M. Hall (1997) 34-35; for an overview of the scholarly discussion on the meaning of ethnicity in ancient and modern times, cf. J. M. Hall (1997) 2-32; McNerney (2014) 1-15; Siapkas (2014) 66-75.

¹⁷ <http://www.archaiologia.gr/blog/2013/02/28/alexanderland-> [accessed on 30-08-2016].

¹⁸ See appendix I, n. 8.

¹⁹ Palamas (1982) 70-71 = Palamas (1910), *Η Φλογέρα του Βασιλιά*, Canto I. For a brief introduction to *The King's Flute*, cf. Palamas (1982) 22-29; Beaton (1994) 89-91.

²⁰ Goukowsky (1978) 18-78.

²¹ Plu. *Alex.* 14. 1-5.

²² Onesicritus, *BNJ / FGrH* 134, F 17a (= Str. XIV. 1. 63-65); 17b (= Plu. *Alex.* 65. 1-3). Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 64; Arr. *An.* VII. 2-3; *AR.* III. 5-6: Alexander himself converses with the naked philosophers. Stoneman (1995) 99-103, does not question the historicity of Onesicritus' encounter with the Brahmans, but he points out that the theme of the dialogue between the king and the philosophers, so productive in Greek literature, was developed in the Cynic schools independently by Onesicritus.

tyrant, the negative interpretation of his deeds never constituted a unitary view and in the Greek world it faded away soon in Late Antiquity.²³

After the Roman conquest in 146 BC, Alexander embodied the military leader par-excellence and the guardian of Greece's cultural supremacy over Rome;²⁴ Second Sophistic authors such as Plutarch, Arrian and Cassius Dio highlighted his characteristics of invincible conqueror and caring ruler, offering a model to be imitated by Roman Emperors.²⁵ In the third century AD, athletic games named Ἀλεξάνδρεια were held in Veroia in honour of the glorious Macedonian, and the prize for the winning athletes was the so-called νικητήριον, a golden medallion with the portrait of the king.²⁶ In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, Alexander's name and visage were attributed apotropaic properties and people used to wear medallions similar to the *nikētēria* and good luck charms with his effigy,²⁷ a practice which was harshly condemned by the Church, since the Macedonian was still seen as a symbol of paganism.

From the sixth and seventh centuries onwards, when Orthodoxy was firmly established in the Byzantine Empire, there is a change in the Church's attitude towards Alexander,²⁸ and several Christian scholars, among them John Malalas²⁹ (sixth century), George Syncellus³⁰ (eighth century), George Hamartolus³¹ (ninth century) and

²³ Stoneman (2003) 325-338: these philosophical schools did not have a unitary view on Alexander; the Macedonian was used as a "tool for thinking with", a *topos* which made argument and speculation possible. The philosophers' judgments on Alexander seem inconsistent because "people in antiquity (and later) were unable to get him out of their imaginations, and thus could use him as examples both of vice and virtue and, ultimately, as a vehicle of timeless wisdom".

²⁴ D. Spencer (2002) 37-38.

²⁵ For the Second Sophistic interpretation of Alexander, see Stoneman (2003) 338-343; Asirvatham (2010) 193-204.

²⁶ Pandermalis (2004) 16. Cf. also Rizakis, Touratsoglou (1999) 955-959 on the cult of Alexander in Northern Macedon.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Ad Illuminandos Catecheses* XLIX. 240. 23-24.

²⁸ Minaoglou (2012) 33.

²⁹ John Malalas, *Chronographia*, VII. 17: Nectanebo goes to Pella; Olympias gives birth to Alexander. VIII. 1: foundation of Alexandria of Egypt; erection of the Stratēgeion in Byzantium. VIII. 3: visit to Candace, queen of Ethiopia.

³⁰ George Syncellus, *Chronographia*, 314. 8-11: Alexander honours the priest Jaddus in Jerusalem.

George Cedrenus³² (eleventh century), referred to the Macedonian in their chronicles, quoting the marvellous episodes found in Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Romance*³³ (such as Nectanebus' flight to Pella, the encounter with Candace, and the dialogue with the Brahmans) but also building on the Jewish tradition. Flavius Josephus' narration of the conqueror's visit to Jerusalem³⁴ and the interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, according to which Macedonian rule was meant to be the third in the succession of the four empires sanctioned by God, in fact eased Alexander's passage into, and acceptance by, Christendom.³⁵

The "Christian Alexander", created by Byzantine intellectuals, appeared as a champion of Greekness and Orthodoxy alongside Augustus, Jesus and saints also in many icons and frescos in monasteries and churches in Greece.³⁶ These religious representations, together with the fabulous episodes of the *Alexander-Romance*, made of Alexander a fully-fledged hero of Hellenic popular culture. It is worth noting that the Macedonian's absorption into the Christian tradition made it possible for people both to stay rooted to the ancient past and to link that past to their present: Mitsakis has correctly pointed out that in Greek culture Alexander was born an Ancient Greek pagan, but died Byzantine Christian;³⁷ similarly to today's Greeks, he is at the same

³¹ George Monachus or Hamartolus, *Chronicon*, 25: Nectanebo and Olympias; Stratègeion in Byzantium; 26: Alexander's visit to Jerusalem; 31: Alexander bows in front of the Jewish priest Jaddus; 33: Candace; 35: meeting with the Brahmans.

³² George Cedrenus, *Compendium Historiarum* I. 264. 8-16: Nectanebo; I. 265. 20-22: Alexander in Jerusalem; I. 266. 16-17: Alexander welcomes the Amazon Thaleute; I. 267: treaty with Candace and description of the Brahmans' lifestyle.

³³ Roueché (1985) 123: toward the end of the sixth century, with the collapse of the "framework of city life [...], new forms of writing prevailed, and two main forms of narrative composition survived, which met the needs of a period of insecurity and reconstruction. Firstly history – but in the cramped form of chronography – insisted on the temporal continuity of the Byzantine Empire. Secondly, saints' lives reinforced a series of essential values and beliefs".

³⁴ J. AJ XI. 325-334: in his route down to Egypt, Alexander stops at Jerusalem after the siege of Gaza in 332 BC. There he encounters the high priest and he promptly bows down, as a sign of acknowledgement and acceptance of the Jewish God.

³⁵ Daniel 2. 39. Stoneman (2008) 218-219; Minaoglou (2012) 33-34.

³⁶ See, for example, the fresco dated 1568 in the monastery of Docheiariou on Mount Athos (appendix I, n. 11).

³⁷ Mitsakis (1967) 18: "Alexander wird im antiken Griechenland als *Heide* geboren und stirbt als *Christ* in Byzanz".

time *Hellene* and *Rhomios*,³⁸ thus becoming Everyman's hero and escaping from the Church's damnation. The ε *recensio* of the *Romance*,³⁹ in which Alexander is panegyrically described as a heroic Orthodox *Cosmocrator*, was in fact written in or around the eighth century, when his acceptance by the Church was fully established. AR (ε) provided the basis for the late Byzantine prose *Romance*, composed in the years 1450-1453, and for the version with the most marked folk traits, entitled Φυλλάδα τοῦ Μεγαλέξανδρου (*Phyllada tou Megalexandrou, Booklet of Alexander the Great*) and first published in Venice in 1680.⁴⁰ The title, *Phyllada*, derives from the cheap material on which the popular romance was printed, but its worth was nevertheless immense: it was reprinted numerous times⁴¹ during the Ottoman Empire, keeping Alexander alive among the Greeks.

The Macedonian king was held in high esteem not only by people and intellectuals, but by several Byzantine Emperors too; in the twelfth century, the imperial house of the Comneni even sought to be regarded as his direct descendants, claiming that they unified Alexander's world rule and the Orthodox Roman Empire.⁴² This perception of the role of the Byzantine dynasty is explained by Pseudo-Codinus in the *De Officiis*, a fourteenth-century compilatory text about court hierarchy and ceremonies. Interested in the origins of titles and rituals of the empire, Pseudo-Codinus gives reason for the double status of the Roman Emperors as descendants of both the great Constantine and Alexander as follows:⁴³

³⁸ Kaldellis (2008) 42: "with the foundation of the Modern Greek state, *romiosyne* came to represent the Orthodox and demotic aspects of the new Hellenic national persona". On the development of Greeks' perception of their ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity, see the brilliant overview offered by Zacharia (2010²) 1-18 in the introduction to her edited volume *Hellenisms*. Cf. also Browning (2002) 256-277; Page (2008) 27-71.

³⁹ For the different Greek recensions of the *Alexander Romance*, see Merkelbach (1954); Mitsakis (1967) 5-20; Holton (1973); *idem* (2002) 3-12; Veloudis (1977) introduction, θ'-λε'; Stoneman (2008) 230-232; 244-245.

⁴⁰ Stoneman (2008) 221-222.

⁴¹ Stoneman (2008) 221 counts forty-three times since 1680; Minaoglou (2012) 37 states sixty.

⁴² Vasilikopoulou (1999) 1305-1307; 1313-1314.

⁴³ Ps-Cod. *De Officiis* IV, 206. 28-207.8.

Because Constantine the Great both was, and was called, “emperor of the Romans”, the emperors, his successors until now, are called “emperors of the Romans”. And since Alexander [207] was king of the Macedonians – but Macedonia is subject to the emperor of the Romans – the eastern people pay great honour to the emperor as successor to the paternal house of Alexander (τὰ μὲν ἑῷα ἔθνη διδόασι μεγάλην τιμὴν τῷ βασιλεῖ ὡς διαδόχῳ τοῦ πατρικοῦ ὀσπητίου τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου), but the western people pay great honour to him [the emperor] as the successor of Great Constantine (τὰ δ’ αὖ ἑσπέρια ὡς τοῦ μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου διαδόχῳ).⁴⁴

After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, Alexander III’s leadership in battles was evoked by several intellectuals to prompt princes and kings to follow in his footsteps and fight against the Ottoman Empire. An interesting example of this trend is the monk Gerasimus Blachus (1605-1685), who urges the Russian Tsar Alexius, the only Orthodox ruler available at his time, to intervene for the sake of Christendom. In his letter to the Tsar, Blachus ascribes to himself the role of a “new Isocrates”, inviting the ruler to imitate Philip II and Alexander and to wage war against the Barbarians of his day, the Ottomans.⁴⁵

During the Greek Revolution (1821-1830), the legendary conqueror, transformed into an Orthodox freedom-fighter, is called upon by both the upper and the lower classes of society to free his fellow countrymen from the oppressive yoke of the infidel Turks. The contrast between Greeks and Turks was translated into the opposition between Orthodoxy and Islam,⁴⁶ and, ultimately, mapped onto the ancient polarity between Greeks and Barbarians, West and East.⁴⁷ On these grounds,

⁴⁴ Macrides, Munitiz, Angelov (2013) 148-151.

⁴⁵ Minaoglou (2012) 82-83.

⁴⁶ Cf. the population exchange ratified by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923: the discrimination between the two peoples was made on the basis of religion, and not of language or ethnic characterisation. Clogg (2004³) 99.

⁴⁷ For early occurrences of the dichotomy between Greeks and Barbarians, see Tuplin (1999) 54-57: the term *Barbaros* already occurred in the archaic period and was not created by the events of 480 BC; however, the Persian attacks on mainland Greece made it a more regular word. For the scholarly debate about the polarity between Greeks and Barbarians in antiquity, see E. Said (1987²) 56-57; E. Hall (1989) 99-100; J. M. Hall (1997) 45-48 and (2002) 179; Tuplin (1999) 47-53; Harrison (2002) 7; 127-128: there is

Alexander's "Panhellenic crusade" provided a strong precedent which made the masses believe in a favourable outcome for their revolutionary endeavour as well as for the Μεγάλη Ίδέα (Great Idea)⁴⁸ in the period of nation-building which followed the proclamation of the independent Greek State in 1831. Thus, Alexander's Christianisation, created by churchmen during the Byzantine period and developed by intellectuals during the Ottoman rule, became an overarching theme in Modern Greek history, which is still relevant today and paved the way for the use of the Macedonian in contemporary political rhetoric.⁴⁹

It is worth noting that in 1831 the newly Hellenic State did not include Alexander's motherland, identified by Greeks with today's Macedonia.⁵⁰ The region gained independence only in 1912, after almost a century of ruinous wars. During this period, Alexander became the emblem of a free Hellenic nation, and the proof that

little stress on biological differences between Greeks and Barbarians; Sourvinou-Inwood (2002) 174; Skinner (2012) 44: "Greek identities were, from the outset, hybrid, relational, and inventive, meaning different things at different times to different people".

⁴⁸ The *Great Idea* was formulated by Ioannis Kolettis in 1844 and expressed Greece's irredentist claims on all the areas of Greek settlements in Asia Minor (Modern Turkey). The plan was abandoned after the defeat of the Greek forces by the Turkish armies in the so-called *Asiatic Catastrophe* (1919-1922). Clogg (2004³) 46-47; 91-97.

⁴⁹ See, e. g., Christos Zalokostas, Μέγας Άλέξανδρος, ό πρόδρομος του Ίησοϋ (*Alexander the Great, the forerunner of Jesus*, Athens 1971): by spreading the Greek language to the countries which he conquered, Alexander created the basis for a unified Greek community ready to accept the Christian message. According to Zalokostas, Alexander's world-empire is a forerunner of the Christian one, and the entire Christendom owes its existence to the Greeks.

⁵⁰ In this thesis, with *Macedonia* I intend the modern geographico-political region in Northern Greece, whereas with *Macedon* I refer to the area covered by the ancient kingdom of Philip II and Alexander III. *FYROM* will be used to describe the Republic of Macedonia, for it has been the official nomenclature of the modern state since the Interim Agreement of 1995. The Macedonian Kingdom's antiquities are considered an integral part of Greece's national history, as contemporary Greeks claim to have cultural and historical continuity since antiquity. In ancient times, several authors, amongst them Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, fr. 3, Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4, F 74, and Hdt. VIII. 137-139, testify the Hellenic origins of the Macedonians; as Hatzopoulos (2011) 73 has pointed out, in antiquity the dichotomy between Greeks and Macedonians is political and not racial. In modern times, the adjective *Macedonian* describes a regional or an ethnic identity, rather than a national one, and although Macedonia has its own symbols and heroes, such as the Star of Vergina and the fighters of the Macedonian Struggle, Greek-Macedonians do not constitute a national community in contrast to a Greek one: see Danforth (1995) 83.

Macedonia and the other Greek territories still under the Ottomans should be united with the rest of Greece. A synergy between political propaganda and people's desire for freedom fostered Alexander-Receptions in diverse artistic fields, such as the traditional Karaghiozis shadow-theatre,⁵¹ in which the "freedom-fighter" Alexander is blended with the "dragon-slayer" St George, Theophilos' paintings about the Macedonian hero's battles,⁵² and folk tales and songs from all around Greece which retell Alexander's historical and legendary deeds.⁵³ The young Hellenic state even encouraged people's "obsession" with Alexander by labelling Northern Greek products – mainly ouzo, olive oil, and olive soap-bars – in order to reassert Macedonia's Greekness, liberty, and continuity with the Classical past.⁵⁴ Alexander, now a national hero, grew even Greater in the 1990s, with the outbreak of the *Macedonian Question*, the still unsolved political dispute between Greece and FYROM about the right to the name "Macedonia" and the cultural and historical identity of its inhabitants. In this stalemate, Alexander was appropriated by both nations as their "historical ancestor", a powerful rhetorical means in the process of nation-building and ethnogenesis.⁵⁵

A final twist was added in 2012 with the reopening of the Kasta Hill archaeological site in Amphipolis. Excavations are still in progress but have already revealed a massive royal tomb, where many Greeks still hope to find Alexander's corpse and so to prove the legitimacy of their ownership of the king of Macedon and Macedonia's ongoing Hellenicity since Antiquity.⁵⁶

⁵¹ For a general introduction to the Geek shadow theatre, see Yayannos, Yayannos, Dingli (1976-1977) I-II; Petris (1986); Caimi (1990) 23-30; 54-60.

⁵² Matthiopoulos (1997) 678-680.

⁵³ For Alexander in folklore, see chapter two, *Folk Alexander*; for Alexander in Greek music, cf. my introduction to the paper "Alexander the Great screaming out for Hellenicity", in: K. Moore (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander*, (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ See also P. Oikonomos' textbook entitled Μέγας Αλέξανδρος (*Alexander the Great*) and published in Athens in 1914 in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). The textbook was addressed to children in the fifth year of primary school and was written after the need to rewrite the Macedonian hero's story in consonance with the State's propaganda of the time. Cf. appendix I, n. 12.

⁵⁵ See Danforth (2003) 348-364; *idem* (2010) 572-598; my paper "Alexander the Great screaming out for Hellenicity", in: K. Moore (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander* (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ The archaeologist Katerina Peristeri, director of the excavations in Amphipolis, dates the tomb in the fourth century BC and supports the hypothesis that it belonged to Alexander III. Peristeri has been backed by Antonis Samaras' government (2012-2015), but also severely judged by other archaeologists,

The project

In my thesis I focus on the Greek Alexander-Reception because of its continuity, variety, and yet organic nature. It is in fact an immense treasure-trove constantly reinventing itself, which leaves to the passionate researcher freedom to indulge in the disparate fields of studies intersecting with the different interpretations of the Macedonian hero; nevertheless, it presents themes accompanying the myth of the great conqueror from Antiquity to the Modern era. My choice was also driven by the fact that the Greek Alexander-Reception as a whole has been incompletely studied. Scholars have focused on the creation of the Alexander myth in the Hellenistic and Roman period,⁵⁷ and on the adventures of the wandering hero of the *Alexander-Romance* and their development in the Middle Ages.⁵⁸ By contrast, the historical and religious literature of Late Antiquity, which, as stated above, still influences and shapes the contemporary Greek mentality, and Modern Greek cultural productions, such as folk art and literature, songs, and cinema, have been almost disregarded or studied as separate phenomena. Far from claiming completeness, in my doctoral thesis I offer a study of some less explored sides of the Greek Alexander-Reception and I investigate how the myth-making of the Macedonian operates in different eras.

The material is divided into two sections: the modern and the ancient, containing two and three case-studies respectively. Within each section, the Alexander-Receptions are discussed in linear fashion, finding their place in the wider context of the twenty-four-century process of adaptation of the Macedonian conqueror personality, life, and endeavours. This structure has been chosen so that the uniqueness of each Greek adaptation of Alexander would be respected and highlighted, while still allowing comparisons to be drawn between past and present, and considerations of the potential “red threads” which run through this heterogeneous material.

such as Angeliki Kottaridi, for her management of the dig and the biased interpretation of the findings. Cf. Kottaridi’s interview released in the newspaper *Αυγή* (Augē) on 14 January 2015: <http://www.avgi.gr/article/10966/5213688/boles-gia-amhipole-apo-ten-angelike-kottaride> [accessed on 25-07-2015].

⁵⁷ Goukowsky (1978); Stewart (1993); D. Spencer (2002).

⁵⁸ Cary (1956); Veloudis (1977); Pallis (1989); Stoneman (2008).

Amongst the wide range of motifs, in the modern section I explore the overwhelming and ongoing folk oral and literary production related to the legendary persona of Alexander the Great. Looking at the patterns found in tales, songs, spell, and traditions, I reconstruct proper “epic cycles” on the life and deeds of the Macedonian hero.

As a second case-study I offer a jarring note in the wide panorama of positive Alexander-Receptions in Greece: Theodore Angelopoulos’ film *Megalexandros*. His recreation of the Macedonian conqueror as a bandit-like autocrat was intended as a political warning to the Hellenic Nation against any form of autocratic power, an advice that Greeks did not want to take. The rejection by the audience of Angelopoulos’ film makes his Reception of Alexander more worth studying, as a (failed) attempt to counterbalance his countrymen’s Ἀλεξανδρολατρεία (Alexandrolatry).

Both the folk and the celluloid Alexander are modern adaptations and recreations of ancient Greek myths and tales, blended with modern heroes and popular traditions. Given the intense scholarly discussion on the folk literary genres, the modern section includes an introductory chapter to the methodology chosen to systematise the different narratives proposed in chapter two.

The first ancient case-study focuses on the physical appropriation of Alexander as a means of political propaganda: in the aftermath of Alexander III’s death, his Successors tried to legitimise their power by placing his image on their coins or by showing affinity to him. But one of them was more successful in this political game: the general Ptolemy. In fact, not only did he choose to establish his kingship in Alexandria of Egypt, Alexander’s dearest foundation, but he also articulated his own literary profile of the Macedonian hero, a model king which served his self-projection as “New-Alexander”.

The motif of the assimilation to Alexander, exploited by Ptolemy, is also the focus of my second ancient case-study, which explores both the Late Antique and the Modern rhetoric behind Julian’s likeness to Alexander. A series of great champions in various eras, such as Pyrrhus of Epirus in the fourth-third century BC and Theodoros Kolokotronis during the Greek Revolution, tried to present themselves as New Alexanders; Julian the Apostate stands out because his putative resemblance to the Macedonian conqueror was almost imposed on him in the fourth century AD and, at times, was felt as a constraint by Julian himself. Strikingly, the juxtaposition Julian-

Alexander has not yet been discredited by Greeks but continues to be fertile in the Modern Greek mindset.

In my last chapter, I discuss how Alexander can be considered a “historiographical mirage”, i. e. the artificial result of a process of story-telling and Hellenic interpretation of the Achaemenids that developed in the fifth century BC. There is, therefore, a “Herodotean” Alexander before the historical Alexander III, since earlier representations of the Persian King had a deep impact on the Alexander-historians, who “Persianised” their Alexander according to *Herodotean* tropes.

If Alexander was a mirage already in his own time, it is no surprise that there were so many possibilities for Greek creativity to explore over subsequent centuries.

Section one: Modern Greek Alexander-Receptions

Chapter one
Modern Myth-making.
An Introduction to Methodology in Folklore studies

The aim of this introduction is to reflect on the scholarly discussion on folk literary genres and to articulate a flexible but consistent terminology which will allow us to draw rigorous conclusions in the two following chapters. It should be stated beforehand that folk narratives often present fluid boundaries between genres and that divisions may appear contrived at times,⁵⁹ but the need for a methodology has a twofold reason: first, it will help in the systematisation of the vast folk production on Alexander; secondly, it will create a better understanding of the peculiarities of the modern myth-making which constitute the substratum of the folk and celluloid Alexander.

When we read Modern Greek folktales, myths and traditions, it is easy to draw parallels with Ancient Greek mythology,⁶⁰ as they carry us to a Greek world and present similar human approaches in describing and making sense of the surrounding reality. Notwithstanding that different scholarly attempts were made to clarify the core features of each of these genres, a common consensus has not yet been reached internationally.⁶¹ A general impasse in finding a widely accepted method of categorisation occurs especially in academic works in Greek language, due to the terminology used to describe the modern folk production: the word *μῦθος* is used for both ancient and modern myths, but also other folk literary genres, such as tales and legends; e. g., in many anthologies Aesop's fables are called *mythoi*.⁶² The root of the

⁵⁹ For the interaction between myth and history in the ancient folk and historical narratives on Alexander, cf. Gabba (1981) 52-53.

⁶⁰ For a collection of Märchen types in Ancient Greek literature, see Rose (1928) 286-304.

⁶¹ For an overview of the scholarly discussion on the definition of mythology and its distinction from folklore, see Kirk (1970) 1-41. G. Anderson (2006) 63-89 offers a useful discussion of the problem of the distinction between folktales, myths, and legends by providing numerous examples of Ancient Greek and Roman folk narratives. For the differences between ancient and modern mythology, cf. Kyriakidis (1965²) 240; Hadjitaki-Kapsomenou (2001) 41; Bremmer (2011) 539.

⁶² Note that most of the Greek bibliography of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries uses the polytonic system, according to which the term *mythos* always bears a circumflex on y, thus blurring the distinction between ancient and modern mythology. Nowadays the author's reference to an ancient or

problem lies in the intrinsic linguistic “ambiguity” of the term *mythos* attested already in antiquity, and in the modern scholars’ interpretation and use of its semantic polyvalence. For example, in the *Iliad*, during the delicate moment of the assembly of the Achaeans discussing the possible solutions to appease Apollo, the diviner Calchas is asked by Achilles *to recount, to give the reason* – μυθήσασθαι – of the god’s wrath;⁶³ on the other hand, the authors of Περσικά, Αἰγυπτιακά, Ἑλληνικά were called λογογράφοι (*logographoi*, writers of *logoi*), because in their accounts they relate historical facts mingled with *unhistorical and mythological* descriptions.⁶⁴ Until the Classical period, *logos* and *mythos* were often interchangeable and meant “word, speech, utterance, tale, story, or plot of a play”;⁶⁵ only with the sophists did the two terms start to be differentiated: *logos* then took on the significance of *reasoning* or *grounded theory*, in contrast with *mythos*, a *mere tale*, adorned with fabulous and fantastic elements.⁶⁶ Herodotus is considered the author on the verge of the two terms’ semantic change: in the *Histories*, the word *logos* both introduces a tale⁶⁷ and distinguishes a scientific account from a *mythos*,⁶⁸ i. e. a non-scientific theory, a folk

modern myth can be easily spotted thanks to the use of a different accent (μῦθος / μύθος); yet, the arbitrary use of the word for describing other folk literary genres remains an issue.

⁶³ Hom. *Il.* I. 74. Cf. *Il.* VI. 382: [housemaids asked by Hector where Andromache was]: “Ἐκτορ ἐπεὶ μάλ’ ἄνωγας ἀληθέα μυθήσασθαι. “Hector, since you vehemently bid us tell you the truth”.

⁶⁴ Th. I. 21: “The chroniclers composed stories aiming at what is more attractive to hear than what is closer to the truth (ὡς λογογράφοι ξυνέθεσαν ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῆ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον); these stories being impossible to be refuted, having turned into the fabulous (ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες) due to the time incurred”. See also Arist. *Po.* 1455b 17: λόγος intended as a plot of a dramatic or narrative poem.

⁶⁵ See Liddell-Scott, lemma λόγος and μῦθος.

⁶⁶ Pl. *Prt.* 320c: “but shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors, put my demonstration to you by telling a fable, or going through in detail with a reasoning (μῦθον λέγων ἐπιδείξω ἢ λόγῳ διεξιθών)?”. Vernant (1980) 186-187; Dowden (1992) 1-3; S. Said (2007) 76-88.

⁶⁷ Hdt. I. 141. 1: “As soon as the Lydians had been subjugated by the Persians, the Ionians and Aeolians sent messengers to Cyrus in Sardis, wanting to be on the same terms as those that they had when they were subjects to Croesus. After hearing what the Lydians proposed, Cyrus told them a *tale* (λόγον): a certain flute-player, seeing fishes in the sea, played his flute, thinking that they would come out to the land [...]”. In this passage, the word λόγος introduces a folktale, characterised by an indefinite setting and a generic protagonist (“a flute-player”), both features which are typical of the genre.

⁶⁸ Hdt. II. 23: “The opinion about Ocean is grounded in obscurity (ἐς ἀφανές τὸν μῦθον) and there is no way to prove it (οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον)”; II. 45: “And the Greeks say many things and other inconsiderate too

legend, or a myth. These narrative forms are not deemed false *tout court* by Herodotus, but they do not fall into the field of the historian, since they are not verifiable.⁶⁹

The semantic evolution of the word *mythos* from a “speech act indicating authority” into “an imaginative tale”⁷⁰ is thus reflected in the scholarly debate on both ancient and modern mythology: i) a cluster of scholars supports the *authoritative function* of myths, interpreting them as the product of a community’s heritage:⁷¹ they are the recipients of the cultural, religious, and philosophical beliefs of a specific group, which considers its own mythology as the bearer of its ancestors’ knowledge.⁷² Myths entail a kernel of truth, since they represent the local traditional tales on a lost and powerful past which informed the present; nevertheless, they are set *illo tempore*,⁷³ in such a distant time that it is *felt* unhistorical – before human time – when gods, demigods, and heroes lived. Although the actions are cast in an undefined past, genealogies of gods and heroes and their socio-political interactions are jealously treasured with plenty of details in these accounts, as being a part of the local tradition.⁷⁴

ii) The second strand in scholarship labels myths as a branch of folktale or vice versa.⁷⁵ If *logos* appeals to the *reader’s* intellectual ability of rigorous enquiry, *mythos* is a spoken word which targets the *listener’s* συμπάθεια (affections, feelings).⁷⁶

Ancient myths are widely used as raw material for various modern folk oral and literary traditions in Greece; what then makes Neo-Hellenic myths distinctive from the

(πολλά καὶ ἄλλα ἀνεπισκέπτως); among them, this is a silly story (εὐήθης δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ ὄδε ὁ μῦθος) which they tell about Heracles”.

⁶⁹ For Herodotus’ historiographical method, see Murray (1987) 93-115; Lateiner (1989) 35-43; Fowler (2011) 46-47.

⁷⁰ Bremmer (2011) 539.

⁷¹ Dowden (1992) 120. See also Burkert (1979) 23: myth is a “traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance”; Bremmer (1987) 7: myths are “traditional tales relevant to society”; and Veyne (1988) 60, who highlights the myths’ authoritative aspect, stating that the Greeks considered their mythic tradition as true despite the fantastic elements in it.

⁷² Dowden (1992) 5; Hadjitaki-Kapsomenou (2001) 33-34.

⁷³ Dowden (1992) 120.

⁷⁴ Kirk (1970) 39-40; Burkert (1979) 23.

⁷⁵ See Kirk (1970) 35-37.

⁷⁶ Vernant (1980) 189.

ancient *mythoi*? Kyriakidis states that modern myths are characterised by a shorter and more simplified structure, and by an exemplary, didactic purpose.⁷⁷ Although Kyriakidis made an important division between *mythos* and myth, he blurs the line between the latter and folktales, of which a contradistinctive feature is the moralising end.⁷⁸ My impression is that when scholars try to pin down the peculiarities of myths, they actually dissolve them into folktales or small-scale *mythoi*. Modern myths should be rather considered the joining link between folktales and *mythoi*: in fact, with the former they sometimes share didactic overtones, and with the latter the selection of extraordinary, charismatic figures for the leading roles. In this way, the protagonists, gifted with an almost “divine aura”, are seen to be as exemplary as the ancient heroes, and are included in the community’s mythological lore. According to the terminology adopted in this thesis, a myth is a story which usually involves gods and heroes who acted in a far away, undefined past; notwithstanding its amiable and entertaining form, these characters’ deeds still matter for a certain community living in historical times. Myths are handed down orally within a group of people who feel these narrations to be important by reason of their cultural bearing: in a way, they hoard historical information on the life, customs, and beliefs of their ancestors.⁷⁹

The Modern Greek word for folktale, παραμύθι, derives from the Ancient Greek term παραμύθιον,⁸⁰ which belongs to the same semantic area of *mythos*, but expresses specifically an exhortation or a consolation. According to Babinotis’ definition, *paramythi* is a fantastic tale which provides the listener with comfort and pleasure.⁸¹ In continuity with the ancient meaning of the word, the modern *paramythi* includes a consolatory and didactic function and is to be understood as an amusing, comforting, and often moralising account which deals with the ethical values,

⁷⁷ Kyriakidis (1965²) 240. See also Ioannou (1973) 8: myths are allegories, concise stories with a didactic purpose.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Dowden (1992) 4: folktales as “traditional tales which ordinary folk used as a sort of moralizing entertainment”.

⁷⁹ Burkert (1979) 23; Bremmer (1987) 7; Dowden (1992) 120.

⁸⁰ In Greek demotic, the elision of the neuter ending –ov after the vowel ι is a quite common phenomenon.

⁸¹ Babinotis (2002²) lemma Παραμύθι; cf. Triantafyllides (1998) lemma Παραμύθι: “a folk (and / or artistic) fantastic tale of supernatural acts and wonderful stories, which are not presented as true and are intended to delight the listeners”.

aspirations, hopes, longings, and social dilemmas of a community. The protagonists are common figures, often described with stereotyped names. Even when the characters are granted extraordinary powers by luck or magic, or when they are presented as humanised animals, the community is still able to identify itself with them and, at the same time, to amuse itself, thanks to the introduction of various fabulous elements into a familiar background.⁸² In fact, just as in myths, time and space are left undefined; yet, folktales present a “human setting”, populated with human – not divine – beings. In Modern Greek tales, the protagonists are often in quest of their family, fortune, or love; they are kings aided by, or in conflict with, their sons or daughters; childless women wanting to give birth to a baby; poor fellows who, gifted with great traits or magical powers, accomplish difficult tasks and fight against their fate, their jealous kinsmen, or dreadful monsters.⁸³

Folk traditions deal with a set of historical figures and facts which are a source of pride for a community.⁸⁴ They are a treasure-trove of religious and moral values for new generations, they help the conservation of the local historical and cultural heritage, and they explain the features of the surrounding area.⁸⁵ As much as folk tales and myths, traditions are also product of the popular imagination and myth-making capacity, but they are felt to be as unquestionably true:⁸⁶ protagonists are national heroes, common people, and sometimes personified natural phenomena which characterise the life of the community; the plot evolves in a not distant, historical time and in a geographical background which the community is acquainted with.

According to the outlined genre categorisation of folk material, in my chapter on Greek Folklore I analyse five myths, twenty tales, and twelve traditions on Alexander. Myths are mainly concerned with Alexander’s relationship to the Sun. In one of the two archetypal versions of the myth, the Sun is introduced to account for the Macedonian’s divinity, whereas in the other he is challenged by Alexander. The Sun’s paternity is a motif which reminds us of the historical visit of the great conqueror

⁸² Kyriakidis (1965²) 265; Kirk (1970) 39-40; Ioannou (1973) 7-8; Bremmer (1987) 6.

⁸³ Cf. the set of Greek folktales in Megas (2012).

⁸⁴ Hadjitaki–Kapsomenou (2001) 35-36.

⁸⁵ Kyriakidis (1965²) 173 divides folk traditions into four categories: 1. mythological and personifications; 2. historical; 3. aetiological; 4. religious.

⁸⁶ Kyriakidis (1965²) 168; Ioannou (1973) 8.

to the oracle of Zeus-Ammon in 331 BC, and invests him with the heroic and divine aura typical of ancient myths; on the other hand, Alexander's desire to outdo the Sun and to become the king of the sky flags his hubristic behaviour, providing the account with a didactic value which is not uncommon in Modern Greek myths.

In folktales Alexander is regarded as a far-reaching conqueror in a constant quest for immortality and glory; because of his unquenchable longings, he travels to remote and imaginary places. In some tales he is pictured as a hero who, being naturally gifted with supernatural strength or empowered by magic, accomplishes fantastic deeds. The quest, magic, the dispute with family members or friends, and the wanderings in distant territories are all motifs which are typical in folktales. Characteristic of these tales is also the relentless reassurance of Alexander's wellbeing and rule, a consolatory message which provides an important insight of Hellenic culture: Greeks entrust the Macedonian hero's comeback with their salvation and the end of their troubles.

Alexander-traditions pivot on his historical persona: he acts in a circumscribed area or well-defined community, and traces of his passage, such as ruins of monuments or place names, are still verifiable by the audience, thus "proving the veracity" of the story told. The chronological frame is left undetermined, but it is clear that Alexander is living and performing his tasks in historical time, perhaps even a recent or contemporary one, since the geographical details anchor him in a close and easily accessible environment.

To this sizeable folk literary material there should be added two more genres in which Alexander features: songs and spells. In Greece there are two main types of popular music: *δημώδης* (demotic), which developed during the Byzantine period in demotic language, and *λαϊκή* (folk), a Greek version of "urban folk music" which arose in the 1930s and became mainstream in the sixties and seventies. Demotic songs⁸⁷ on Alexander are mainly reworkings of famous songs in which the protagonist is substituted or flanked by the Macedonian king: for example, in a song he "replaces" Digenes Akritas in a duel against a crab; in another, he fights with Mikrokonstantinos against the Turks besieging Constantinople.⁸⁸ Folk songs on Alexander parallel the legendary and fabulous motifs which became popular through oral and literary

⁸⁷ On demotic songs, see Beaton (2004) 78-82.

⁸⁸ Spyridakis (1953) 417.

tradition; among these motifs are Olympias' interest in witchcraft and the eternal hope for a return of the great conqueror as a saviour of the Hellenic nation. The majority of these songs owe part of their popularity to the well-known themes sung, and to the famous Greek musicians who composed or interpreted them, such as Manos Chatzidakis, George Dalaras, Nana Mouschouri, and Chrysanthos.⁸⁹

Spells are short sentences believed to have magical power, in which Alexander features as an apotropaic figure who casts the evil out. Spells are uttered when people feel in danger and seek for protection from noxious beings or violent natural forces; sometimes they are pronounced also to harm opponents in courts, workplaces and love-matters: the victim is bound to a bad fate by the occult essence of words, just as in the ancient *defixiones*.⁹⁰

Becoming a folk hero

Alexander the Great is surely one of the historical figures who repeatedly crops up in Hellenic literary production, being the protagonist of numerous narratives, poems, songs, sayings, and theatrical plays. His abiding presence in popular culture is closely related to Greeks' "ethnic memory", i. e. to their consciousness of being a collective group: whenever Greeks face new cultural and political challenges, the Macedonian hero comes back and stands at their side. Over the centuries Alexander has symbolised the epitome of the conqueror, but also the teacher of exemplary courage, fostering "national" pride and boosting the people's morale in times of hardships: he helped the Greek Orthodox community in the late Byzantine period when the Empire was endangered by both the crusaders and the Turks' invasions, and he fought together with Theodoros Kolokotronis in the revolution against the Ottomans. During the Μακεδονικὸς Ἀγώνας (*Macedonian Struggle*), the series of conflicts which took place in 1904-1908 between Greeks and Bulgarians in the region of Ottoman Macedonia, Alexander battled alongside Pavlos Melas for the Macedonian cause, a battle which he

⁸⁹ George Dalaras, *Αν ἦμουν ὁ Μεγαλέξανδρος* (*Were I Alexander the Great*); Nana Mouschouri, *Δεν ἦταν νησί* (*It was not an island*), composed by Manos Hadjidakis; Chrysanthos, *Το τραγούδι της τάβλας* (*The song of the board*), included in the soundtrack of Angelopoulos' *Megalexandros*.

⁹⁰ See examples of modern spells dated between the nineteenth and twentieth century in Spyridakis (1953) 415-416.

is still restlessly fighting nowadays, in order to safeguard the Graeco-Macedonian cultural heritage and Hellenic sovereignty over the northern territories from FYROM's irredentist claims. As Alexander constitutes a pillar of Greeks' collective ethnic memory and he has accompanied them as centuries have passed by, he is perceived as a proof of their ongoing Greekness since Antiquity: Alexander *is still alive*, therefore τὸ Ἑλληνικόν⁹¹ (Hellenicity) has never perished, and they, contemporary Greeks, are the legitimate descendants of the Ancient Greeks.

The Modern Greek mythological characterisation of Alexander as divine and invincible has its prototypes in the ancient tradition. Alexander himself invested in the creation of a mythological lore around his persona: during his childhood, his parents allegedly fostered in him a strenuous admiration for his heroic ancestry;⁹² moreover, his recognition as the son of Zeus-Ammon, duly supported by the intellectuals at his court,⁹³ was an important part in the empowerment of his political agenda and plan of

⁹¹ The first definition of *Hellēnikon* was given by Herodotus (VIII. 144. 2): “kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech (ὄμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον), and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life (θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἢθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα)”. [Transl. Godley].

⁹² Plu. *Alex.* 2. 1-2: “It is said that from his descent from Caranus Alexander was a Heraclid on his father's side; on his mother's instead he was an Aeacid from Neoptolemus. The aforementioned things are by all means believed”. Plutarch supports Alexander's divine descent by enumerating the portents which occurred after the Macedonian's conception and on the day of his birth (*Alex.* 2. 2-3); moreover, the historian highlights Olympias' engagement in mysteries and occult practices (*Alex.* 2. 1; 4: Olympias sleeping with snakes). Cf. D. S. XVII. 1. 5.

⁹³ Various testimonies scattered in the ancient sources attest the presence of at least four epic poets at the court of Alexander with the aim of singing his glorious deeds in the Persian campaign: Agis of Argos, Anaximenes of Lampsacus, Choerilus of Iasus, and Cleo of Sicily. All of them were disdained by later authors as unworthy poets and flatterers (see, e. g., Cic. *Pro Archia* 24; Str. XI. 5. 5); and Curtius names Agis and Cleo as strong supporters of Alexander's divinity and of the introduction of *proskynēsis* (VIII. 5. 13; VIII. 5. 21). Cf. Callisthenes, *FGrH* 124, F 14a (= Str. XVII. 1. 43): “Callisthenes says that Alexander especially aspired to go inland to the oracle, since he had heard that Perseus, as also Heracles, had gone there in earlier times; [...] the fellow expressly told the king that he, Alexander, was the son of Zeus”. In order to secure a *heroic* status for Alexander, Callisthenes supports the legend about the priest of Ammon's appellation of the Macedonian as “son of Zeus”. In any event, heroic recognition was granted to all the Argeads through their ancestry (see above fn. 92: the Argeads were Heraclids) and it did not entail divinity or apotheosis; Callisthenes too “keeps it to a heroic level”, adding that Alexander's desire to consult the oracle generated from his mythic ancestors Perseus and Heracles' visits to the shrine.

conquest.⁹⁴ However, during the Indian campaign (327-325 BC) the great conqueror found himself in need of something more powerful than a heroic status to unify his empire and to legitimise his unstoppable march eastwards: a full recognition of his divinity by the Macedonians and the Greeks in his entourage.⁹⁵ The insistence on Alexander's longing to rival his divine ancestors grows bigger in the descriptions of the events in India, as a way to excuse some of his risky or irrational decisions, such as the attack to the Aornos Rock, undertaken to outdo Heracles, who had failed in the attempt,⁹⁶ or the imitation of Dionysus' *bacchanalia* in Carmania.⁹⁷ In 324 BC, close to the end of his life, Alexander was also recognised as θεός ἀνίκητος (invincible god)⁹⁸ by the Greeks living on the mainland, a title which he gained as an acknowledgement of

Furthermore, the historian is presented by Curtius (VIII. 5. 8) as a strong opponent to the king's later claims of divinity.

⁹⁴ For the scholarly debate on Alexander's religious beliefs and emulation of his ancestor heroes, see Tarn (1948) II. 347-374; Edmunds (1971) 363-391; Bosworth, (1988.a) 278-290; *idem* (1996) 129-131; Fredricksmeyer (2003) 253-278; Worthington (2003) 236-241; Mossé (2004) 73-83; Dreyer (2009) 218-234; Leiva Rodríguez (2015) 10-16. For Heracles' importance and influence on Alexander, see Amitay (2010) 9-26.

⁹⁵ Curt. VIII. 5. 5: "And now, when all was ready in advance, thinking that the time was then ripe for what he had long conceived in his vicious mind, he began to consider how to usurp divine honours (*quonam modo caelestes honores usurparet coepit agitare*). He wished, not only to be called, but also to be believed to be the son of Jupiter (*Iovis filium non dici tantum se, sed etiam credi volebat*) [...]. VIII. 5. 6: Alexander, who desired such things, did not fall short of pernicious adulation (*perniciosa adulatio*), the constant evil of kings, whose power is more frequently overthrown by flattery than by foes".

⁹⁶ D. S. XVII. 85. 2. See also Arr. *An.* IV. 29. 7-30.1.

⁹⁷ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 10 (= *Moralia* 332a); Arr. *An.* VI. 28. 1-2. Arrian doubts the veracity of Alexander's Bacchic pomp; nevertheless, the passage – even if invented by a later source – still proves the importance of Dionysos in Alexander's campaign in India. See also Goukowsky (1981) 32-33.

⁹⁸ The idea that Alexander was invincible was already present in the Greeks' mindset: Plu. *Alex.* 3. 5: on the day of Alexander's birth, Philip II achieved three victories (the defeat of Potidea, Parmenio's victory over the Illyrians, and the horse-race at the Olympic games), prompting the seers to prophesy the baby's invincibility: τὸν παῖδα τρισὶ νίκαις συγγεγεννημένον ἀνίκητον ἔσεσθαι. Furthermore, Plutarch (*Alex.* 14. 4) describes Alexander's visit to Delphi in order to consult the oracle before his Persian campaign. Since the Macedonian arrived during the so-called ἀποφράδες ἡμέραι, days on which no business was done, Pythia did not want to deliver the oracle. Alexander then tried to drag her to the temple; at this point, overwhelmed by his ardour (σπουδή) and on the spur of the moment, she said that he was invincible: ἀνίκητος εἶ, ὦ παῖ. Cf. D. S. XVII. 51. 3, who sets the story in Libya, where the oracle of Ammon bestowed Alexander the title of *invincible*. Tarn (1948) II. 342-343; Goukowsky (1978) 60-61.

his numerous victories, bravery, and the great military acumen displayed during his campaign.⁹⁹ Immediately after his death, his idolisation reached new dimensions with the flourishing of numerous legends about his sayings and deeds.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding the disputable historicity of these narrations, Greeks welcomed this legendary material as if true and perpetuated it for centuries.¹⁰¹

If we compare Kirk's list of the twenty-four most common themes in Ancient Greek heroic and divine mythology¹⁰² with the Hellenistic and early Imperial¹⁰³ traditions on Alexander, thirteen contact points can be seen. In the same way as many ancient Greek gods and heroes, Alexander has an unusual birth (n. 23),¹⁰⁴ either because of the odd phenomena which characterised his conception and his day of birth,¹⁰⁵ or because of Olympias' recourse to Nectanebo's magic in order to conceive a baby.¹⁰⁶ Alexander's longing for the unknown leads him to undertake a long campaign, which encompasses city foundations (n. 17),¹⁰⁷ contests (n. 7),¹⁰⁸ a plan of revenge (n.

⁹⁹ Hyperides, *Against Demosthenes*, fr. 7: "In the Assembly you, Demosthenes, conceded that Alexander might be the son of Zeus and Poseidon too if he wished (καὶ τοῦ Διὸς καὶ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος εἶναι εἰ βούλοιο), and [...] to set up a statue of Alexander, the king and god invincible (στήσαι εἰκόνα Ἀλεξάνδρου βασιλέως τοῦ ἀνικῆτου θεοῦ)". Mossé (2004) 81-82 highlights that the acknowledgement of Alexander's divinity by the Greeks was not a religious act, but simply a political one: "intoxicated by his victories [... the Macedonian] wanted to make a show of his authority".

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion on the chronology of the legendary material on Alexander contained in the Vulgate and in the various recensions of the *Alexander Romance*, see Stoneman (1991) 8-17. For the Diadochs' emulation and use of the image of Alexander in their political agenda, see Goukowsky (1978) 116-135; Dahmen (2007) 9-18.

¹⁰¹ For Greeks' attitude towards their myths, see Veyne (1988) 60: "for the Ancient Greeks, a mythic tradition is true despite the marvellous; they sought a kernel of truth behind the lies".

¹⁰² Kirk (1970) 187-189.

¹⁰³ By *early Imperial* I mean the Greek literary production during the first three centuries of the Roman Empire.

¹⁰⁴ Numbers refer to Kirk's list (1970: 187-189). Cf. G. Anderson (2012) 81-102.

¹⁰⁵ Plu. *Alex.* 2-4: a thunderbolt falls on Olympias' womb; Philip II dreams of marking his wife's womb with a seal in the shape of a lion; Olympias is found sleeping with a snake.

¹⁰⁶ AR (α) I. 4-7.

¹⁰⁷ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 5 (= *Mor.* 328E): Alexander established more than seventy cities among the barbarians; cf. AR (α) III. 35.

¹⁰⁸ AR (α) I. 18-19: Alexander travels to Italy to compete with his chariot in the athletic games held in Pisa.

11),¹⁰⁹ and the quest (n. 6) and the loss of immortality because of his deceitful daughter (n. 14).¹¹⁰ Furthermore, during his peregrinations, Alexander has to solve riddles and to find promptly ingenious solutions to problems (n. 1);¹¹¹ he goes through transformations and disguises (n. 2);¹¹² he meets imaginary people living in fabulous far-away places, and he fights against monsters (n. 4).¹¹³

In ancient lore, the Macedonian is generally considered pious: he reveres the gods, he takes care of the displacement of both his enemies and kinsmen (n. 9),¹¹⁴ and his death is regrettably foretold by prophecies and seers he trusts (n. 19).¹¹⁵ On the other hand, his excessive desire for conquest is considered hubristic (n. 8)¹¹⁶ and he accidentally kills his friend Clitus (n. 3) because of an unaccomplished sacrifice.¹¹⁷

This comparison shows that during the Hellenistic and the early Imperial period Alexander is deeply transformed into a myth, one destined to last in the Greek

¹⁰⁹ Revenge on the Persians for having burnt the Acropolis in the fifth century BC during the Persian wars against Greece: see Arr. *An.* II. 14. 4: in his answer to Darius' first letter, Alexander explicitly says: "I came to Asia in order to take vengeance on the Persians (τιμωρήσασθαι βουλόμενος Πέρσας διέβην ἐς τὴν Ἀσίαν)". Cf. AR (α) I. 23, suppl. A: "But I shall come in person and take back from you all the tributes you took from him [Philip] (καὶ οὐς [φόρους] ἔλαβες παρ' αὐτοῦ, ἐγὼ πρὸς σε παρῶν λήψομαι καὶ παρὰ σοῦ)".

¹¹⁰ AR (β) II. 39-41; cf. AR (α) II. 39-40.

¹¹¹ AR (α) III. 5-6: Alexander discussing with the Brahmins (Naked Philosophers); (β) II. 23: Alexander tricks the Persian army at Issus.

¹¹² AR (α) II. 14-15: Alexander visits the Persian court in disguise; III. 22-23: disguised as Antigonus, meets Candace.

¹¹³ D. S. XVII. 77. 1-3: Alexander's encounter with the Amazons and their queen Thalestris. AR (β) II. 23-44: narration of Alexander's *mirabilia* in his first letter to Olympias and Aristotle.

¹¹⁴ D. S. XVII. 69. 3: on the way to Persepolis, the Macedonian army meets a group of wretched Greeks, who had been deported and mutilated by previous Persian Kings. Alexander is deeply touched by their poor conditions, and he is so affected that he cries most of all. AR (β) II. 21: Alexander thanks Providence for making him victorious over the Persians and he gives an honourable burial to Darius.

¹¹⁵ AR (β) II. 44: Alexander is foretold of his death in the City of the Sun; III. 24: Pharaoh Sesonchosis' prophecy; III. 30: the bad omen of the half-beast-born baby in Babylon.

¹¹⁶ AR (β) II. 40: two birds warn Alexander not to proceed in his march towards the Island of the Blessed.

¹¹⁷ Plu. *Alex.* 50-51: Clitus did not accomplish his sacrifice, a fault which was immediately interpreted as a bad omen by the soothsayers. But, according to Plutarch, Clitus' death was not caused by the Fate's will only: he brought about his end with his behaviour, for he was rough and stubborn; similarly, Arr. *An.* IV. 8-9: Alexander sacrificed to the Dioscuroi, but he failed to sacrifice to Dionysus; thus the divine wrath together with Clitus' impunity drove the latter to death.

tradition. In fact, the core of the story which later became known as Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* began to develop around the third-second centuries BC and flourished particularly in the third century AD.¹¹⁸ During these six centuries, the narrative of the *Romance* was constantly enriched with new legendary facts and curious details about the Macedonian's life and campaign, in consonance with the great interest aroused by the exoticism, *mirabilia*, and the lives of sages and holy men.¹¹⁹ This hodgepodge of curiosities, mythology, and historical events was not forgotten but, on the contrary, further developed in the Byzantine¹²⁰ and Ottoman periods through the *Rhimada* and the *Phyllada of Alexander*.¹²¹ These two narrations kept alive in the Greeks' memory the image of a heroic Alexander, who in the nineteenth century was then ready to become the protagonist of the Modern Greek popular tradition and of Angelopoulos' film in 1980.

¹¹⁸ Stoneman (1991) 8-17.

¹¹⁹ On the literary production of the culturally thriving Hellenistic period, see Whitmarsh (2014) 400-410.

¹²⁰ Vasilikopoulou (1999) 1311-1312: Alexander the Great is considered the first king of *all* the Greeks and, therefore, the ancestor of the Byzantine Emperors.

¹²¹ See Holton (1973) 5-23.

Chapter two

Folk Alexander: an all-Greek alloy

τον Μέγα Αλέξανδρο τον “γνωρίζω” παιδιόθεν.¹²²

I have “known” Alexander the Great since childhood.

Angelos Chaniotis

In this chapter I discuss Alexander the Great’s role in Modern Greek folklore, with a special focus on folktales, myths, and traditions, although examples of songs, poems and spells will be provided. This material was handed down orally for a long time and a great part of it was eventually collected by folklorists during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹²³ Unfortunately, it mostly lies scattered in old volumes in the libraries of mainland Greece which are not easily accessible to a non-Greek reader. With my study, I hope to save the memory of these popular narrations and to ignite interest in the Reception of Classics in Hellenic Folklore beyond Greece.

The analysis of the Alexander-folk production is here organised according to the content and not, as customary in folkloristic studies, on the basis of provenance: this choice was made in order to avoid repetitions. In fact, the Alexander-folk production comes from different regions of the Greek-speaking world, such as Macedonia, the Pontic Area (especially from Trabzon, former Trapezous, on the Black Sea coast of Northern-Eastern Turkey), Thrace, Thessaly, Epirus, Laconia, Naxos, Chios, Crete, and a substantial number from Zante; notwithstanding the wide geographical

¹²² Angelos Chaniotis, paper read at the Benaki Museum (Athens, 4 November 2015) on occasion of Corinne Jouanno’s presentation of *To Μυθιστόρημα του Αλεξάνδρου. Γέννηση και μεταμορφώσεις* (Athens 2015), Greek edition of the original *Naissance et métamorphoses du Roman d’Alexandre* (Paris 2002), translated by Marina Loukaki.

¹²³ Numerous folktales, songs and spells about Alexander are still circulating orally in Greece; in the last two decades of the nineteenth century the founder of Greek folklore, Nikolaos Politis, and his collaborators began the collection and systematisation of this precious material by travelling throughout Greece and asking elderly people to recount their traditions and tales (for the various methods of collection of folktales adopted by folklorists, see Thompson (1977) 406-412). For collections of Greek folk narratives, see Geldart (1884); Garnett (1896); Dawkins (1953); *idem* (1955); Ioannou (1973); for Macedonian-Greek folktales, see Miliopoulos (1951); for a complete guide to Greek folk culture, see Puchner (2009), who includes bibliography in English, French, German and Italian.

distribution, there is a kernel of common themes, of mythological and literary references, and of shared religious and moral values, which can be defined as “Panhellenic”. Thus, depending on their content, folktales and myths have been divided into *types*, which are basic story-plots, and into *motifs*, i. e. the episodes forming a type.¹²⁴ When a type is subject to minor changes (e. g., geographical and personal names, or details secondary to the narration), the tale is called a *variant*; if a plot is modified in its fundamental features, the tale is considered a *version* of the story that is taken as the archetype.¹²⁵ In my systematisation, I have named *cycle* a set of Alexander-stories based on the same type, with its numerous variants and versions.¹²⁶ In Greek folklore there can be traced five main cycles:

- a) Alexander and the Mermaids;
- b) Alexander and the Nereids;
- c) Alexander and the Sun;
- d) Alexander with animal ears;
- e) Jealousy and Alexander’s death.

Alexander-traditions often share some of the motifs of the cycles, but they are combined with elements serving a particular community, such as the Macedonian’s building skills linked to the description of several monuments in the Greek countryside. Etymologies, (pseudo-)aetiologies, and descriptions of geographical elements or of mythological and historical events of local interest populate these narratives.

¹²⁴ Megas (2012) introduction, XXXVIII. For a catalogue of the Folktale motifs, see Thompson (1955-1958).

¹²⁵ Megas (2012) introduction, XXXVIII. Thompson (1977) 413-427. For a catalogue of the types in the international folkloristic tradition, see Aarne, Thompson (1961); cf. AAVV, *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, <http://wwwuser.gwdg.de/~enzmaer/erztypen-engl.html#top> [accessed on 20-08-2015].

¹²⁶ I have grouped versions of a type into a cycle only when the divergent elements do not change the plot so massively as to allow us to consider it a new type; when differences from the archetypal type denote a certain purpose, the version is provided *in extenso* for the benefit of the discussion. For each archetype, my English translation is provided together with the original Greek text; for original texts of versions and variants the reader is directed to appendix II.

The Cycles

In what follows a survey of tales divided by cycle is given with translation and commentary. References to the Classical, Byzantine, and Modern strands of tradition are discussed together with an analysis of the differences between existent versions and variants. Furthermore, where possible, the Aarne-Thompson type and the Thompson motif number will be quoted, in order to show where this material stands in the international folkloristic production, and to highlight its novelties and peculiarities.

The story-types of the first two cycles, “Alexander and the Mermaid” and “Alexander and the Nereids”, reconnect with Pseudo-Callisthenes’ narration of Alexander’s travels into fabulous lands and his failed attempts to pursue the so-called ἀθάνατο νερό (the “water of immortality” or “water of life”). The β recension of the Greek *Romance* contains two letters written by Alexander to his mother Olympias to tell her of his most extravagant explorations of distant places and encounters with unknown populations.¹²⁷ At the end of the first letter (II. 39-41), the conqueror narrates to his mother the journey to the *Land of Darkness* and how his unfaithful and cowardly cook Andreas had found by chance the *Source of Life*, long coveted by Alexander. The story is that, after a long march of three days, when the army reached a place where the air was less dark and fragrant, the cook was sent to prepare food. Upon washing dried fishes in a clear spring, he noticed that, once rinsed with that water, they came back to life.¹²⁸ Fearing his king’s reaction, he decided to keep what had happened secret but, before leaving the place, he drank from the spring and

¹²⁷ AR (β) II. 23-41 and III. 27-29. The *mirabilia letter* in book II of the *Romance* is generally compared with the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgameš* in respect to the motifs of the journey to the Outer Ocean and the failed quest for immortality: see Henkelman (2010) 323-355. Cf. Ogden (2010) 205-2013, who compares the description of Pseudo-Callisthenes’ *Makarōn Chōra* with the Homeric land of night (*Od.* XI. 12-19), the Hesiodic Isles of the Blessed populated by heroes (*Op.* 169-172), and the Orphic tables.

¹²⁸ The dried fish coming back to life is an overarching motif in the Greek mindset: attested already in the fifth century BC in the Herodotean account of the prophecy of Artayctes’ end (IX. 120), it reappears in Pseudo-Callisthenes’ narration; via the *Romance* it finds its place in Modern folklore. One famous example is the Thracian demotic song featuring Alexander the Great and Mikrokonstantinos (i. e. Constantine Palaeologus) drinking and eating together at the time of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. In the song, the fish coming back to life is a symbol of the fall of the city into the enemy’s hands (see below).

stored some of the water in a silver vessel. On the way back to light, Alexander cried for his misfortune, not being able to find the spring of immortality and to sip from it. When the king discovered the cook's secret, he punished him severely; angered by this, Andreas decided to give the remaining water of life contained in the vessel to Kale, Alexander's daughter. At this point, Alexander banished his daughter from life among men and he cursed her, telling that she would be called "Neraida, since she obtained immortality from water (*nero*)":¹²⁹

[Alexander says to his daughter:] "Take your clothes and get out of my sight; see there, you have become an immortal spirit. You were called Kale, and now I shall call you Kale of the mountains and the hills, as from now on you shall dwell there. You will be called Nereid, for from water you received the gift of immortality (καλέσω σε Καλήν τῶν ὀρέων, ὅτι ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῦ λοιποῦ κατοικήσεις. ἔση δὲ κεκλημένη Νεραΐδα, ὡς ἐκ τοῦ νεροῦ τὰ αἶδια δεξαμένη, τουτέστιν τὰ ἀθάνατα)." [...].

As for the cook, I ordered that he had a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea. He thereupon became a spirit himself and went away to live in a corner of the sea (ὁ δὲ ῥίφεις ἐγένετο δαίμων καὶ ἀπελθὼν κατώκησεν ἐν τινὶ τόπῳ τῆς θαλάσσης).

This account has been reworked by Greek popular imagination, which is particularly inclined to give life to seas, rivers, lakes, and mountains:¹³⁰ in fact, these natural features of the landscape surround and dictate the rhythms of life in the countryside. The Mermaid and the Nereid tales, both derived from Kale's story in the *Romance*, are to be considered two versions of the same archetypal plot of Alexander's quest for the *athanato nero*.¹³¹ These tales are attested throughout mainland Greece and the

¹²⁹ AR (β) II. 41.

¹³⁰ On the interaction between life, landscape and mythology, see Buxton (1994) 80-113.

¹³¹ Cf., for example, the Mermaid-tale transcribed by Karkavitsas (see below) and the Nereid-tale attested in Gortynia, Acardia (for the Greek original text and English translation of the Arcadian tale, see appendix II, n. 8). These two accounts share all the salient features of the plot, inasmuch as the Arcadian can be considered a short variant of the Mermaid-type.

islands; their remakings and local adaptations generated two prolific cycles, each one displaying numerous variants and versions.

A) Alexander and the Mermaid cycle

Folk tale type (Aarne-Thompson):

- Main type: n. 551, the water of life.
- Secondary types: n. 300, dragon-slayer; n. 460b, journey in search of fortune; n. 465a, the quest for the unknown; n. 550, strong men / hero overcoming obstacles.

Folk tale motifs (Thompson): culture hero overcoming monsters (A531); dragon guarding the treasure (B11.6.2); the mermaid (B81); similarities with the motifs of the Harpies (B52) and the Sirens (B53); plant of immortality (D1346.5).

This folk type shows how Alexander manages to obtain the water of immortality after a challenging journey and a fight against a dragon. The Macedonian stores the precious liquid at home in a vessel, but his sister, ignoring its content, pours it on wild onions. According to the different variants, either because of distress when she understands her mistake, or because Alexander curses her, she becomes a mermaid and goes to live in the sea.

I present this widespread oral folk tale in the literary shape given to it by Andreas Karkavitsas, a famous Greek novelist of the second half of the nineteenth century:¹³²

Όταν ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος πολέμησε κι έκαμε δικό του τον κόσμο, φώναξε τους σοφούς και τους ρώτησε:

¹³² Karkavitsas A. (1973), Άπαντα II, Athens: http://www.snhell.gr/kids/content.asp?id=184&cat_id=7 [accessed on 02-08-2016]. On Karkavitsas (1866-1922), see Beaton (1994) 78. Cf. this version of the tale with Megias (2012) 200-202. Spyridakis (1953) 404, n. 4, reports the tale with a little variation at the end: in Crete inhabitants say that, when the mermaid sings her sweet songs, the sailors listen to them carefully and learn new routes.

- “Πώς θα μπορέσω να ζήσω πολλά χρόνια; Ήθελα να κάμω πολλά καλά στον κόσμο”.
- “Βρίσκεται τρόπος” αποκρίθηκαν οι σοφοί “μα είναι κάπως δύσκολος”.
- “Δε σας ρώτησα” είπε ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος “να μου πείτε αν είναι δύσκολος· ποιος είναι θέλω να μάθω”.
- “Να βρεις το αθάνατο νερό” του είπαν οι σοφοί.
- “Και πού είναι αυτό το αθάνατο νερό;”
- “Ανάμεσα σε δυο βουνά. Μα τόσο γρήγορα ανοιγοκλείνουν, που και το πιο γοργόφτερο πουλί δεν προφταίνει να περάσει. Πολλά ξακουσμένα βασιλόπουλα θέλησαν να το αποκτήσουν· μα έχασαν τη ζωή τους άδικα. Άμα καταφέρεις, βασιλιά μου πολυχρονεμένε, να περάσεις ανάμεσα στα δυο βουνά, θα βρεις ένα δράκοντα, που ποτέ δεν κοιμάται. Αν σκοτώσεις τον δράκοντα, θα το πάρεις”.

Όταν το άκουσε ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος, πρόσταξε αμέσως να σελώσουν το άλογό του, τον Βουκεφάλα. Φτερά δεν είχε, μα πετούσε σαν πουλί. Καβαλίκεψε και σε λίγο έφτασε στο μέρος που του είχαν πει οι σοφοί. Στέκεται και βλέπει τα βουνά ν’ανοιγοσφαιλούν αδιάκοπα και τόσο γρήγορα, που ούτε πουλί δεν μπορούσε να περάσει. Μα ο βασιλιάς δεν τα χάνει. Δίνει μια βιτσιά και πέρασε ανέγγιχτος ανάμεσα στα δυο βουνά. Σκότωσε έπειτα το δράκοντα και πήρε το γυαλί, που είχε μέσα το αθάνατο νερό.

Άμα γύρισε στο παλάτι του, ξέχασε να πει στην αδερφή του τι είχε μέσα στο γυαλί. Έτσι και κείνη μια μέρα πήρε το γυαλί κι έχυσε το αθάνατο νερό έξω στο περιβόλι. Το νερό έπεσε σε μια αγριοκρεμμυδιά, κι από τότε αυτό το φυτό δεν μαραίνεται ποτέ.

Όταν έμαθε η βασιλοπούλα το κακό που έκαμε, ήταν απαρηγόρητη.

“Θεέ μου!” λέει, “δε θέλω να πιστέψω, πως μια μέρα θα πεθάνει ο αδερφός μου. Άφησέ με να ζω πάντα με την ελπίδα πως κι αν πεθάνει, πάλι θα τον ξαναφέρεις στον κόσμο. Ποιος ξέρει αν δεν έρθουν δύσκολα χρόνια για την πατρίδα μου;”

Αμέσως η αδερφή του βασιλιά έγινε από τη μέση και κάτω ψάρι και πήδηξε στη θάλασσα. Έγινε Γοργόνα! Από τότε γυρίζει πάντα στη θάλασσα κι άμα δει κανένα καράβι, τρέχει και το ρωτά:

“Καράβι, караβάκι· ζει ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος;”

Αλίμονο στον караβοκύρη που θα της πει πως πέθανε. Η Γοργόνα αναταράζει τα νερά, σηκώνει βουνά τα κύματα και χάνεται το καράβι.

Μα ο έξυπνος караβοκύρης αν πει:

“Ζει, κυρά μου, ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος. Ζει και βασιλεύει, και τον κόσμο κυριεύει!”

Τότε η Γοργόνα λάμπει από τη χαρά της. Απλώνει τα ξανθά της μαλλιά και τα κύματα ησυχάζουν αμέσως. Γελούν τα πέλαγα και τ'ακρογιάλια, κι οι ναύτες από τα καράβια τους ακούνε μαγεμένοι τη φωνή της Γοργόνας, που ξαναλέει τραγουδιστά:

“Ζει ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος

ζει και βασιλεύει

και τον κόσμο κυριεύει!” ...

When Alexander the Great fought and made the world his own property, he summoned wise men and asked them:

- “How will I be able to live many years? I like to do a lot of good things in the world”.

- “There is a way” responded the wise, “but it is somewhat difficult”.

- “I did not ask you”, said King Alexander, “to tell me whether it is difficult; I want to know how”.

- “You should find the water of immortality” told the sages.

- “And where is this water of immortality?”

- “Between two mountains; but they open and close so rapidly that even the swiftest bird does not fly as fast as to pass. Many renowned princes tried to get this water, but they died in vain. My long-lived king, if you manage to pass between the two mountains, you will find a dragon that never sleeps. If you kill the dragon, you will have the water”.

When King Alexander heard this, he immediately gave orders for his horse Bucephalas to be saddled. The horse did not have wings, but he could fly like a bird. After a short ride, Alexander reached the place described to him by the sages; he stood there and he saw the mountains open and close unceasingly and so fast that not even a bird could get through. But the King did not lose his courage: with a switch to his horse he passed untouched between

the two mountains. Alexander then killed the dragon and took the glass vessel which contained the water of immortality.

When the king returned to his palace, he forgot to tell his sister about the content of the glass vessel. So one day she took it and poured the water of immortality outside in the garden. The water fell upon a wild onion plant, and since then this plant never withers away.

When the princess learned the bad mistake that she did, she became inconsolable. “My God”, says she, “I can not believe that one day my brother will die. Let me live always with the hope that if he dies, again you will bring him back to the world. Who knows if hard times come for my country?”

Immediately the king’s sister became a fish from the waist down and jumped into the sea. She became a Mermaid! Since then she always goes around in the sea and, when she sees a boat, she hastens towards it and asks:

“Oh boat, little boat; is King Alexander still alive?”

Woe to the skipper who will reply to her that Alexander died. The Mermaid agitates the waters, raises waves as high as the mountains and the boat gets lost (in the storm).

But if the clever skipper says:

“My lady, King Alexander is alive. He lives and reigns and conquers the world!” Then the Mermaid glows with joy. She stretches her blonde hair and the waves calm down immediately. The seas and the beaches laugh and, from their ships, the sailors listen enchanted to the voice of the Mermaid, who sings repeatedly:

“King Alexander is still alive,
he is alive and he reigns
and he conquers the world!” ...

An inscription from Pella dated 206 AD attests the worship of the Virgin Goddess Syria Gyrbiatissa (Συρία θεὰ Παρθένοσ Γυρβιάτισσα), who was brought from Syria to Macedon during the third century BC.¹³³ Her domain included the control of water-sources, fertility, and death, and she was identified with Aphrodite, considered one of

¹³³ For the literary and material evidence of the worship of the goddess Syria in Pella and in the surrounding area of Bottiaia (Emathia), see Chrysostomou (1992) 103-117.

the most important deities in the Macedonian Pantheon. The Virgin Syria was portrayed either carried by sea animals, or as a fish with a womanly head; sometimes as a mermaid, half fish and half human. These representations became part of the Ancient Macedonian lore and constituted the *historical* precedent for the creation of the legend of Alexander's sister.¹³⁴

In the folktale, Alexander's sister inherited the fate of the cook Andreas in the *Romance* and turned from a human into a mermaid. This metamorphosis is similar to the transformation Glaucus underwent in Greek mythology.¹³⁵ But, differently from the old fisher, she neither ate a magic herb, nor drank an elixir of life:¹³⁶ she simply wasted it. Her distress caused her metamorphosis into an immortal sea creature. The Modern Greek word for mermaid is γοργόνα;¹³⁷ in Ancient Greek mythology, the Gorgons are the daughters of Phorcys and Ceto, the ancestors of all the marine monsters. They are three sea deities known under the names Sthenno, Medusa, and Euryale, and they abide beyond the ocean.¹³⁸ Although in ancient Greek vases and sculpture the Gorgons are usually portrayed – similarly to the Harpies – as wicked winged women with serpentine locks of hair, wide mouths, large eyes, and a fixed gaze, their bond with the maritime world is made clear by the name Euryale, meaning “the lady of the wide sea”.¹³⁹ The Gorgons' sisters Graeae and Sirens were also pictured as swans and winged ladies, and only in the Middle Ages did their representation as sea divinities or fish-monsters become the most common one.¹⁴⁰ The specific attributes of the Graeae, the Sirens, and the Gorgons – old age, melodic voice, and petrifying gaze respectively – were often confused in antiquity and, ultimately, mingled together in the Byzantine period, giving life to a fierce creature, half-fish and half-woman, who rules the oceans and the seas, seducing the sailors with her ability to sing.

¹³⁴ Chrysostomou (1992) 109; (1998) 128.

¹³⁵ Paus. IX. 22. 7.

¹³⁶ In the Nereid-type Alexander's sister(s) drink(s) the water of life, but not in the Mermaid-type.

¹³⁷ Interestingly, in the folktale Alexander's sister is unnamed until her metamorphosis, after which she is named *Gorgona*. In reality, Alexander had three sisters: Cynnane, Thessalonike, and Cleopatra. For their lives, their tragic ends, and the relative bibliography, see Carney (1988) 385-404.

¹³⁸ Hes. *Th.* 270-276. Politis (1980²) 338.

¹³⁹ Εὐρυάλη from εὐρύς, wide, and ἅλς, sea.

¹⁴⁰ Politis (1980²) 343-344.

Alexander's Gorgona is in line with the Ancient and Byzantine reinterpretation and fusion of mythological sea divinities: in the tale, similarly to the Homeric Sirens who seduced and bewitched Odysseus' men,¹⁴¹ with her voice she enchants the sailors passing by, who are said to be *mageumenoí*, i. e. in an ecstatic state, under the effects of a spell. In her artistic representations, she often has two fish tails, a motif already attested in the ancient iconography related to the maritime god Triton.¹⁴²

Alexander also encompasses Ancient and Byzantine motifs. In the opening line of the tale, he is said to possess the entire world, to be a cosmocrator, the ruler of the world. The Alexander-historians never question Alexander's ability to conquer the entire *oecumene*: the release of the Gordian knot ensured the fulfilment of the prophecy of world-rule¹⁴³ and he is called *anikētos* by the Pythia.¹⁴⁴ Diodorus adds to this confidence stating that the oracle of Ammon granted to the Macedonian the rule of the whole world.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Plutarch and Diodorus say that Alexander aimed at reaching the Ganges – which meant the end of the world to him, for the river was believed to lead to the Outer Ocean surrounding the entire *oecumene* – but he was prevented in this achievement by a revolt of his exhausted army, the only obstacle left to his plans.¹⁴⁶ In any event, at least in the historiographical tradition, the Macedonian's desire to see the end of the world was fulfilled: Diodorus states that Alexander eventually managed to reach the Ocean when he sailed down the Hydaspes, which was described as one of its southern tributaries.¹⁴⁷ In the *Romance*, Alexander goes even beyond the *oecumene*, by descending into the depths of the sea (*AR* (β) II. 38B) and ascending into the sky carried up by birds (II. 41). Moreover, from the Christianised recension ε, there is a certain insistence on the role of Providence in the

¹⁴¹ Hom. *Od.* XII. 41-46.

¹⁴² See the two-tailed Triton in a mosaic of the second century BC stored at the Archaeological Museum of Sparta: <http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/Z34.2.html> [accessed on 2-10-2015].

¹⁴³ Plu. *Alex.* 18. 1-4. Arr. *An.* II. 3. 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 14. 4. Cf. D. S. XVII. 51. 3: [the answer of the priest of Ammon to Alexander's questions:] "The proof of his divine birth will be the greatness of his deeds; as formerly he has been undefeated (ἀήττητον), so from now on he will be unconquerable (ἀνίκητον) forever".

¹⁴⁵ D. S. XVII. 51. 2.

¹⁴⁶ D. S. XVII. 94-96. 1; Plu. *Alex.* 62. 1 - 63. 1.

¹⁴⁷ D. S. XVII. 96.1.

Macedonian's *cosmocratoria* (world kingdom) which will last through the centuries down to modern times.¹⁴⁸

Further to Alexander's invincibility as a conqueror, the tale remarks on his wisdom, since before starting his journey he holds discussions with a group of sages. The motif of the Macedonian's encounters and dialogues with learned people and philosophers has its historical foundation in his upbringing under Aristotle's aegis,¹⁴⁹ but also on his admiration for the haughtiness and grandeur of the Cynic Diogenes,¹⁵⁰ whom he visits during his stay in Corinth (late 336 BC). The "sage Alexander" motif was largely exploited in the debates of the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period¹⁵¹ and in the Late Antique and Medieval literary production:¹⁵² to give an example, it will suffice to say that the tradition on the conqueror's visit to the *Gymnosophistae* is attested and developed in the *Alexander Romance* (III. 5-6), in the Berlin Papyrus 13044 (first century BC), in the Geneva Papyrus 271 (second century AD), in Palladius' *On the Brahmans of India* (fifth century AD), and in the *Correspondence of Alexander and Dindimus* (the Latin version of the original Greek probably dates to the eighth century).¹⁵³ The motif reappears in the Ottoman period, when the Greeks were in need of a saviour who would free them from the Turkish yoke with his courage and acumen.

The Greeks' hope for the hero's return, which in the folktale is just hinted at the prayer Gorgona addresses to God, is more expressively shown in the oral tradition of the Karaghiozis shadow-theatre of the twentieth century. In the play *Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος και ο Καταραμένος Δράκος / Όφις* (*Alexander the Great and the Cursed*

¹⁴⁸ The idea of Alexander's predestination to conquer the entire world started in Jewish tradition as early as the second century BC with the first book of the Maccabees: cf. 1. 3: "and he reached the ends of the world (ἕως ἄκρων τῆς γῆς) [...] and the world went quiet with his presence". See also Stoneman (2008) 222-223.

¹⁴⁹ Plu. *Alex.* 7; 8. 3.

¹⁵⁰ The account of the encounter is given by Arrian (*An.* VII. 1) and by Plutarch (*Alex.* 14. 1-3), who adds the famous quote: "if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes". For the tradition of the encounter between Diogenes and Alexander and its interpretation, see Bosman (2007) 51-63.

¹⁵¹ Some authors take Alexander as a symbol of greed and a brutal king to be opposed to the wise philosopher; others highlight the Macedonian's genuine interest in philosophy and see in him the embodiment of the idea of philosopher-king. Either ways, Alexander becomes an omnipresent figure in ancient philosophy, a *vademecum* to think with (see Stoneman (2003) 325-343).

¹⁵² Cary (1967²) 83-95; 105.

¹⁵³ See Stoneman (1994) introduction, IX-XXXVI. Cf. Cary (1967²) 13-15.

Dragon / Snake), Alexander introduces himself to Karaghiozis explaining to him that he is the famous Macedonian, whom often the Greeks call upon when facing hardships;¹⁵⁴ in a less famous version of the play, *Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος και τα αινίγματα της Βεζυροπούλας* (*Alexander the Great and the riddles of the Vizier's daughter*), instead of slaying the dragon the hero saves the villagers by solving the three impossible riddles of the vizier's daughter. Interestingly, the name of the maiden questioning Alexander is *Sireine*,¹⁵⁵ which, together with the motif of Alexander's wisdom and the slaying of the dragon, constitutes a further correspondence between the two folk traditions of the shadow-theatre and the mermaid-type tale.

The *Dracontoctonia* is an overarching theme throughout Greek literature: famously, Alexander's ancestor Heracles, when still a child, killed two snakes with his bare hands, and the Orthodox Church created its own dragon-slayers too: St George and St Demetrius, who are often depicted on holy images and churches brandishing their spear against the evil animal. In the Hellenic folk production of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is a large diffusion of the type of the dragon-slayer hero: according to Alexiadis,¹⁵⁶ 377 variations are attested throughout Greece. In his book, he distinguishes the "proper" *dracontoctonia*, where the hero slays the dragon (*dracōn*) which occupies the water spring of a village (AT300; 169 examples), from the *dracoctonia*, tales referring to a *dracos*, i. e. a snake (AT301A and 301B; 156 and 52 examples respectively). In Greek popular and religious culture, Alexander the Great is both a dragon and a dracos-slayer; nevertheless, in the mermaid-tale he is reconnected to the *dracontoctonos* type AT300, due to the water element.

The dragon is not the only obstacle though: in order to get the water of immortality, Alexander has to pass through the clashing mountains. The inaccessibility of the mountains and the lack of birds remind us of the description of the two rocks Alexander besieged and conquered during the Sogdian and Indian campaigns. The

¹⁵⁴ See, e. g., the puppet player Panos Kapetanidis' performance of the show: Εσύ και οι απόγονοί μας, όταν έχετε προβλήματα, σκοτούρες, φασαρίες, το μυαλό σας γυρνάει στους προγόνους σας, κι εμείς τότε ερχόμαστε και σας βοηθάμε να νικάτε τα μεγάλα και μικρά προβλήματά σας. "You and our descendants, when in need or trouble, turn your mind back to your ancestors, and thus we come and help you overcome your big and small problems".

¹⁵⁵ Stoneman (2008) 141-143.

¹⁵⁶ Alexiadis (1982); cf. Ogden (2012) 277-294: a study of the Eastern traditions on Alexander as dragon-slayer.

Sogdian Rock was considered impregnable and it was the last stronghold in Sogdia;¹⁵⁷ Alexander wanted to conquer it in order to tame the rebellious area. When the Macedonian army reached the fortress in Spring 328/327 BC, the barbarians mocked Alexander saying that he would need *birds instead of soldiers* to get at the top of it and lay siege to them.¹⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the disadvantageous position of his army, the great conqueror was determined to win and he promised a price of twelve talents to the first of the soldiers who would climb up, eleven to the second, and so on.¹⁵⁹ Both Arrian and Curtius insist on the competence of the Macedonians for this task: Alexander had at his disposal a group of three hundred men who, having gained experience in the previous sieges, were now well trained in rock-climbing and “they were able to fly” as if they had wings.¹⁶⁰ The steepness of the mountains and the bird-motif reappear also in the ancient historians’ accounts about the siege of the so-called Aornus Rock (327/326 BC). Both Diodorus and Arrian highlight the inaccessibility of the rock by quoting the legend of Heracles’ unsuccessful attempt to besiege it,¹⁶¹ and by describing its huge features.¹⁶² Moreover, it is worth noticing that the name Aornus, meaning in Greek *without birds*,¹⁶³ is not based on a popular etymology of an Indian name, but conveys the idea of an unreachable, hostile place or of a precipitous mountain.¹⁶⁴ Curtius corroborates this opinion with his description of the Hindu Kush valley: “because of the deep snows and the perpetual cold, no trace is to be found even of birds or any wild beast”.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Arr. An. IV. 18. 4.

¹⁵⁸ Arr. An. IV. 18. 6: οἱ δὲ σὺν γέλῳτι βαρβαρίζοντες πτηνοὺς ἐκέλευον ζητεῖν στρατιώτας Ἀλέξανδρον.

¹⁵⁹ Arr. An. IV. 18. 7.

¹⁶⁰ Arr. An. IV. 19. 1: “They had practised the art of climbing rocks (πετροβατεῖν)”. See also Curt. XI. 7. 24: “Alexander’s soldiers have wings (*pinnas*)”.

¹⁶¹ D. S. XVII. 85. 2; Arr. An. IV. 28.1.

¹⁶² D. S. XVII. 85. 3: circumference one hundred stadia, height eleven; Arr. An. IV. 28. 3. 1: circumference two-hundred stadia, height eleven.

¹⁶³ From privative ἀ and ὄρνις (bird). Plu. *De Alex.* I. 3. (= *Mor.* 327C): “Birdless” Rock.

¹⁶⁴ Rollinger (2014) 606-607.

¹⁶⁵ Curt. VII. 3. 11: *altae nives premunt terram gelu et perpetuo paene rigore..., ut ne avium quidem feraeve ullius vestigium extet*. See also Philostr. *VA* II. 10: birds “sucked” by a fracture at the top of the Aornus Rock, in the same way as above the Parthenon. Interestingly, today’s Greeks still believe that no bird can fly above the Parthenon.

The mountain-motif likens Alexander to Jason: in the *Argonauts*, the hero is aided by the goddess Athena to pass through the Clashing Rocks on the Thracian coast of the Bosphorus, right at the entrance of the Black Sea.¹⁶⁶ But the similarities between the two are deeper: like Pseudo-Callisthenes' Alexander, during the quest for the Golden Fleece Jason wanders in marvellous places in which he meets Amazons, Harpies and Sirens, and he reaches the Outer Ocean.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, riding on his flying Bucephalus, Alexander the dragon-slayer can be paralleled to winged-Perseus in his mission to cut Medusa's head or to Bellerophon riding on Pegasus and slaying the Chimaera.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the Alexander-historians' descriptions of the Macedonian campaigns in Eastern Asia provided the core material which, blended with ancient mythological traditions, informed the setting and the characteristics of Alexander's "labour" in this tale.

Interestingly, the immortal water is used to explain dry onions' long shelf life. The introduction of a pseudo-aetiology regarding such an ordinary vegetable plant into an entirely supernatural environment adds a "familiar touch" to the tale, which reflects the audience's beliefs and raises the level of engagement in the narration.

Folk versions and variants

In a Cretan version attested in Rethymnon Gorgona looks like, but is not a real mermaid.¹⁶⁹

Alexander the Great had sealed into a flask the water of immortality and in another one the devil. Ignoring the contents of the flasks, his sister opened the bottle in which there was the devil. The devil went out but, with her female shrewdness, she managed to close it back into the bottle. Afterwards she opened the second flask, she drank some of the water of immortality and she

¹⁶⁶ A. R. *Argon.* II. 537-647. Cf. with the πλαγκταὶ πέτραι (wandering rocks) in the *Odyssey* (XII. 59-61), placed close to Scylla and Charybdis.

¹⁶⁷ Pi. *P.* 4. 241-50.

¹⁶⁸ It is worth mentioning that in the Ottoman period, the mythological motif of the dragon-slayer will be reworked again by the Greeks, and Alexander will be paralleled with St. George, the Orthodox fighter (see further discussion in chapter three on Theodore Angelopoulos' *Megalexandros*).

¹⁶⁹ For the original Greek text, see appendix II, n. 1; Spyridakis (1953) 404-405, n. 5.

poured the rest on an onion plant, which (for this reason) is said to hide the secret of immortality.

When the sister of Alexander the Great realised the gravity of her action, she got frightened. Being hopeless, she fell into the sea, where a big fish swallowed her up to her waist. She continued to live in the sea as half fish and half woman, as she had drunk the water of immortality.

Since then, every year on February 2nd the Macedonian's sister appears on the sea surface and, when she encounters a boat, she asks the sailors whether Alexander the Great is still alive. If the sailors' response is "he lives and rules", she rejoices and sings new songs. But if the answer is "Alexander died", then she agitates the sea waters with rage and she sinks the boat.

The tale diverges from the archetypal mermaid-type in four points: i) Alexander carries two flasks instead of one; ii) his sister looks like a mermaid because she has been half-swallowed by a big fish, but she does not undergo the usual metamorphosis; iii) the chronological detail: the mermaid appears in the sea only once a year on a specific date;¹⁷⁰ iv) the presence of the devil.

Interestingly, Alexander's sister's female curiosity and shrewdness, which drew her to open the flasks, liken her to Pandora, who, according to the myth, opened the lid of the jar given to her by Zeus and released all the sorrows which scourge the human kind.¹⁷¹ In a way then, in the Greek mindset, Alexander's death is the beginning of the Hellenic people's evils and struggles.

Like the aforementioned Cretan version, a Thracian tale presents a "peculiar" Gorgona, since Alexander's daughter has to undergo two metamorphoses before becoming a mermaid. With the first one, she becomes a seal (φώκια), as she hopes to find her beloved in the Egyptian sea, who has been confined there by her father; with the second transformation, she turns into a mermaid to avoid the annoyances caused by the other fishes. Following the usual plot of the mermaid-type, when Gorgona sees

¹⁷⁰ February 2nd is an important religious feast in Crete, in which Holy Mary is celebrated. For the tradition on the conflation between the Mermaid and Holy Mary, see later, Myrivilis' *Mermaid Madonna*.

¹⁷¹ Hes. *Op.* 94-95.

a sailor, she stops him to know about Alexander's fate.¹⁷² In Thrace the seal-motif reappears in another account attested in Adrianoupolis and in Bizyē (today Edirne and Vize in Turkey), in which *a seal or a fish-shaped young woman* (ἰχθυόμορφος νεᾶνις) *dwelling in the sea* (διατρίβουσα εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν) replaces Gorgona and stops the sailors to enquire whether Alexander is still alive.¹⁷³ Interestingly, in this version the *fōkia / ichtyomorphos neanis* is presented as the great conqueror's mother.

A shift in the familiar relationship is noticeable also in a variant from Zante, in which Gorgona is not the Macedonian's sister but his partner; in Lakkoī in Crete she is attested as the daughter, as in the episode of the *Romance*. These differences demonstrate that the Greeks, keen on populating their surroundings with the Macedonian hero's kinsmen, see his family relations as material to mould freely.

In another type of tale entitled *Gorgona*,¹⁷⁴ a mermaid stops the boat of a childless skipper and gives to him a small sea shell, advising that his wife should eat it in order to conceive a baby, whom they will keep and raise until his fifteenth birthday. At that age, the child has to be sent back to the mermaid. This Gorgona has little in common with Alexander's sister; nonetheless, the tale provides a version of the "Sun helping a childless woman" type, which is integral part of Hellenic Alexander-lore and will be discussed later in the "Alexander and the Sun" cycle. For the moment, it will suffice to say that this type of Sun-tale is typically Greek and is attested in many variants on the mainland and the islands.¹⁷⁵

Literary versions and variants

The following is an excerpt from Andreas Karkavitsas' tale Ἡ Γοργόνα, first published by the author in 1899 in a collective volume of twenty narrations entitled *Words from the Prow* (Τὰ Λόγια τῆς Πλώρης).¹⁷⁶ The account opens with the description of an ordinary night on Captain Farasis' ship, which was sailing to the Piraeus with a grain load. Only one sailor of the crew – the first-person narrator of the story – is still awake,

¹⁷² Spyridakis (1953) 406-407.

¹⁷³ Spyridakis (1953) 406.

¹⁷⁴ Ioannou (1973) 159-166.

¹⁷⁵ Megas (2012) 232.

¹⁷⁶ Karkavitsas (1899) 181-186. See appendix II, n. 2.

since he feels too highly-charged and about to faint. All of a sudden, the sky turns deep purple, and he encounters Gorgona:

Suddenly I was scared again. Deep inside the light purple cloud, I saw an enormous shade proceeding. The thick body shape, the head adorned with towers,¹⁷⁷ resembling the Holy Mount.¹⁷⁸ Its two eyes created turning bright circles and looked proudly at the world about to be pushed into a disaster. There he is, I said, the providential angel, the destroyer and the saviour! Upon looking at him, I felt a shiver in my soul. At any time I was anticipating the horrible blow of the hammer to fall. Now the Earth with its fruits and the sea with its woods are lost! No more songs, neither travels, nor kisses!

But I did not hear the blow. The shadow advanced into the water with fiery jumps. And the faster it advanced, the smaller its stature became. And suddenly this voluminous and fearful shape stood in front of me, and she was a beautiful girl indeed. On her head, she wore a crown adorned with diamonds, and her hair was a rich, blue mane stretching on her the back until below the waves. The wide forefront, the almond-shaped eyes, her coral lips were spreading around a glow of immortality and something of regal pride. From the crystal neck down, a golden scaly thorax held her body tight; with her left hand she pushed forth the shield, while she played with the Macedonian sarissa in the right hand.

I was still at loss when I heard a sweet, calm, and soft voice say to me:

- Sailor, oh my good sailor! Is King Alexander still alive?

King Alexander! I whispered with more doubts in my head. How can King Alexander possibly be still alive? I did not know what sort of question that was, nor what to respond, when the voice repeated for a second time:

- Sailor, oh my good sailor! Is King Alexander still alive?

- Now ... my Lady! – I answered without thinking. – King Alexander now!

Not even his dirt can be found on earth.

¹⁷⁷ Compare to the representations of the Syria Thea with a tower on her head, Chrysostomou (1992) 109.

¹⁷⁸ Ἁγιοτόπος stands for Mount Athos, often called “Holy Mount” in Greece because of its numerous monasteries.

Alas! What a bad thing happened to me! The very beautiful girl turned at once into a horrible abomination. A Cyclops came out of the wave and showed half of the body covered with scales. Lively snakes stood up from her silky hair in every direction; they put their languages and venomous stings outside, and started blowing in a terrifying way. The ironclad chest and virginal face changed immediately, as if it were the (famous) Monobyza of the folktale. Now I was well aware of whom I had to face! It was not Charon of the Earth, the destroyer and saviour angel. It was Gorgona, Alexander's sister, who stole the water of immortality and came back lively and powerful.

The ageless Glory, eternal on both land and sea, still belonged to the great cosmocrator. [...] Of course she did not want to learn about the perishable body, but about the memory of her master. And now to my uncritical response she furiously threw her hand – a bushy and heavy hand – on the gunwale, and she moved her tail black and forth, making the calm sea look like the Ocean.

- No, Lady, lies...! I shouted out loud with loose knees. She looked at me strictly and with trembling voice she asked again:

- Sailor, oh my good sailor! Is King Alexander alive?

- He lives and reigns; – I answered straightaway – he lives and reigns and conquers the world.

She listened to my words carefully. Like immortal water poured into her veins, my voice immediately changed the monster and she turned again into a shining beautiful virgin. She lifted her hairy hand from the gunwale and smiled scattering rose petals from her lips. Suddenly the purple air was flooded by a war song, as if at that time the Macedonian army were returning from the countries of the Ganges and the Euphrates [...].

The archetype of "Alexander's Gorgona" tale is divided into two episodes: the story of the Macedonian's quest of the water of immortality and the description of a sailor's encounter with the sea lady. Karkavitsas' literary interpretation of the folktale leaves aside the motif of the quest and develops the mermaid's episode: a ship is sailing peacefully when Gorgona appears suddenly and asks whether Alexander is still alive; she turns into a monster after a negative answer and regains her beautiful looks after a

positive one. This sequence, stereotypical in the Gorgona-lore, is here originally embedded in a nautical novel. The protagonist tells us his first-hand experience of the encounter with the mermaid, which in folk versions is usually sketched by the sentence: “when Gorgona meets a sailor (or a boat) ...”.

Karkavistas’ *Gorgona* also offers an appreciable and continuous flow of references to Ancient Greek, folk, and religious culture. Three elements remind us of the historical Alexander: the appellation *cosmocrator*; the campaigns in the East, metonymically described by the river boundaries of the Euphrates and the Ganges; and the Macedonian *sarissa*.

In popular lore, Monobyza¹⁷⁹ represents the fierce lady-warrior, a folk interpretation of Maximo, the Queen of the Amazons who fought against Digenis Akritas and eventually fell in love with him.¹⁸⁰ The etymology of the name – from μονό, single, and βύζος, breast – refers to the Amazons’ alleged practice of cutting one breast in order to shoot with the bow without impediments. These warrior women have always been a source of interest in Greek literature: the heroes Achilles,¹⁸¹ Bellerophon,¹⁸² Heracles,¹⁸³ and Theseus¹⁸⁴ fight against them; Herodotus describes them as proud Sarmatian women skilled in horse-riding and archery;¹⁸⁵ in the Alexander-historians’ narratives, after an epistolary exchange, not only is the Macedonian king invited by the Amazons to see their land – for they were eager to accept him as a lord and to offer him a tribute of hundred talents yearly,¹⁸⁶ but he is also asked by the Queen Thalestris to have an intercourse with her, since she wished to bear a glorious and strong daughter to the world.¹⁸⁷ Thus, the Amazons liken

¹⁷⁹ Also attested as Μοβοβύζω (*Monobyzō*).

¹⁸⁰ *Digenes Akrites*, VI. 385-389. For a discussion of the similarities between Alexander and Digenis’ traditions, cf. Menning (2003) 103-115.

¹⁸¹ Apollod. *Epit.* V. 1: Achilles falls in love with Penthesilea after having killed her.

¹⁸² Hom. *Il.* VI. 186: Bellerophon slew the Amazons in Lycia.

¹⁸³ Apollod. *Bibliotheca*, II. 5. 9: Heracles’ ninth labour consisted in the obtainment of the belt of the Queen of the Amazons Hyppolite.

¹⁸⁴ Plu. *Thes.* 26-27: Theseus took captive the Amazon Antipe and married her.

¹⁸⁵ Hdt. IV. 110-117. On the Amazons, see Blok (1995) and Mayor (2014).

¹⁸⁶ AR (β) III. 25-26.

¹⁸⁷ D. S. XVII. 77. 1-3; Curt. VI. 5. 24-32; Justin XII. 3. 5-7. Arrian (*An.* IV. 15; VII. 13) expresses his doubts about the Amazons’ existence and Plutarch is not convinced by Thalestris’ story either (*Alex.* 46. 2; 4), but he provides a list of authors supporting or discrediting its veracity (*Alex.* 46. 1). Furthermore, he tries

Alexander to his mythological past and heroes, and, with a greater significance, constitute an overarching theme in Greek literature, featuring in the Alexander-legends which flourished during the Hellenistic, the Byzantine, and the Modern Greek period.

The belief in the apocalyptic end of the world, the appearance of the “destroyer and saviour angel”, and the parallel drawn between the mermaid’s crown and Mount Athos are religious elements which embed the folk Alexander and his sister Gorgona into Orthodox religion. The transplant of the tale into religious lore is made even more explicit in Stratis Myrivilis¹⁸⁸ version of Gorgona, transformed into a Madonna painted on a wall of a church on the island of Lesbos:¹⁸⁹

Above all, there remains a strange painting on the wall of the Chapel, where it can still be seen, partially effaced by the salt sea air, the most remarkable Madonna in Greece and in the whole of Christendom.

Her head is done in the familiar, conventional Byzantine style – a dark-complexioned face, sensitively drawn, with an expression of reserve, rounded chin, almond eyes, and a small mouth. A purple pallium surrounds the upper part of her body and covers her head down to the eyebrows. There is also the golden halo, as in all the icons. Her eyes are extremely wide and green in colour. But from the waist down, she is a fish with blue scales; and in one hand she holds a ship and in the other a trident, like that of the ancient sea god, Poseidon. [...]

It was called the Mermaid Madonna, as it is to this day, and from it the Chapel and the port took their names. No one stopped to reflect that, on the day when this Madonna was conceived in the mind of the old hermit, there she sprang as from the head of Zeus and on this unique sea rock near an Aegean island she established herself as a new Greek divinity, who in a miraculous

to rationalise the Amazons legend and explains it as a consequence of a Scythian king’s offer of his own daughter in marriage to Alexander. For a discussion on Alexander’s encounter with the Amazons, see Baynham (2001) 115-126.

¹⁸⁸ On Stratis Myrivilis (1892-1969), see Beaton (1994) 134-139.

¹⁸⁹ Excerpt from Myrivilis (1981) 9, based on R. Abbott’s English translation *The Mermaid Madonna*. For the original Greek text, published in 1949, see appendix II, n. 3.

manner united all the epochs and all the meaning of the race – a race that struggles with the elements and tempests of the world, half on land and half on the sea, and with the ploughshare and the keel, always subject to a warlike divinity, female and virgin.

The Mermaid-Madonna has almond-shaped eyes, like Karkavitsas' Gorgona, and she features blue scales, a trident, and a ship on her hand, three elements which are often present in Greek artistic representations of Alexander's sister. Her resemblance to the god Poseidon and the goddess Athena, the Byzantine complexion, and her status as Church icon constitute an attempt to join together all the periods of Greek history, as openly stated by the author himself. The Mermaid, like her brother Alexander the Great, has a unifying role in the history of the Hellenic people.

Similarly, Gorgona is Christianised by Odysseas Elytis¹⁹⁰ in his poem *Tà Τζιτζίκια* (*The Crickets*), in which Alexander is replaced with the king Sun, the mermaid with the Virgin Mary, and the sailors with a group of cheerful crickets answering repeatedly that the Sun is still alive.¹⁹¹

The Virgin held the seas
in her apron.
[She held] Sikinos, Amorgos
and her other children.
- Hey you, crickets, my angels!
Hello and farewell.
Is the king Sun still alive?
And all the crickets respond together:

- He lives and lives and lives...
The king Sun lives.

¹⁹⁰ On Odysseas Elytis (1911-1996), see Beaton (1994) 167-169: early poetry; 182-183: poetry in the 1930s and the 1940s; 212-215: post-war poetry.

¹⁹¹ Excerpt from the collection Elytis O. (1986), *Τα ρω του έρωτα*, Athens. For the Greek text, see appendix II, n. 4.

Another poetic version of the folk mermaid-tale, entitled *Gorgona* and composed by George Drosinis, was included in the reader for the fourth year of primary school in 1946.¹⁹²

Inside the wide sea a boat travels
All around the night unfolds...
and by the breeze that gently caresses the waves,
the white-dressed brig is shaken, it slowly wiggles,
as a bride, who continuously blows and gloats sweetly.

But suddenly, as if it nailed into the sandy shore
its two anchors together,
the boat stands still and in front of its bow
a Mermaid soaked by the sea water shows up staring with a fierce expression:
- Has King Alexander died or is he alive?

She asks with a deep voice while stirring up the waters
with her fish-tale,
and her womanly ear seeks for an answer.
- King Alexander reigns over the world – responds the sailor –
May thou have a long life, oh Lady!

Alas if he told her that Alexander is dead
since a far away past!...
Straight at the same time the poor sailor
she would have sunk choked along with his ship,
And the Mermaid would begin to cry for the king.

But now that she has learned that he lives, her appearance changes
and she adorns herself with beautiful features.
She becomes a slim girl, she reclines on the waves,
and she looks around with two sweet little eyes,

¹⁹² Drosinis (1946) 118-119; appendix II, n. 5. On George Drosinis (1859-1951), see Beaton (1994) 67-69.

And by her blond hair the sea gets illuminated.

The brig restarts and slowly wiggles

in the blue sea.

And the Mermaid in the foam flaps like a seagull,
she holds a golden lyre and she begins to play and
to sing in the sea with heavenly voice!

At the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Drosinis was an active journalist, poet and novelist, who often took inspiration from folklore. His main concerns were to become “an author of his people”, i. e. to express his countrymen’s voice, but also to be read, appreciated, and fully understood by them. For this reason, his works were written in Demotic Greek and were often included in primary schools’ textbooks. His genuine interests in Hellenic traditions and customs also led the poet to found the *Hellenic Folklore Society* together with Nikolaos Politis.

Drosinis’ Gorgona meets all the characteristics of the folk tradition of the mermaid: like Homeric Sirens, she plays the ancient lyre and sings with celestial voice but, if disappointed, she becomes a terrifying, enormous monster.

Another example of mermaid-episode embedded into a wider story is offered by Elias Venezis in his romance *Aeolian Earth* (Αίολική Γῆ).¹⁹³ The unexpected meeting with Gorgona is presented as a dramatic personal experience of a minor character, who is describing his first journey by sea in his childhood. As in Karkavitsas’ tale, the encounter is described in plain language by the protagonist’s narrating voice:¹⁹⁴

[...] when suddenly something like a big fuss was heard amid the roar of turbulence. And afterwards (I heard) the voice of the captain screaming, talking to the waves: “Is he alive? The great king is alive! Alexander the Great lives!”

... The boy... remembers how at that point, beside the prow of the boat and amid the blur of the water, he saw a fish-tale like the one of a dolphin. Then he saw the whole fish. From the waist up as if it had a woman body...

¹⁹³ On Elias Venezis (1904-1973), see Beaton (1994) 139-141.

¹⁹⁴ For the Greek text, see appendix II, n. 6.

Although brief, the hypertext of Gorgona's episode is enough to remind the audience – the one “in the book”, the sailor's listeners, and the one “outside the book”, the readers of *Aeolian Earth* – of the Hellenic lore on Alexander and his mermaid sister; it also provides evidence of its great popularity in Greece.

To these literary examples should be added a famous musical version composed in 1966 by the internationally acclaimed Greek composer Manos Hadjidakis. The song, entitled *Δεν ήταν νησί (It was not an island)*, offers an allusion to the story of Alexander's Mermaid, and has its lyrics excerpted from Nikos Kazantzakis' romance *Καπετάν Μιχάλης (Captain Michalis)*, published in 1953. Both the romance and the song express the people's overwhelming desire to see Crete free from Ottoman rule, which is likened to the Mermaid's longing for her brother.

It was not an island,
It was a monster which was lying on the sea.
It was Gorgona, Alexander the Great's sister,
Who was mourning and was agitating the sea.
If Crete is set free,
My heart too shall be free.
If Crete is set free, I shall laugh.

The song trades on assumptions of shared knowledge and moral engagement: every Greek knows that Gorgona is agitating the sea because she is upset for Alexander's demise; in a sense, the Macedonian's wellbeing (or comeback) is here perceived as a premise to a free Crete.

Artistic interpretations of Alexander's mermaid flourished throughout the Greek-speaking world as much as the literary and folk versions of the tale. The following two examples were singled out for the peculiar way in which they present different strands of Alexander-traditions merging together.

Chrysanthos Mentis Bostantzoglou (1918-1995), better known under the pseudonym Bost, was a famous political cartoonist, a painter, a sculptor, and a

playwright. In his paintings, folk art and surrealism¹⁹⁵ join together to give life and freedom to his heroes, who represent the admirable figures both of the Ancient and Byzantine history and literature, but also of the Greek Revolution: Pericles, Alexander, Erotocritos, and Androutsos to name just a few. Bost followed on from the well-established folk tradition of Karaghiozis and of Theophilos' naïf and primitive art,¹⁹⁶ but he revisited this material adding to it a distinctive satirical vein, a feature of all his comic strips and theatrical works too. In fact, at the same time he wanted to *promote* and to *challenge* Hellenism: he was extremely critical of *Katharevousa* language and of any rigid, scholastic cultural trend supported by the wealthy bourgeoisie; his main interest lay in people's cultural and artistic expressions, i. e. in cultural heritage intelligible and accessible to everyone. He wanted to "give Greece back to Greeks" and, for this reason, he purposely misspelt the titles of his paintings in order to satirise and provoke the detached and lofty leading class of his time.

Because of his artistic and left-wing political views, Bost left us an interpretation of Alexander quite humanised and familiar to Greeks; his Macedonian conqueror can actually be considered a quintessential example of his artistic production as a painter, in which Antiquity, Byzantine Empire, Greek Revolution, and Folk and Orthodox traditions are mixed together. In all the five paintings displaying Alexander as a subject, the Macedonian wears the ancient *perikephalaia*—although with a big crest resembling Kolokotronis' helmet, a Byzantine cuirass, and the *fustanella*¹⁹⁷ of the fighters of 1821. The Macedonian hero is also equipped with the *sarissa*, but at the top of it there is the flag of the Hellenic Republic with the typical white Orthodox cross against a blue backdrop. In the painting 'Ο Μεγαλέξανδρος με την αδερφή του την Γοργώνα (*Alexander the Great with his sister the Mermaid*, 1984)¹⁹⁸ the great conqueror is pictured holding his sister in his arms on the sea-shore. His complexion, characterised by long straight black hair, dark eyes, and mustache, is very different from the image we are used to in his ancient portraits; nevertheless,

¹⁹⁵ Greek Surrealism was a cultural movement that started in the 1930s and promoted an "alternative, expansive, and indeed subversive interpretation of [the ancient] heritage" in the arts: Stabakis (2008) 1-5.

¹⁹⁶ On Theophilos (1870-1934), see Kaplani-Kokkini (1967²) 24-26; Tsarouchis (1967²) 13-27.

¹⁹⁷ The *fustanella* is a pleated skirt worn in the Balkans during the Ottoman period.

¹⁹⁸ See appendix I, n. 13.

Alexander – or, more precisely, his “legendary persona” *Megalexandros*¹⁹⁹ – is easily recognisable by Greeks, thanks to the *perikephalaia* with a high red crest, considered the emblem of his prowess since the period leading to the Greek Revolution.²⁰⁰ The reference to the mermaid-lore is also made obvious by the woman’s fish-tale and by the deliberately misspelt Greek caption on the top of the scene. But in this painting Bost refers to a specific version of the mermaid tale, the one still proudly told nowadays by the inhabitants of Thessaloniki, as revealed by the White Tower placed in the backdrop, one of the landmarks of the city.²⁰¹ According to the local tradition, Alexander’s sister Thessaloniki, either because she has drunk by accident the water of immortality, or because she was informed of her brother’s death in the East, throws herself into the Thermaic Gulf, and is transformed into a beautiful mermaid. The inhabitants claim that from time to time they can still hear her sing and see her wander in the sea because of her distress. The tale provides a mythological explanation for the toponym, which was chosen reportedly after Thessaloniki’s presence in the gulf around which the city was erected.²⁰²

Since the foundation of the Greek State in 1831, Alexander the Great has been pictured on several drachma coins, banknotes, and stamps. In 2008 the Macedonian hero became, together with his sister the mermaid, the subject of a new issue of stamps: at the time when the European Union accepted FYROM’s candidacy as a member (2004), Greece involved all forms of media to reinforce its claims on the right to use the name “Macedonia” for the northern region between the Pindus mountain and the Nestus River, and to express disagreement with the Former Yugoslav Republic’s exploitation of Ancient Macedonian heritage. On the stamp, the mermaid is at the bottom on the left side; on the upper right side, Alexander’s head resembles the Macedonian court artists Lysippus and Apelles’ portraits of the great conqueror:²⁰³ he

¹⁹⁹ See below, chapter three on Angelopoulos’ *Megalexandros*.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Rhigas Pherraios’ *Manifesto*: appendix I, n. 17. On Rhigas (1757-1798) and his literary and political activities, see Irmscher (2000) 1694-1695, with further bibliography.

²⁰¹ Another highlight of the city is the statue of Alexander riding Bucephalus placed in Nikis Avenue not far away from the White Tower. See appendix I, n. 10.

²⁰² Thessaloniki was indeed named after Alexander’s sister, but as an act of legitimation by Cassander: in 316 BC he founded the city and dedicated it to his wife, thus seeking to appeal the supporters of the Argead family in Macedonia. D. S. XIX. 52. 1-2; Str. VII. 1. 21; D. H. I. 49. 4.

²⁰³ See appendix I, n. 14.

has a leonine mane, symbol of courage and virility; the characteristic *anastole*; a pronounced nose; and full lips and cheeks, pointing to his youth.²⁰⁴ The juxtaposition of a folk mermaid with the stylised courtly portrait of Alexander might look bizarre, but the aim of the Greek State was to show that Ancient and Modern traditions coexist in Greece, as Hellenic culture enjoys uninterrupted continuity since Antiquity.

B) Alexander and the Nereids cycle

Folk Tale Type (Aarne-Thompson):

- n. 551: water of life;
- n. 403A: supernatural / enchanted relatives;
- similarities to the faithless sister type (n. 315).²⁰⁵

Folk tale motifs (Thompson): Fairies (F200); similarities to the Harpies (B52) and the Sirens (B53); plant of immortality (D1346.5).

Folk narrations on the Nereids focus on the theft of Alexander's water of immortality and on their metamorphosis into fairies living in the woods, as in the *Romance Kale* is banished to live *alone in the mountains* and condemned to be called *Nereid*. Like Kale, folk Nereids are kin of the Macedonian king – normally his sisters – and they too are confined to isolated places and related to the water element: they populate hills, mountains, lakes, dells, wells, and rivers; if enraged, they cause tornados and hurricanes. But modern Nereids remind us also of the ancient Nymphs (Νύμφαι), minor goddesses presiding over various natural phenomena and taking care of the flora and fauna of their domain. Classified into different families according to their duties and characteristics, the fifty nymphs of the sea are called Haliad Nymphs (Ἀλῖαι

²⁰⁴ For Alexander's image in ancient art, see: Bieber (1964); Killerich (1993) 85-92; Moreno (1993) 101-136; Stewart (2003) 31-66; Pandermalis (2004) 15-36.

²⁰⁵ See Thompson (1977) 114-115: the sister plots against the dragon-slayer / the heroic brother.

/ Ἀλιάδες) or Nereids (Νηρηΐδες),²⁰⁶ and were depicted as beautiful maidens riding on seahorses, dolphins, or sea-monsters, very similar to mermaids.

Interestingly, in Macedonian folklore the queen of the Nereids is called Lady Kalē (also Lady Kalō, Κυρία Κάλω), as the conqueror's daughter in the *Romance*,²⁰⁷ and she replaces the mythological Thetis, the mother of Achilles, Alexander's "ancestor". This substitution gives an additional spin to the multi-layered tradition, developed through a continuous process of adaptation of ancient and new material by the Greeks.²⁰⁸

In Hellenic folklore, Nereids are said to kidnap at night σημεδεμένα κορίτσια, that is girls with a "special mark" of beauty or, more often, of ugliness. People can calm their peevishness only by whispering three times μέλι γάλα· κα'π'ἀπ'ἐδῶ πέρασεν ὁ Βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος· ζῆ καὶ βασιλεύει ("Honey and milk! From here too King Alexander has passed; he lives and reigns") or στήν ψυχὴ τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου, κακὸ μὴ μου κάμετε! ("For the soul of king Alexander, do not harm me!").²⁰⁹ Especially during hurricanes or in moments of danger, similar spells are still uttered in the Greek countryside. The fortune and the persistence of the Nymphs-motif give evidence of the Greeks' attachment to their superstitions; core characteristics of these spells are the mention of King Alexander and / or the pair honey-and-milk, which probably refers to a real offering that used to be made to the Nereids in order to "mellow" their bad temper. Honey (*meli*) plays such an important

²⁰⁶ See Chantraine (1999) lemma Νηρηΐδες: daughters of Nereus, the god of the sea; maritime nymphs; Modern Greek: Νεράιδες. Lemma νερός (adj.): "fresh", often referred to water; thence in Late Antique and Byzantine Greek το νερόν took the meaning of "fresh water".

²⁰⁷ G. F. Abbott (1903) 124-125; 242-249.

²⁰⁸ An example of the continuous adaptation of the ancient tradition related to the Nereids and Alexander is given by *P.Oxy.* XV 1798, a second-century AD anonymous historical work on the Macedonian conqueror. In the papyrus (F 44, col. ii, ll. 6-11) Alexander is said to have made offerings to Thetis, the Nereids, Nereus and Poseidon before the battle of Issus in 333 BC; the importance of the water element and sea divinities is stressed, as Alexander turns to them before the battle in a moment of dismay: Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ πλησί|ον ὀρῶν τὴν κρίσιν | ἐν ἀγωνίαι· ἦν καὶ πρὸς | εὐχὰς ἐτράπη, Θέτιν | καὶ Νηρηΐδας καὶ Νηρέα | καὶ Ποσειδῶνα ἐπικα|λούμενος. The source probably adapts the Alexander-historians' description of another event, such as the libation to the sea deities before crossing the Hellespont (Arr. *An.* I. 11. 6), to remark his descent from Thetis and Achilles: see the *editores principes* Grenfell, Hunt (1922) 133; cf. Denuzzo (2003) 92, n. 9; Prandi (2010) 69-71, n. 9F.

²⁰⁹ Nikolaidēs (1899) 227; Politis (1931) 54-59; Kyriakidis (1965²) 194-196.

role in the Nereid-tradition that, in a Macedonian variant attested in Kastoria, upon becoming female deities dwelling in the countryside, Alexander's sisters are called Μελιτένιες.²¹⁰ They show up close to crossroads and dells at night annoying passers-by; the spell which needs to be uttered to pacify them reaffirms not only Alexander's, but also Bucephalus' welfare: ὁ βασιλιάς ὁ Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος ζεῖ καὶ βασιλεύει μαζί μὲ τὸ ἀλόγο του ("King Alexander the Great is alive and he rules together with his horse").

I shall start my survey of folk accounts following the Nereid-type with the fairy tale²¹¹ attested in the village of Phelloë (Kalavrita, Achaea) and entitled Οἱ ἀδερφάδες τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου (*Alexander the Great's sisters*),²¹² since it represents the most developed example attested on paper we have:

Ὦντας ο μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος εκυρίευσεν οὐλον τον κόσμο, ἐπήγε και ἐκεῖ που βγαίνει το ἀθάνατο νερό, και ἐγιόμισε δυό λαήναις για να λουστή και να γίνη ἀθάνατος. Ὦντας τοις ἤφερε 'ς το σπίτι, ἕνας αξιωματικός που του εἶχε γινάτι, λέει 'ς τις ἀδερφάδες του το μυστικό και τοις ὀρμηνεύει να λουστούν και να πιουν ἐκεῖναις, και να βάλουν ἄλλο νερό 'ς τοις λαήναις. Ἐκεῖναις ἀμέσως ἐπήραν το νερό και ἤπιαν και ἐλουστήκανε και ἐχύσανε τα ἀπολούσματα 'ς το δρόμο. Ἐκεῖ ἔτυχε μία κόττα και ἕνας μπότσικας και ἐβραχήκανε με το ἀθάνατο νερό· και για τούτο η κόττα ξαναμουτεύει κάθε χρόνο και γίνεται πάλι νέα και ο μπότσικας δεν ξεραίνεται, και ἀν ξεριζωθή και κρεμαστή 'ς τον ἀγέρα. Οι ἀδερφάδες του μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου ἀμα ἤπιανε τ'ἀθάνατο νερό κ'ἐλουστήκανε με δαύτο, ἐσηκωθήκανε 'ς τον ἀγέρα, ἤγουν ἐγιναν ἀερικαῖς, και ἀπό τότε εἶναι οι Νεράιδες. Ἐκεῖναις κάθε χρόνο παίρνουνε ἀπό τα χωριά κορίτσια σημειωμένα, δηλαδή καμμιά κουτσή ἢ καμμιά κουλή, και τοις κάνουνε Νεράιδες να τοις δουλεύουνε, και ἔτσι ἔχουνε οι Νεράιδες φουσσάτα μεγάλα· και κάθονται μέσα 'ς τα λαγκάδια και 'ς τους βράχους. Οι καθαυτό Νεράιδες, οι ἀδερφάδες του μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου, δεν πειράζουν κανένα,

²¹⁰ Spyridakis (1953) 409, n. 7. Compare with the spell from Samē, Cephalonia, in appendix II, n. 12: *Happy and tender-hearted ladies, | Honey and milk on the board of the king. | For the soul of King Alexander, | do not harm me.*

²¹¹ See Dowden (1992) 5: fairy-tales are folk-tales with fairies.

²¹² Politis (1965²) I. 387-388, n. 654.

αλλά οι σημειωμένες, οι δούλαις τους, πειράζουν και παίρνουν τους ανθρώπους. Όταν περάσει κανένας μεσημέρι ή μεσάνυχτα από το μέρος που βρίσκονται, τον παίρνουν οι Νεράιδες και τον βαρούνε και τον γκρεμίζουνε και του κάνουνε χίλια κακά. Άμα όμως νοήση και φωνάξη· “Ζη Αλέξανδρος ο βασιλιάς, ζη και βασιλεύει!” τότες αμέσως τρέχουνε οι αδερφάδες του και τον γλυτώνουνε.

Όποιος είναι αλαφροήσκικτος τοις βλέπει, αλλιώς τον κρούνε χωρίς να βλέπη τίπτας. Πολλές φορές παίρνουν βοσκοπούλαις από τα χωριά, και τοις κρύβουν σε διάφορα μέρη, και τοις κάνουν αόραταις· έτσι αυταίς βλέπουν όσους έρχονται και τοις γυρεύουν, ενώ εκείνοι δεν τοις βλέπουν. Όταν δεν τοις χρειάζονται πλιο, τοις απολούνε, και κείναις, όντας γυρίζουν, τα μολογάνε ούλα, πως έβλεπαν τους συγγενείς τους που περνούσαν από κοντά τους, και πως το ψωμί που τους έδιναν οι Νεράιδες ήταν ξερό και κατάμαυρο.

When Alexander the Great was ruling the entire world, he went also to the place where there is the water of immortality, and he filled two bottles in order to bathe himself and to become immortal. When he brought the bottles home, one of his generals, who had an inimical attitude towards him, tells the secret to Alexander's sisters and suggests that they wash themselves with the water and drink it; furthermore he prompts them to replace the water of immortality in the bottles with other (common) water.

The sisters immediately took the magical water, drank it and bathed with it. Afterwards, they poured away the water from the ablution in the street, and it happened that a hen and a wild onion plant got wet from it; for this reason, the hen becomes strong and young again every year and the wild onion does not dry, even when uprooted and hanged exposed to the air. The same moment when Alexander the Great's sisters drank the water of immortality and washed with it, they were lifted into the air and became fairies; since then they are called Nereids. Every year from villages the Nereids take girls with a special mark (i. e. lame and invalid girls) and they make them fairies. In such a way the Nereids have big armies and they dwell among dales and rocks. The “real” Nereids, Alexander's sisters, do not harm anyone, but their attendants, the marked maidens, annoy and abduct humans. When

someone passes through the places where they live at midday or midnight, the Nereids seize him, hit him and knock him down, and they harm him in thousand ways. But if he thinks and shouts “King Alexander is alive, he lives and reigns!”, then Alexander’s sisters run and save the fellow immediately.

Whoever is able to perceive spirits sees them, otherwise the Nereids meet the humans without them realising it. Many times they take little shepherdesses from villages, hide them in different places, and make them invisible; thus the shepherdesses see all those who come and seek for them, while these people do not perceive them. When the Nereids do not need the little girls anymore, they set them free. Once back at home, the shepherdesses narrate everything: how they would see their relatives passing by, and how the bread which the Nereids gave them was dry and dark black.

This tale may allude to the difficult relationship between Alexander III and Parmenio: the Macedonian’s sisters are prompted to steal his water of life – his unique chance to become immortal – by one of his generals, who is specifically said to be envious of him. The ancient sources portray Parmenio questioning the young conqueror’s choices several times,²¹³ and usually before important battles, which always end in a great success for Alexander. Seeing his plans continuously rejected, the general surely had a good reason to hold a grudge (*ginati*) against his king. As will be argued in chapter seven on the *Herodotean* Alexander, the constant clash between Parmenio and Alexander is modelled on the literary *trope* adopted by Herodotus for describing the excesses of the Achaemenids through the unheeded warnings of their advisers; via the Alexander-historians’ narratives the *trope* passed down into later Greek lore. In fact, their disputes may suggest the old general’s inadequacy and the young conqueror’s innate capacity to lead the army and rule the empire. In the tale, the inimical feelings of the general supply an explanation for Alexander’s death, a motif which is really common in Greek folk tradition and it will be further discussed as a part of the “envious cousin” cycle. Here it will suffice to say that folk legends on Alexander’s death

²¹³ For a discussion of the clashes between Parmenio and Alexander, see the *tragic warner / bad adviser* theme in chapter seven, the *Herodotean* Alexander.

spread out soon after his demise in Babylon in 323 BC, such as Alexander's attempt to fake his ascent to heaven by disappearing in the Euphrates or the death by poison.²¹⁴

Interestingly, in this tale the Nereids are described as *aerikes*, invisible fairies floating in the air. The adjective *aerikos* derives from the Byzantine and Modern Greek noun *αέρα*, a simplification of the ancient *αήρ* (air); while the masculine and feminine gender of the adjective normally mean "similar to, made of air", the substantivization of the neuter denotes spirits, ghosts, and fairies, due to the still common folk belief that the air and the wind are mysterious invisible forces which can destroy things or make noises.²¹⁵ Moreover, the term *αλαφροέσκιωτος*, characteristic of folk literature, is used to describe a person who is able to see spectres and perceive indiscernible beings, in keeping with the folk believe that nature is populated by supernatural powers.²¹⁶

Versions and variants

Two tales from Macedonia attest the honey-and-milk spell, but both the Nereids and Alexander are characterised differently from the archetypal plot. The first account, entitled *Ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος κ' οι Νεράιδες* (*King Alexander and the Nereids*),²¹⁷ is a creative blending of common ancient and folk motifs of the Alexander-lore with new elements: surprisingly, the great conqueror's quest for immortality, the water of life, and the maiden's metamorphosis are absent; on the other hand, the protagonist Nereid is a storm deity "by birth". She is introduced straight away as Alexander's fiancée (*αγαπητικιά*), and their romantic encounters take place only at night-time – a widespread theme both in international folklore and in ancient mythology, according to which Night is Eros' mother.²¹⁸

In the tale, due to his irascibility, the Macedonian loses his kingdom and power. The presentation of Alexander as a failed hero is extremely rare in the Graeco-Macedonian folk production and it is even more striking when compared with the

²¹⁴ Arr. An. VII. 27. 3: fake ascent to heaven; Arr. An. VII. 27. 1-2: poisoning; cf. AR (β) III. 32.

²¹⁵ Babiniotis (2002²) lemma *αερικό* / *αγερικό*.

²¹⁶ Babiniotis (2002²) lemma *αλαφροέσκιωτος* / *ελαφροέσκιωτος*.

²¹⁷ Spyridakis (1953) 409, n. 6. See appendix II, n. 9 for the original Greek text and English translation.

²¹⁸ Ar. *Birds*, 694-696.

courtesy of the (usually mischievous) Nereids, here presented as polite beings who are not bitter about Alexander's excessive anger. Because of their generosity, people pray them to stop tornados, which the Nereids immediately dissolve as long as they hear that Alexander is still alive.

In the second Macedonian version of the Nereid-type, attested in the Western part of the region,²¹⁹ Alexander the Great guards the water of immortality from his sisters, who are described as three witches (μάγισσαι). Once, during his absence, they steal and drink the precious water. When the Macedonian understands what his sisters have done, he is seized by anger and kills them, incinerates them, and throws their ashes in the air. This Macedonian tale projects a choleric and resentful Alexander too, but it is worth noting that his bad temper is triggered by his sisters' wrongdoing. Furthermore, it is a pretext for the introduction of a folk aetiology on the origin of tornados, which are believed to be caused by the ashes of the three witches floating into the air. The spell uttered by locals to prevent violent meteorological phenomena in the area confirms that Alexander is still alive and, with the mention of Bucephalus and his sword, it also highlights the conqueror's eternal and unshakeable prowess: Ζεῖ ἀκόμη ὁ Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος, τὸ ἄτι τοῦ καὶ τὸ σπαθὶ τοῦ ("Alexander the Great is still alive, his steed and his sword too").

A folktale attested in the village of Lakka (on the small Ionian island of Paxos) also presents Alexander's sisters as witches, but it highlights their negative role by using the term στρίγγλες (*stringles*):²²⁰

There were three witches, who were sisters and had as their only brother Alexander. He possessed the water of life, but the three witches drank it and became immortal: thus one lives in the wind, one in the sea, and one down on the earth. And they appear to people dressed in white and with their hair untied, thrown back parallel to the earth; whoever sees them, s/he has to say: "The Lady is passing by; for the soul of Alexander, shall she not harm us!"²²¹

²¹⁹ Spyridakis (1953) 408, n. 5. See appendix II, n. 10.

²²⁰ For the Greek text, see appendix II, n. 11; *Laografia* 10, 151, n. 9, collected by G. I. Silvanos.

²²¹ Cf. the spell from the village of Argyrades, Corfu in appendix II, n. 13: "The Lady passes by, and she does not harm; | Let her rejoice her brother Alexander | Lest she shall harm us".

In Modern Greek mythology, the *Stringles* are described mainly as wicked old witches or female demons mauling humans through spells. Already in Ancient mythology sinister magical powers were attributed to old women, such as the Graeae, the Gorgons' sisters, who are grey and old since birth and share between them one single eye and tooth.²²² The Stringles' name is thought to derive from the ancient word σπρίγλος, a terrible bird foreboding bad omens.²²³ Because of their unpleasant aspect and connection to evil birds, they are likened to the ancient Harpies, storm spirits depicted as half-women and half-birds which come down to the earth in order to snatch people and objects away.²²⁴ This juxtaposition is widely attested in the vernacular language (demotic Greek), in which a nasty woman is often likened either to a Harpy or to a Stringla.

The three witches from Paxos remind us also of the ancient Moerae or Fates, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, the goddesses who allotted and determined the fate of each man. In antiquity there was no univocal tradition on the Moerae: initially they were described as one single deity spinning with her thread the duration of human life,²²⁵ at times as a pair,²²⁶ and eventually as a trio.²²⁷ Their attributes and lineage vary too, being sometimes considered the daughters of Zeus and Themis, or of Nyx, of Ananke (Necessity), of Chaos, and of Pontus. In the fairy-tale, the three witches wear a white dress and rule jointly over the entire human world, taking care of a different domain each (air, water, earth); this description matches with the presentation of the Moerae in the *Republic*, where Plato states that they sit close to the Sirens, all clad in white. Lachesis sings about the past, Clotho about the present, and Atropos about the future, following a threefold division of tasks and knowledge, and sitting each one on her throne.²²⁸

²²² Apollod. *Bibliotheca*, II. 4. 2. Kyriakidis (1965?) 200.

²²³ Politis (1871) 172-187.

²²⁴ The name Ἄρπυιαι is etymologically linked to the verb ἀρπάζω (to snatch away, carry off, seize).

²²⁵ Hom. *Il.* XXIV. 209-210.

²²⁶ Paus. X. 24. 4.

²²⁷ Pl. *R.* X. 617b.

²²⁸ Pl. *R.* X. 617C: τρεῖς, ἐν θρόνῳ ἐκάστην, θυγατέρας τῆς ἀνάγκης, Μοίρας, λευχειμονούσας, στέμματα ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν ἐχούσας, Λάχεσιν τε καὶ Κλωθῶ καὶ Ἄτροπον, ὕμνεῖν πρὸς τὴν τῶν Σειρήνων ἄρμονίαν, Λάχεσιν μὲν τὰ γεγονότα, Κλωθῶ δὲ τὰ ὄντα, Ἄτροπον δὲ τὰ μέλλοντα.

The boundaries between Nymphs, Sirens, and Harpies were blurred already in Antiquity; modern Nereids, Gorgons, and *Stringles* – a patchwork of mythological deities of the past with new folk elements – perpetuate the ancient “blending trend”.

Spells

From a literary perspective, spells constitute a prolific group of versions of the archetypal Nereid-type, since, thanks to their conciseness, they can either be added as the concluding quote to a folktale, or stand alone.

By way of example, here below is reported a spell from Kastoria, which hints at the region’s ancient historical past:²²⁹

Farewell, farewell,
Be well, be well,
King Alexander is still alive
Both him and his horse
In Farsala, in Farsala.²³⁰

The mention of the city of Farsala in the spell suggests that in the local folklore of Kastoria there is still memory of the ancient ties between Macedon and Thessaly, forged through the Greek institution of *philia* and through the numerous interventions of the Macedonian kings in the rivalries between Thessalian aristocratic families.²³¹ Philip II fostered this tradition of friendly relations by marrying two Thessalian women, the Aleuad Philinna and Nicesipolis, the niece of Jason of Pherae. In 354 BC, he managed to take an active role in the political panorama of Thessaly with his intervention against Pherae, which eventually surrendered to him, and in 353 BC, when he supported the oligarchs of Pharsalus. Philip’s personal power over the region was then secured with his election as *archōn* of the *koinon* of the Thessalians for life.²³²

²²⁹ Spyridakis (1953) 409, n. 6. For the Greek spell, see appendix II, n. 14.

²³⁰ Fersala, as spelt in the spell, is a corruption of the toponym Farsala, a Thessalian city also known in antiquity with name Pharsalos. See Ntasios (2012) 99-103.

²³¹ Graninger (2010) 309-313.

²³² Hammond (1994) 46-49; Graninger (2010) 313-317.

The Macedonian-Thessalian *philia* went on under Alexander the Great, who was offered the title of *archōn* of the *koinon* at the end of 336 BC. Moreover, the Thessalian horsemen constituted an important section of the cavalry that Alexander led into Asia in 334 BC. Ancient sources disagree on the exact number of infantrymen (the total varies from 30,000 to 42,000) and cavalymen (from 4,500 to 5,500) in Alexander's army;²³³ nonetheless, it is worth considering Diodorus' account, where both Thessalian and Macedonian horsemen amount to 1,800.²³⁴ My interest here is not the argument of the exactness of Diodorus' piece of information, but its value for our discourse: the equality of the two corps suggests that Alexander held the Thessalian cavalry in high esteem and that he fully trusted its ability.²³⁵

Alexander is connected to Thessaly not only by a politico-military bond, but also "emotionally": as Plutarch informs us, Bucephalus was a Thessalian horse which Philip II bought from Philinicus.²³⁶ Already in Antiquity, Thessalian steeds were famous for their strength and quality, thanks to the numerous plains of the region which made horse-breeding possible.²³⁷ Among the different breeds, the horses from Pharsalus were branded with a typical ox-head, and they were noted for their high value.²³⁸ Given Bucephalus' name, stamina, and the large sum of thirteen talents which Philip II paid to purchase him,²³⁹ we can surely assume that Alexander's beloved stallion was bred in Pharsalus, a fact that explains why in Kastoria people believe that the Macedonian and his horse are still alive and they live in Farsala.

²³³ For the scholarly discussion on the accuracy of these numbers and the related bibliography, see Strootman (2012) 57-60.

²³⁴ D. S. XVII. 17. 4.

²³⁵ For the long-lasting and growing importance of Thessalian cavalry in archaic and classical Greece, see Hyland (2003) 126-129; Donaghy (2014) 104-106.

²³⁶ Plu. *Alex.* 6. 1.

²³⁷ Str. IX. 5. 1-2.

²³⁸ Hyland (2003) 149.

²³⁹ Hyland (2003) 142: "5th and early 4th century sources record 300 drachmae for a cheap, adequate horse, and 1,200 drachmae for a class animal".

C) Alexander the Great and the Sun cycle

This cycle approaches Alexander's relationship to the Sun from two opposing perspectives: the first praises the Macedonian developing the myth of his divine descent, whereas the second presents him as a gigantic figure and addresses the problem of his intemperance.

Folk Tale Type (Aarne-Thompson):

- n. 511: the supernatural birth of the hero;
- n. 551: the water of life;
- n. 650: the strong man;
- n. 898*: child to be returned to the Sun when twelve years old (Greek type).

Folk-tale motif (Thompson): fight of the Gods and Giants (A162.1).

C. 1. Descent theme.

Alexander's paternity has been a matter of interest since Antiquity, for the sources present four fathers for him: Philip II, the natural parent and Olympias' legitimate husband; Zeus, the ancestor of the Argead family; Zeus-Ammon, Alexander's divine father; Nectanebo, the Egyptian trickster who deceived the queen in order to have intercourse with her. Modern scholarship has focused on his unstable relationship with his natural father Philip II²⁴⁰ and on the discussion of whether Alexander himself was truly convinced of his divinity.²⁴¹ Whether he believed in his divine descent or not, Alexander's political rhetoric included also the promotion of a specific image of himself as god-like king; to this purpose, he nominated Apelles as his official court painter, Lysippus as his sculptor and Pyrgoteles as his engraver.²⁴² Apuleius even claimed that the nomination of the three artists took place with a formal statement forbidding

²⁴⁰ Ruzicka (2010) 3-11.

²⁴¹ See fn. 94.

²⁴² Plu. *Alex.* 4. 1-2; *De Alex.* II. 2 (= *Mor.* 335AB); Hor. *Ep.* II. 1. 239-241. For the portraits of Alexander in ancient art, cf. Bieber (1949) 373-427; *eadem* (1964) 12-38; Killewich (1993) 86-89; Moreno (1993) 101-112.

others to reproduce his own looks; although the declaration may be a forgery, it suggests that ancient authors thought it plausible that Alexander had full control of his public image.²⁴³ Information on the three court artists is scant, but we know that, prompted by the king, Apelles portrayed Alexander sitting on the throne with physical attributes similar to Zeus',²⁴⁴ and that Lysippus carved a statue of the Macedonian holding a spear and looking at the heaven as in dialogue with his divine father.²⁴⁵ Lysippus also made a statue of Helios on his chariot,²⁴⁶ which, possibly, led to the assimilation of Alexander with the Sun in Hellenistic and Roman art.²⁴⁷

In his silver coin issues, in continuity with the imagery of Philip II's mints, Alexander III highlighted his family bonds to the Heraclids by opting for the enthroned Zeus on the *recto* and the head of Heracles wearing a lion scalp on the *verso*.²⁴⁸ Although it is not sure whether the king intended the head of Heracles to be understood as his own portrait, later generations recognised his face in it; furthermore, Ptolemy's introduction of the head of Alexander with the elephant scalp soon after his death may suggest that already in his lifetime coinage Heracles was indeed conceived to be his own portrait.²⁴⁹

In Hellenic folklore, the conqueror's divinity is usually associated with the sun (ἥλιος, *helios*), often spelt with an initial capital, due to its assimilation to the Christian God. The syncretism between the sun and God occurred in the Principate and is attested by several passages of the New Testament, in which Jesus is described as the "Sun of righteousness" or the "light of the world".²⁵⁰ The anthropomorphic characterisation of the sun of the Alexander-cycle has a precedent in the solar mythology of the Classical period, when the figure of *helios* was integrated into the

²⁴³ Arr. An. I. 16. 4; Apul. Florida, 7. Stewart (1993) 21-41; *idem* (2003) 31-40.

²⁴⁴ The so-called Ἀλέξανδρος Κεραυνοφόρος (*Alexander Ceraunophoros*, "the thunder-bearer"); see Moreno (1993) 110.

²⁴⁵ Ἀλέξανδρος Αἰχμηφόρος (*Alexander Aichmēphoros*, "the spear-bearer"); see Moreno (1993) 111.

²⁴⁶ Pl. NH. XXXIV. 63.

²⁴⁷ Kullerich (1993) 88-89. See also L'Orange (1947). For representations of Alexander as Helios, see appendix I, n. 21.

²⁴⁸ Price (1991) 30-31; Kremydi (2011) 161-168.

²⁴⁹ Bieber (1949) 388; Price (1991) 33-34; Dahmen (2007) 10-11.

²⁵⁰ See, e. g., Matthew, 17. 2; John, 1. 9; 8. 12.

myths and worship of Heracles and Apollo;²⁵¹ but it is only with Byzantine era that there is a growing trend in the use of vernacular expressions which describe the sun as a human being: he *goes out* (i. e. rises), *rules*, *goes to sleep in the West* (at sunset).²⁵² In folk legends and songs, the sun is very strong, always hungry, and he lives at the top of high mountains; he has a mother and a wife, and he gifts childless women with fertility.²⁵³ This interpretation of the sun is modelled on the ancient myths of Heracles and of the Giants for their superhuman strength and voracity, and of Zeus, the father of the gods and all mankind, who used to be worshipped at the top of hills and mountains.²⁵⁴ The Christianisation of these pagan sun-traditions occurred with the substitution of Solar Zeus with Helias,²⁵⁵ a Jewish prophet of ca. ninth century BC believed to be the cause of rain, thunders and bolts. Thus, on remote mountaintops Orthodox churches were built in his name, replacing, but also assimilating, the ancient pagan cults of Zeus and the sun.²⁵⁶

In this section two myths²⁵⁷ will be discussed, both from the small village of Tragaki; they belong to the rich folk Alexander-tradition of Zante, which particularly focuses on the Macedonian's birth and on his demise. The reason for the Zakynthians' special interest in the marvellous journeys and actions of Alexander probably lies in the period he spent in the Western regions of Greece, when he might have taken the chance to visit the Ionian Islands. In fact, after Philip II's marriage to Cleopatra Eurydice, an aristocratic Macedonian, and his subsequent rift with Olympias in 337 BC, Alexander and his mother left for exile. Olympias stopped in Epirus at her brother Alexander I Molossus' court, where she stayed until Philip's assassination in 336 BC; Alexander moved on and travelled into Illyria, from where he was called back months later in autumn after Demaratus' intercession.²⁵⁸

²⁵¹ Politis (1975²) 130.

²⁵² Cf., by way of example, the Greek expression ἥλιος με δόντια (*Sun with teeth*), used to characterise sunny and yet very cold days.

²⁵³ Politis (1975²) 131-141.

²⁵⁴ Politis (1975²) 142-150.

²⁵⁵ Note the similarity between the Greek word for sun, ἥλιος (*helios*), and the name Ἡλίας (*Helias*).

²⁵⁶ Politis (1975²) 177.

²⁵⁷ The two folk narrations from Tragaki are categorised as modern myths, as they deal with a "divine, heroic" Alexander, son of the Sun-God.

²⁵⁸ Plu. *Alex.* 9. 5-6.

As the numerous folk traditions attested in Zante, Paxos, and Cephalonia suggest, the inhabitants of the Heptanese proudly keep alive the memory of Alexander's legendary passage in their lands, wishing to have a share in his glorious past.

Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος ο γιός του Ηλίου (*Alexander the Great the son of the Sun*)²⁵⁹

Ήτουνά μια βασίλισσα και δεν έκανε παιδιά κ'είχε μαράζι γι'αυτούνο. Κι όλο έκλαιε, έκλαιε. Ούτε τον άντρα τση είχε ναν τη παρηγορήση. Έλειπε όλο σε πολέμους. Αλλά ήτουνά και πολύ ωραία γυναίκα. Οπού εσσουνήθαε και ενιβότουνά και εκαθότουνά στο προσηλιακό.

Του άρεσε του Ηλίου, που την ήβλεπε· “Μωρέ, δεν είναι καλά – λέει – να κάμω ένα παιδί με δαύτη; Καϊμό τό'χω και εγώ να κάμω ένα”. Το λοιπό εκατέβηκε μιά φορά και τσ'είπε· “Εγώ σ'αγαπάω κι ά μ'αγαπάς και εσύ, δέξου να κάνουμε παιδί”. Η βασίλισσα εκθαμπώθηκε η κακομοίρα, που τον είδε κοντά τση. “Μπορώ να πω το όχι σε ένα τέτοιο βασιλιά; – του είπε – Είμαι άξια εγώ;” Ο Ήλιος τσ'αποκρίθηκε· “Όμως με την συμφωνία πως δε θαν τό'χης πάντα το παιδί εσύ. Θάν το πάρω να βασιλέψη στο βασίλειό μου”. “Και τι άλλο θέλω από να βασιλεύη στον ουρανό;” Είπε η βασίλισσα.

Και στσιό εννιά μήνες εγεννήθηκε ένα παιδί, ένα άσπρο, όπου όσο το ήβλεπε κ'εσκεφτότουνά πώς θάρθη η ώρα ναν τση το πάρη, δεν ημπόρειε ναν το υποφέρη. Εκλειούσε πόρτες, χαραμάδες, μην πάη και τση τονέ κλέψη ο Ήλιος κρυφά. Όσο εμεγάλωνε το παιδί, τόσο εγενότουνά όμορφο και αντρείο και το ελέγανε γι'αυτό Μεγαλέξαντρο.

Η καϊμένη η βασίλισσα ούλο υποφείριζε για δαύτονε και εσκεφτότουνά πώς να γελάση τον Ήλιο, να μην του δώση τον υγιό του. Όπου αρχίνησε να μπαλιγάρη το παιδί με ούλα ευτούνα και ναν του λήη· “παιδάκι μου, δεν είναι μέγάλος ο κόσμος ούλος ναν τότε κάμης δικόνε σου; Παρί τι θα καταλάβης να βασιλεύης εκεί απάνου; Κανένας δε θα σε ξαναδῆ από τσοί δικούς σου”. Οπού από δώ από κεί τον εκατάφερε. “Αμή ο πατέρας μου, πού θα με θέλη; Τι θα γένη;” Είπε το παιδί. Λέει εκείνη· “Εγνοια σου κ'εγώ έχω να κάμω. Δε θαν τονέ

²⁵⁹ Modern Greek myth from Tragaki, Zante. See Minotos (1953) 689-690, n. 3.

αφήσω. Μοναχά να προσέχουμε στον ύπνο σου, αν τύχη να κοιμηθῆς μέρα, γιατί ευτούνος τη νύχτα κοιμάται και δε φαίνεται. Εγώ θα στέκω από πάνω σου, να σε φυλάω”. Όπως κι όλας τονέ φύλαε, τονέ φύλαε.

Αλλά ο Μεγαλέξαντρος αρχίνησε κ’εβαρειότουνα το βασίλειό του και μια μέρα λέει στη μάννα του· “Μητέρα – λέει – εβαρέθηκα. Θα πάρω να πάω και σ’άλλα βασίλεια, ναν τα κάμω δικά μου”. Τι νάν του πῆ η μάννα του η κακομοίρα! “Καλά, – λέει – παιδάκι μου. Να πάς εδώ στη γῆς όπου θέλεις. Μοναχά σ’ορκίζω στο γάλα, που έχεις φαωμένο από μένανε, αν τύχη και κοιμηθῆς μέρα, να βάλῆς άθρωπο να σε φυλάῆ, μην τύχη και τρυπώση καμμία ώρα ο ἥλιος και σε πάρῆ”. “Εγνοια σου – λέει – μανούλα μου. Θα προσέχω σαν να ’σουνα εσύ”. Όπως κióλας ποτέ του δεν εκοιμότουνα απόγιομα. Είχε ένα στρατιώτη μπιστεμένο του και μόνε έκανε πως λαγιάζει τονέ ζύπναε.

Αμή μια μέρα (τι είναι η τύχη! Όσα θέλει κάνει), εκεί που επερίμενε το φαητό του στο βασιλικό τραπέζι, τονέ πήρε ο ύπνος, γιατί ήτουνα κακονυχτισμένος. Ο ἥλιος ευτούνη τη στιγμή εφύλαε. Δεν ήθελε τίποτσι άλλο. Έστειλε μια αχτίνα του και τονέ πήρε. Από τότενες ο Μεγαλέξαντρος ζῆ εκεί πάνου με τον πατέρα του και βασιλεύει.

There was a childless queen who suffered much and always wept for not having children. And her husband could not comfort her either, for he was incessantly fighting in far away wars. But she was a very pretty woman, and she used to wash her face and sit facing south-eastwards in a place where she could look towards the sun.

The Sun enjoyed looking at her: “Hey, would it not be a good idea – he said – to have a baby with her? I regret that I do not have a child and I long for one”. Therefore, once he went down on earth and he told her: “I love you and if you love me too, accept my offer to make a child”. The queen, poor thing, was dazzled when she saw the Sun standing by her. “May I say no to such a king? – she told him – Am I worthy?” The Sun responded: “But we shall have a baby under the agreement that you will not have him always by yourself. I will take him to rule in my kingdom”. “And what else should I wish more than seeing him rule in heaven?” – said the queen.

After nine months a white child was born; when the queen looked at him and thought that the time would come when the Sun comes to take him, she could not stand the idea. She closed doors and cracks, so that the Sun would not steal the child secretly. As the child grew up, he became more handsome and braver every day; for this reason, people called him Megalexandros, the Great Alexander.

The poor queen was always in pain for him and she thought about ways to trick the Sun and not to give him the child. Then she started to persuade her son with these words: "My child, isn't the whole world too big to make it all yours? And what will you gain from ruling from there above? Nobody among your kin will see you again". Eventually, she managed to convince him. "And what if my father wants me then? What will happen?" said the child. And the queen replied: "I will take care of you. I will not allow the Sun (to snatch you). We only have to concern about your sleep, if you ever sleep during the day; for during the night he rests too, and he does not appear. I will stand there by your side, in order to guard you". And in this way she used to guard and to protect him.

But Alexander the Great started to get bored with his kingdom and one day he said to his mother: "Mother, I am annoyed. I shall set out for a journey towards other kingdoms, in order to make them all mine". What could his wretched mother reply?! "Fine, my son. – said she – Go wherever you want here on the Earth. Only I swear by my maternal milk which fed you, if you ever sleep during the day please put a man to guard you, lest the Sun sneaks in suddenly and snatches you". "Do not worry, mother" – said he – "I will be careful as much as you were". And Alexander never slept afternoons: he had a trustworthy general who would wake him up as soon as he was falling asleep.²⁶⁰

Eventually, one day (what an unpredictable thing destiny is! It does whatever it wants), at the time when Alexander was waiting for his food to be served on the regal table, he fell asleep, because he had had a sleepless night.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Arr. *An.* IV. 13: The Royal Pages watched over Alexander as he slept; on the night of the conspiracy organised by Hermolaus, a Syrian prophetess who travelled with the court prompted the king to stay awake and drink until daybreak.

At that time the Sun was keeping an eye on him, and he did not wish anything else. He sent one of his rays of light and he snatched Alexander. Since then, Alexander the Great lives and reigns with his father there above in the sky.

The long-coveted birth of Alexander draws from the strand of tradition which started with Pseudo-Callisthenes and describes Olympias' difficulty in getting pregnant and her recourse to magic in order to conceive.²⁶¹ In the folk myth as in the *Romance*, a beautiful queen longs for a baby, but she is unable to have one, since her husband is often away on battlefields and thus she is left alone for long periods.²⁶² Moreover, in both the accounts there is a claim for divine descent: Alexander's father is Nectanebo disguised as the solar god Zeus-Ammon in the *Romance* and the Sun-God in the folk myth. It is worth noticing that sudden fertility granted to a childless woman by the sun is a typically Greek folk motif: according to the folklorist Megas, there are twenty-five variants of this type in the Helladic territory.²⁶³ The tale-type's protagonists are common people and there is no mention of divine attributes or of Alexander; the sun simply offers *his* help to a couple of peasants, demanding that the child goes to *him* when the age of twelve years old is reached.

Once in the sky, Alexander is perceived as a god-like figure, who reigns jointly with the Sun-God: the Macedonian's ascension to his father carried up by a ray of light reminds us of Christ's ascent to heaven and supports his assimilation into Orthodox religious lore. In fact, as seen above, in the Byzantine period Alexander's flight was well known to the Greek audience via the *Alexander Romance*²⁶⁴ and through church art; between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries it became a popular theme also in the Western Christian Alexander-Reception, either as a warning against excessive pride, or as divine recognition of the Macedonian's rule over the *oecumene*.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ *AR* (α) I. 4-7. The story of Olympias' infertility is probably one of the motifs that developed at an early stage in the third century BC, for it is already attested in the archetype (α) version of the *Romance*.

²⁶² The *AR* (β) version makes Olympias' struggle quite clear at I. 4, when, on his departure, Philip II says to her: "If you do not bear me a son after I return from the war, you shall never know my embrace again". [Transl. Stoneman].

²⁶³ Megas (2012) 113-119 (tale); 232 (comment).

²⁶⁴ See *AR* (β) II. 41: Alexander yoked two birds to ascend to the sky.

²⁶⁵ Schmidt (1995) 107.

The hero's exceptional birth and prodigious strength and beauty are tropes found also in the ancient myths developed around the figures of Heracles and of Theseus, and they became essential elements in many folk narrations.²⁶⁶ Their evolution constituted two separate types: the "supernatural birth of the hero" and "the strong man type" respectively, which can be traced in several folk Alexander's narratives.²⁶⁷ The stress on Alexander's whiteness and his avoidance of the sun remind us of the Aetolian tale of Anēliagos, an extremely handsome prince obliged to live locked up in his castle and always in the shadow. Had he seen the sun, he would have died immediately. Anēliagos eventually died because he fell in love with the cunning Rhēnē. In fact, unhappy to spend only nighttimes with the prince, one day the woman decided to trick him: she killed all the roosters, thinking that in this way Anēliagos would not wake up early enough to run back to his castle before sunrise and he would stay with her. Thus, when Anēliagos sneaked away from Rhēnē's castle, he was stricken by the sun's rays and died.²⁶⁸

Alexander's trustworthy general may be a reference to his beloved friend Hephaestion, a friendship which became proverbial in Greece as much as the bond between Achilles and Patroclus. The two Macedonians shared the same cultural and military upbringing, which constituted an important stage in the creation of comradely spirit between the companions: in fact, when Darius' mother Sisigambis addressed Hephaestion as king, Alexander reassured her not to worry about her mistake, for *he was Alexander too*.²⁶⁹ This anecdote suggests that the great Macedonian genuinely considered his friend as a peer, and as his *alter ego*. The strong *philia* between the two young companions is highlighted numerous times by the ancient sources: Curtius states that Hephaestion "was by far the dearest of all the king's friends",²⁷⁰ and that he was also the trustee of the king's secrets. Similarly, Plutarch says that, among the companions, Hephaestion was the most beloved by Alexander, and that he deserved the appellation φιλαλέξανδρος (supporter of Alexander), for he even backed the

²⁶⁶ For examples of the hero-motif in non-Greek folk traditions, cf. Underberg (2005) 10-16.

²⁶⁷ Thompson (1977) 279.

²⁶⁸ See Kyriakidis' comment in Minotos (1953) 695.

²⁶⁹ Curt. III. 12. 17: "*Non errasti*", *inquit*, "*mater: nam et hic Alexander est*".

²⁷⁰ Curt. III. 12.16: *longe omnium amicorum carissimus erat regi*.

conqueror's policy of "orientalisation".²⁷¹ Arrian narrates that when Alexander paid honours at Achilles' tomb in the Troad, Hephaestion crowned the tomb of Patroclus;²⁷² during the mass wedding at Susa, they both marry one of Darius III's daughters, so that their children would be kin.²⁷³ After Hephaestion's death, Alexander is overwhelmed by such a grief that he had to be dragged away from his friend's corpse, dear to him as his own life;²⁷⁴ furthermore, he planned the erection of a magnificent tomb in his memory and even asked the oracle of Siwah the permission to honour his friend as a hero.²⁷⁵

Version from Tragaki, Zante: *Alexander the Great and the witch princess*²⁷⁶

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess, and there was no other like her in the world. But what she desired! She wished to marry the Sun! And there was no way she could take another man as a husband. All the princes, who were seeking for engagement, were rejected. "There is no one else like you [Sun]!" she used to say. Until at some point the Sun understood that she was in love with him: in fact, from dawn, when the God rose, to the time he was setting, she was sitting in front of him on a chair and staring at him the entire time.

So do imagine what beauties this young lady had, if from his kingdom the Sun went down to earth. He told her: "We will make a child. This child will conquer the entire world and will rule it; but then I shall take him with me in my kingdom, as I have no other child". The princess accepted the Sun's offer, had intercourse with him and became pregnant. The time of the childbirth arrived and she bore to the world one white son. For this reason, she called him Alexander the Great.

²⁷¹ Plu. *Alex.* 47. 5.

²⁷² Arr. *An.* I. 12. 1.

²⁷³ Arr. *An.* VII. 4. 5.

²⁷⁴ Arr. *An.* VII. 14. 3-6.

²⁷⁵ Arr. *An.* VII. 23. 6-7.

²⁷⁶ See appendix II, n. 15 for the original Greek text; cf. Minotos (1953) 688-689, n. 2.

The child grew up and he became a great king but, the longer his poor mother was looking at him, the sadder she was feeling. “Look! – speaking to herself – Everything is happening precisely as his father foretold! Alexander conquered kingdoms and countries; everything became his own property!” Until she decided: “I will confess everything”.

“My child, such and such happened – said she to Alexander. And now it is approaching the time for the Sun to come down from the sky to fetch you. Here on earth you have so many kingdoms, so many good things! I know where the water of immortality is. Go and find it: if you drink it, the Sun will not be able to catch you and nothing (bad) will ever happen to you”. Alexander the Great agreed. She prepared for him everything he needed for the journey and she advised him where to go. But she also told him: “Be careful to talk to nobody during your journey”.

So Alexander set off. He went to the place his mother the queen told him and he found the water of life; while he was on his way back with his wineskin full of magic water, in the middle of the street he saw a goldsmith who was crafting a big golden bird, an eagle. What a joy! Alexander the Great could not refrain himself and said: “What a (marvellous) thing it is!” The goldsmith was his Destiny, which was already written. “My Lord, the princess of this country is getting married and I will present it to her”. Alexander spoke to himself: “It can not happen that the princess is getting married and I will not bring a present to her”. “Will you sell it to me? – says Alexander – I will pay you the whole price”. “Gladly you can have it. This gift matches your majesty, my Lord! Take it!”

So I do not know how much the regal amount paid by Alexander was. In that precise moment he remembered his mother’s words. “That is done – said towards himself – what has happened, happened”.

Alexander was just enough able to fit himself into the eagle and, during the night, when nobody was around, he went to the square in front of the palace of the princess, he set up the eagle and hid inside it. At dawn she woke up and saw the eagle, and such a vision blew her mind: she had never seen such a precious thing before. She ordered that the eagle was carried upstairs and placed it into her room. In the evening, when everybody was sleeping,

Alexander went out of the bird, introduced himself, and narrated everything to her, for her beauty had driven him insane.

In fact, she was a witch whom his Destiny had put in his way – as much as the craftsman – and she pretended that she wanted to take Alexander as her husband and she started stroking him. While she was caressing him, she pulled out a knife and cut his wineskin containing the water of immortality.

This version of the myth blends different folk themes: in addition to the water of life and Alexander's loss of immortality, it includes motifs closely related to the sun-type, such as the Macedonian's admirable prowess and the fairness of his skin (see above, Anēliagos endangered by the sunlight). It is worth considering that the core episodes of its plot seem unrelated to the *Romance's* tradition of Olympias and Nectanebo's affair, whereas they present deep similarities with the folk type of the sun gifting fertility: there is, in fact, no mention of the king battling abroad or of the difficulty of the queen in conceiving; the Sun has intercourse with the lady because she resolutely wanted him as a partner and he deemed it a good idea to have an heir with whom to share his rule. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the myth has a completely popular background, unconcerned about Pseudo-Callisthenes' tradition on Alexander's birth as passed down through the *Phyllada*. Moreover, the factors which contributed to the hero's death are typical of folk narratives: a trickster craftsman, a witch disguised as a beautiful princess, the theft of the magic water, and the Moera, the unchangeable fate who orchestrated Alexander's demise.

C. 2. *Hubris* theme.

In this set of myths, Alexander is perceived as a gigantic figure endowed with supernatural powers, similar to the ancient Γίγαντες (Giants), the Byzantine Ἀντρεωμένοι (the valorous, brave), and the Modern Σαραντάπηχοι (literally those as tall as forty cubits, i. e. extremely tall beings).²⁷⁷ As the mythological Giants dared to

²⁷⁷ Kyriakidis (1965²) 176-178: These traditions on gigantic figures spring from the belief that old times were better and happier than the present, since they were populated by heroic figures. This seems to be a seamless motif in Greek literature: Hesiod's mythological giants flow into the *Akrites* and the

wage war against the Olympian gods, in the same way the folk Alexander challenged his father the Sun; furthermore, both the Giants and Alexander are characterised by an oversized body, enormous strength, violent reactions, *hubris*, invincibility, and inventiveness. In fact, Giants are often described with the words θυμός (strong spirit; anger) and άτασθαλία (conceit; arrogance),²⁷⁸ which are also used by the Alexander-historians to criticise the Macedonian's excessive behaviours;²⁷⁹ moreover, after the soldiers' mutiny at the River Hyphasis in 326 BC, Diodorus presents Alexander in the act of constructing massive altars for the twelve gods, a gigantic ditch and wall around his camp, and beds and mangers of exaggerated size, as he aimed at making the local people believe that the Macedonians had gigantic strength and stature.²⁸⁰

Ο αχάριστος βασιλέας Μεγαλέξανδρος (*The ungrateful king Alexander the Great*)²⁸¹

Μια φορά κ'έναν καιρό ήταν ένας και τον έλεγαν Μεγαλέξαντρο. Κ'ευτούνος ο άνθρωπος ήτανε πολύ έξυπνος και δυνατός. Με ούλα τα καλά τον εμοιράνανε οι Μοίρες. Αλλά η τρίτη, που τήνε λένε Κουτσοδαιμόνιο, γιατί ούλο θέλει να χαλάη το καλό, του'δωκε κ'ένα κακό· να'ναι πάντα του αχάριστος.

Το λοιπό άμα ανανοήθηκε τον κόσμο, τι του εσκαρφίστηκε! Του εβουλήθηκε να πάρη τη θέση του Ηλίου στον ουρανό. Ήτανε, βλέπεις, ολόξανθος, όπως είναι το χρυσάφι, και τα μαλλιά του εφτάνανε ίσιαμε κάτω από την αντρεία του· Ούλα του ήτανε χρυσά, όπως είναι το χρυσάφι, ως και η γλώσσα του.

Αλλά όσο εμεγάλωνε, τόσο περισσότερο του εμεγάλωνε η τουβουλιά και μια μέρα δίνει μια από την Τούρλα του Σκοπού, για να πιάση τον ήλιο και

Antreiōmenoi of the Byzantine period, who then evolve into the Modern *Sarantapēchoi*. For the Reception of the Giants in non-Greek folk traditions, see Nagar (2005) 32-37.

²⁷⁸ Calame (1985) 150-153.

²⁷⁹ See chapter seven, the *Herodotean Alexander*.

²⁸⁰ D. S. XVII. 95. 1-2: "[Alexander] wanted to make a camp of heroic proportions (ήρωικὴν βουλόμενος ποιήσασθαι στρατοπεδείαν) and to leave the natives evidence of huge men (άπολιπεῖν σημεῖα μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν), displaying the strength of the giants (ὑπερφυεῖς)". Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 62. 4; Arr. *An.* V. 29.1.

²⁸¹ Tale from Tragaki, Zante. Minotos (1953) 690, n. 4.

ναν τονέ ρίξη κάτου, για να παλέψουνε, κι όποιος ήθελε κερδίσει, εκείνος ήθε να βασιλέψη. Ο Θεός τότε μίσησε γ'αυτούνο, “Μωρέ, πές – λέει – και δόξα σοι ο Θεός!”. Και με τη φόρα πού'δωσε, πάει.

Once upon a time there was a fellow whose name was Alexander the Great. This man was really smart and strong, and the Moerae admired all his good qualities. But the third Moera, whose name was Koutsodaimonio, as she always wished to destroy whatever is good, endowed him with something bad too: infinite dissatisfaction and ingratitude.

Thus, Alexander did not take into account the world – and what he came up with! He desired to take the place of the Sun in the sky. You see, Alexander was all blonde as gold, and his hair reached as far as his virtue; everything upon him was golden, exactly like gold, even his tongue. But as he was growing older, the greater his stubbornness grew.

One day Alexander sets out for the mount Tourla of Skopos, so that he would catch the Sun, drag him down on earth, and fight against him. Whoever won the fight would have become the ruler. For this reason, the Sun-God resented Alexander and said: “Hey fall down and God bless you!”. And Alexander picked up such a great speed that he is gone (i. e. he fell from the top of the mountain and died).

In the first paragraph, Alexander is presented in a very positive fashion: he is gifted with the typical qualities of a hero, such as extraordinary beauty, strength and intelligence. Like Samson,²⁸² the Israelite hero whose strength resided in his hair, Alexander's long mane is described as commensurable to his courage and manliness. The veiled parallel between the Macedonian and the biblical hero – instead of the pagan Heracles – may be a religious reference which, together with the presence of the Sun-God, is to be understood as another effort to cast Alexander into the Christian tradition.

Alexander's virtues are said to be so striking that even the Moerae, shady figures in Greek mythology, admired him. Among the Moerae, Koutsodaimonio – literally “lame demon” – is the key figure of the story, as with her jealousy she triggers

²⁸² *Judges 16.*

a chain of events which brought about Alexander's death: her spell is the cause of the Macedonian's proverbial dissatisfaction (αχαριστία) and *hubris*, which led him to challenge the Sun-God. Eventually, Divine Providence punished him.

The hero's fall to his death reflects the popular belief that only an involuntary slip could kill a Giant: being unable to sustain all his own weight, he can not stand up again. Furthermore, in Modern folklore, people with gigantic features are considered impious figures, and God deliberately causes their fall (and death) to punish their irreverence.²⁸³

The divine punishment of a giant-like Alexander for his excessive pride is attested also in another Zakynthian myth:²⁸⁴ in this short variant, the Macedonian boasts about his heroic endeavours, such as his ability to race one hundred laps around Mount Skopos or to lift the sea to the height of the mountains. God, *offended* (literally, *disgusted*: κάνει σκίφο στο Θεό) by Alexander, throws at him a star from the sky and kills him.

A myth attested in the village of Tragaki, entitled 'Ο Μεγαλέξαντρος καί ἡ νεράϊδα τῆς θάλασσης (*Alexander the Great and the Nereid of the sea*),²⁸⁵ belongs to the cycle featuring Alexander and the Sun, but it presents a complex and unconventional mixture of well-known themes in the Alexander-tradition: the Sun is deceitful, the Nereid is *de facto* a mermaid, and Alexander is not the protagonist of the plot, but rather the unaware pawn in the game of the other two characters.

Ὁ Μεγαλέξαντρος ἐκαμάρωνε γιὰ τὸν ψῆλο του. Καὶ τί τοῦ ἄρεσε; Νὰ βάνη τὸ κεφάλι του νὰ σκεπάζη τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ νὰ κουνῆ τὰ σύννεφα. Κάθε λίγο εὐτοῦνο. Ὅπου ὁ ἥλιος, μία δύο, ἐβαρέθηκε. “Δὲν εἶναι δουλειὰ ἐτοῦνη, εἶπε ἀπὸ μέσα του. Ἐγὼ θὰν τότε σιάξω. Ἐγὼ διατάζω καὶ θὰ μοῦ κάνη καὶ τὸ ντετόρο”. Ἐπῆε κ' ἠῦρηκε μία ἀνεράϊδα τῆς θάλασσης.

- “Σ'ἀρέσει, κυρά μου, εὐτοῦνος ὁ λεβέντης;”

- “Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ μ'ἀρέση;”

- “Εἶναι ὁ ἀφέντης τῆς στεριάς. Τόνη θέλεις γι' ἄντρα σου;”

²⁸³ Kyriakidis (1965²) 178.

²⁸⁴ Minotos (1953) 692, n. 8: Η περιφάνεια του Μεγαλέξαντρου (*Alexander the Great's pride*).

²⁸⁵ Minotos (1953) 361, n. 6.

- “Τόνε θέλω, μὰ τῆ θάλασσα, τῆ μάνα μου. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ εἶμαι ἤσυχη πῶς δὲ θὰ μοῦ τόνε πάρει καμμία ἄλλη, θὰν τόνε πάρω ἀπὸ τῆ γῆς”.

- “Καὶ ρωτᾶς κιόλας;”

Ὅπου δὲν ἤξέρω τι μάγια ἔκαμε στὸ Μεγαλέξαντρο καὶ ἐβουρλίστηκε γιὰ τὴν ἀνεράϊδα. Καὶ δὲν ἐσκεφτότουνα τίποτε ἄλλο περὶ πῶς νὰν τήνε κάμη γυναῖκα του. “Δὲ θέλω νὰ γλέπω ἄλλο τὸν κόσμο, κυρά μου, περὶ ἐσένανε μοναχά”. Καὶ ὅπως ἐκείνη τὸν εἶχε στὴν ἀγκαλιά στη, ἐκείνος ἔμεινε.

Εἶδες ἐκεῖνο τὸν βράχο, ποῦ εἶναι σὰν κεφάλι ἐκεῖ στ’ Ἀργάσι;” Εἶναι τὸ κεφάλι του.

Alexander the Great was proud of his height. And what did he enjoy? He liked to hide the light of the Sun with his head and to shake the clouds, and he used to do this quite often. Until the Sun had enough of Alexander’s behaviour and thought: “This is not right; I will fix him (i. e. take my revenge on him)! I shall order and he will become even a doctor for me (i. e. he will do whatever I order)!” The Sun went to find a Nereid of the sea and asked her:

- “My lady, do you like that fellow?”

- “Of course! Is it possible not to like him?” – Replied she.

- “He is the master of the land. Do you want him as your husband?”

- “I do want him, by the sea and my mother! But to be sure that no other woman will take him, I shall take him away from the earth”.

- “And you are even asking? Sure!”

I do not know²⁸⁶ what kind of spell the Nereid put on Megalexandros, but he fell in love madly with her and he would think of nothing else but to make her his wife. He said: “My lady, I do not wish to see the world anymore, but only you”. And when the Nereid held him in her arms, he died.

[Ms Arvanitaki addressing Minotos:] In Argassi, have you seen that jutting rock which resembles a human head? Eh, it is Alexander’s head!

Alexander the Great is presented as extremely tall, since with his head he is able to shake the clouds and to trouble the Sun. His legendary tallness is surprising: in fact,

²⁸⁶ The tale was narrated by Ms Antzola Arvanitaki, a 76 year-old analphabetic lady of Tragaki, to the folklorist Minotos.

several times in the Vulgate tradition the hero is described as short. Curtius insists twice on Alexander's small size: he states that Hephaestion, although same age as the king, was superior in stature,²⁸⁷ and he adds that the Queen of the Amazons Thalestris was not impressed with Alexander's tiny appearance, deeming that it was no fitting for his great fame.²⁸⁸ At V. 2. 13, Curtius' third reference to the conqueror's build – too tiny for Darius III's throne²⁸⁹ – parallels Diodorus' unflattering description of the great conqueror sitting with dangling legs (ποσὶν αἰωρουμένοις) on the huge royal seat (μείζονος) of the palace of the kings in Susa (XVII. 66. 3).²⁹⁰ Although the Macedonian's shortness was attested in the ancient sources, already in Antiquity it was overshadowed by his great strength, swiftness of mind and perseverance, characteristics which made of him the epitome of the Greek invincible hero. Alexander's gigantic features are to be ascribed to the myth-making of the Byzantine period, a time when the *antreiomenoi* and the *akritai* populated the empire and defended its edges. The legendary strength and superhuman powers of the ancient Giants were thus applied to the heroes of epic and demotic songs, among them Alexander the Great.

In the myth the Sun is not presented as Alexander's father; his behaviour rather reminds us of the motif of Providence found in the Christianised recensions of the *Romance*: the solar deity gets tired of the Macedonian's conceit and decides to take vengeance. Similarly, Pseudo-Callisthenes' Alexander is warned twice not to exceed in his vainglory, lest divine punishment would arrive. The first warning is described in the first letter to Olympias. Alexander tells his mother about the Land of the Blessed, where he had captured and yoked a couple of birds in order to reach the sky, since he desired to verify from above whether that country constituted indeed the end of the world. At that point, a creature in human shape, symbolising Divine Providence, approached Alexander and warned him to return back down to the Earth as fast as possible, before becoming food for the two birds.²⁹¹ In a subsequent letter to his

²⁸⁷ Curt. III. 12. 16.

²⁸⁸ Curt. VI. 5. 29.

²⁸⁹ Curt. V. 2. 13.

²⁹⁰ D. S. XVII. 66. 3.

²⁹¹ Cf. later additions to the episode described in *AR* (β) II. 41.

mother,²⁹² the Macedonian refers to his second attempt to reach the impossible – again stopped by a divine warning – in the description of the temple of Dionysus placed at the top of a mountain at Lyssus, beyond Heliopolis, the city of the Sun. In the temple there was a golden cage in which a bird, similar to a dove, addressed Alexander with human voice and in the Greek tongue, suggesting that “he desist from struggling against the gods”, return to his own place, and “not to strive to climb the paths of heaven”.²⁹³

The Nereid-mermaid, usually Alexander’s sibling, is a witch with no family connection with the Macedonian. Through her magic spells, she makes him fall in love with her, and this insane feeling causes his death: Alexander is so deeply misled that he abandons even all his desires for conquest and glory to live in the sea with her. But does Alexander go through a metamorphosis into a fish or a merman? The myth does not openly state whether the hero turns into a sea animal in order to live with his love in the underwater world. The only evidence of Alexander’s metamorphosis into an animal comes from a fairy tale from Anōgeia in the region of Sparta, in which the Macedonian king turns every day into a *lamb*, as he wants to keep secret his affair with a young local princess.²⁹⁴

To conclude, the Nereid’s evil magic provides a reason for Alexander’s death in the sea, which is instrumental in the explanation of the origin of the cliff visible from Argassi beach, considered by the locals the Macedonian’s head jutting out of the sea.

D) Alexander the Great with animal ears cycle

Folk tale motifs (Thompson): person with ass’s (horse’s) ears (F511.2.2); reeds disclosing the king’s secret (D1316.5); the barber not keeping for himself the king’s secret (N465).

²⁹² AR (β) III. 28.

²⁹³ AR (β) III. 28. [Transl. Stoneman].

²⁹⁴ Manousos (1917) 653-655.

This cycle shares many similarities with the myth of the Phrygian King Midas, whose ears were turned into those of an ass by Apollo. According to the ancient myth,²⁹⁵ one day Pan (or Marsyas) boasted about his ability in playing the flute, and dared to challenge Apollo, the god of music and of the lyre. Midas was chosen to judge the contestants' lyrical skills and he inconsiderately preferred the satyr's rustic melodies to the god's music. Outraged, Apollo deemed Midas unworthy to keep his human ears, and he changed them into a donkey's ears – long and hairy – more appropriate to the Phrygian king's musical taste. The king carefully concealed his shameful flaw under a turban; his barber, though, struggling to keep the secret for himself, dug a shallow hole and whispered into it that Midas had ass's ears. After a while, in the area reed grew up, which, blown by the Southern wind, disclosed the king's secret to the world.

Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος είχε το ένα αυτί σκυλίσιο και τ'άλλο γαϊδουρίσιο. Όπως μη αποκαλυφθῆ εις το λαόν το ελάττωμα τούτο, ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος εφόνευε τον κουρέα, τον οποίον εκάστοτε προσεκάλει να κόψη εις αυτόν την κόμην.

Εκ τούτων εις μόνον διέφυγε τον θάνατον, ο οποίος επέτυχε να εξαπατήση τον Αλέξανδρον, ότι δεν είχαν αντιληφθῆ την επί της κεφαλῆς του ασημίαν. Ούτος όμως εβασανίζετο υπό ακατασχέτου επιθυμίας ν'ανακοινώση το μυστικόν, το οποίον εγνώριζε. Ίνα μη είπη δε τούτο εις τινα των ανθρώπων και γνωσθῆ ούτως ευρύτερον, έφυγεν εις έρημον τόπον, όπου, ευρών φρέαρ βάθους τεσσαράκοντα οργυιών, έκυψε και εφώναξεν εντός του φρέατος: "Ο βασιλιάς Αλέξαντρος έχει το ένα αυτί σκυλίσιο και τ'άλλο γαϊδουρίσιοοοο!!!" Μετ'ολίγον χρόνον εφύτρωσεν εις το χείλος του φρέατος κάλαμος, τον οποίον διερχόμενος κάποιος βοσκός απέκοψε και κατασκεύασε φλογέραν, η οποία, μόλις την έφουσα, έλεγεν: "Ο βασιλιάς Αλέξανδρος έχει το ένα αυτί σκυλίσιο και τ'άλλο γαϊδουρίσιοοοο!"

Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος, ότε επληροφόρηθη ότι εγνώσθη εις τον κόσμον το ελάττωμά του, ησθένησεν εκ της λύπης του. Κατά συμβουλήν μιας μαγίσσης ηδύνατο ούτος να θεραπευθῆ, μόνον εάν εζήτει να πῆ από το αθάνατο νερό, το οποίο ευρίσκεται εις την άκραν του κόσμου.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ *Ov. Met.* XI. 146-193. Cf. *Ar. Plut.* 287.

²⁹⁶ Spyridakis (1953) 391-392.

Alexander the Great had one canine and one asinine ear. Lest the people discover about this flaw, Alexander used to kill the barber, whom each time he summoned to cut his hair.

Of those barbers only one escaped from death, the barber who managed to deceive Alexander, saying that he had not perceived any ugliness on his head. Nevertheless, the barber was then distressed by an overwhelming craving to announce the secret he knew. Lest he said this secret to anybody and spread the notice broadly, he fled into a solitary place, where, having found a well of two hundred and forty feet²⁹⁷ depth, he bowed forward and shouted down the hole: “King Alexander has a canine and an asinine ear!!!” After a little while reed sprouted at the edge of the well; a shepherd, who was passing by the place, cut the reed off to build a flute, which, once blown, said: “King Alexander has one canine and one asinine ear!”

When Alexander the Great was informed that his flaw had been made known to the world, he fell ill out of his sorrow. A witch suggested to him that his illness could be cured only by drinking the water of immortality, which is found at the far end of the world.

This Epirote tale omits the musical contest that occurs in the first half of Midas’ myth and provides no explanation for Alexander’s shameful ears; the narration starts with the second part of the myth and it presents exactly the same episodes: Alexander conceals his ears with a turban; a barber learns the secret, can not keep it, and whispers it into a profound well; reeds grow in the area; the reed – either blown by the wind, or played as a flute by a shepherd – reveals the king’s secret.

The ancient historians’ descriptions of the *historical* Midas provide several reasons for casting Alexander into the Phrygian king’s tradition:

i) a common geographical background. Midas belonged to the Briges who, according to Herodotus, were a tribe living in Macedon on the slopes of Mount Vermion. After moving to Asia, the Briges changed their name into Phryges, and settled down in the area which was named Phrygia after them.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ 1 *orgyia* = 1.8288 metres, ca. six feet.

²⁹⁸ Hdt. VII. 73; VIII. 138. 2-3. Cf. Borza (1990) 65: “What can be established, despite an extremely slight archaeological record (especially along the slopes of Mt. Vermion), is that two streams of Lausitz

ii) Religious symbols and prophecies connecting Midas and Alexander. Gordius, Midas' father, was a poor farmer who possessed only a cart and two oxen. One day, while he was ploughing, an eagle sat on his yoke; Gordius understood that it was a portent and sacrificed to Zeus Basileus. Years later, after a civil war broke out in Phrygia, an oracle informed the inhabitants that their new king would appear on a cart. Suddenly, Gordius appeared on his humble vehicle and the Phrygians immediately acclaimed him their king.²⁹⁹ Thus, the new king dedicated his ox-cart to Zeus on the acropolis of Gordium, and the oracle predicted that whosoever should untie the knot of the yoke, would reign over all Asia. The Gordium foundation myth plays an important role in Alexander's propaganda: the Macedonian hero purposely diverted his route towards the Phrygian citadel hoping to fulfil the oracle and to have a legitimate claim to his rule in Asia.³⁰⁰

iii) The transplant into Eastern cultures of the interpretation of Alexander the Great as the son of the ram-god Zeus-Ammon contributed to his integration into the myth of Midas. Alexander's divinity was fostered by the Diadochoi, who, soon after the hero's death, created an idealised image of him; in particular, Lysimachus, king of Thrace, introduced the portrait of Alexander as the son of Zeus-Ammon on the obverse of his silver tetradachms, minted between 297-281 BC. The great conqueror is thus transformed into a divine king with leonine hair, *anastolē*, and wearing a diadem and ram's horns.³⁰¹ The κερασφόρος ("horn-bearer") Alexander became one of the most famous portraits of the Macedonian hero, which finds a parallel also in fiction: the *Romance* tells the story of the priest Pharaoh Nectanebo's flight from Egypt to

peoples moved south in the later Bronze Age, one to settle in Hellespontine Phrygia, the other to occupy parts of western and central Macedonia". Cf. Roller (1984) 261-262.

²⁹⁹ Justin XI. 7. Cf. Arr. *An.* II. 3: Midas, who was on the cart with his father, was acclaimed the king of the Phrygians.

³⁰⁰ Arr. *An.* II. 3. The historians report different versions of the episode: Alexander either cut the knot (cf. Plu. *Alex.* 18. 1-2; Justin XI. 7; Curt. III. 1. 14-18), or he drew the yoke back after having removed the pole pin which held the knot (Aristoboulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 7a-7b (= Plu. *Alex.* 18. 2; Arr. *An.* II. 3. 7). Either way, the Macedonian clearly held the oracle of Gordium and Midas' tradition in high esteem.

³⁰¹ Arnold-Biucchi (2006) 64. Lysimachus' deified portrait of *Cerasphoros* Alexander can be compared with the male head wearing a panther's skin with bull's horns portrayed on a limited issue of tetradrachms and drachms struck by Seleucus I at Susa after 305 BC. The head has been interpreted as a Dionysus-like Alexander, see Arnold-Biucchi (2006) 36-37.

Macedon and the way he artfully tricked the reigning couple leaving Olympias pregnant with Alexander.³⁰² Surely the source behind Pseudo-Callisthenes' tale is Egyptian, since it aims at presenting Alexander as a legitimate Pharaoh, either as the real son of Ammon or of the crafty Nectanebo.³⁰³ However, the Egyptian legend was then reworked to serve Macedonian propaganda: in fact, when the queen enquires how the god will appear to her on the night of the conception, she is told by Nectanebo that he will take the features of the *horned Ammon*, of *Heracles*, and of *Dionysus* carrying the thyrsus, three divinities that played a crucial role during the Persian and Indian campaigns.³⁰⁴

The myth of the *cerasphoros* Alexander, once transplanted in the East, blossomed in Islamic culture: for example, in the Quranic Surah of the Cave, two men decide to probe Mohamed to understand whether he is indeed a true prophet of God. When asked to illustrate the story of the man who reached the western and eastern limits of the earth during his travels, Mohamed, instructed by God, answered that that man was “the two-horned one” (Dhul-Qarnayn),³⁰⁵ who probably is to be identified with Alexander the Great. In fact, the conqueror had already made his way into Islamic culture through the Syrian version³⁰⁶ of the *Alexander Romance*. This hypothesis is reinforced by other parallels between Pseudo-Callisthenes' work and Islamic literature, where Alexander appears as a Muslim prophet: in the aforementioned Quranic chapter, Alexander builds the iron wall in the Caucasus Mountains to keep out the uncivilised and unclean nations of Gog and Magog;³⁰⁷ in *Qışaş al-Anbiyā (The Tales of the Prophets)*, the Macedonian travels through the land of Darkness in search of the

³⁰² AR (α): Nectanebo bewitched the sleep of Olympias through herbs which caused visions, so that she would see Ammon visiting her and trust the magician's prophecy about her pregnancy (I. 5); he bewitched Philip's sleep through a sea falcon sent as a messenger of a dream (I. 8).

³⁰³ For the Nectanebo-story, see Merkelbach (1954) 57-59.

³⁰⁴ AR (α). I. 6: [Nectanebo speaking:] εἶτα ἀλλάσσεται εἰς κεραὸν Ἄμμωνα, εἶτα εἰς ἄλκιμον Ἡρακλέα, εἶτα εἰς θυρσοκόμον Διόνυσον· εἶτα συνελθῶν ἀνθρωποειδῆς θεὸς ἐμφανίζεται τοὺς ἐμούς τύπους ἔχων. Cf. I. 7: “She was happy because she had been embraced by a serpent, Ammon, Heracles, Dionysus (ὑπὸ δράκοντος, Ἄμμωνος, Ἡρακλέους, Διονύσου), all divine”.

³⁰⁵ Quran 18. 83.

³⁰⁶ Stoneman (1991) 7: the Syriac translation from the Greek as *the source of all the oriental versions*. Doufikar-Aerts (2012) 62.

³⁰⁷ Quran 18. 94-98; cf. AR (γ) III. 26A.

water of life;³⁰⁸ in the *Qışaş-i Rabghūzī*, a fourteenth-century religious text, he answers to the questions of the inflated birds, a fictional dialogue derived from the account of his encounter with two birds with human faces in the *Epistula ad Aristotelem* (AR (α) III. 17).³⁰⁹ Furthermore, Alexander-Iskander stars in many *mirabilia* on the outer lands written in Persian and Arabic languages,³¹⁰ thus becoming an integral part of Eastern folk cultures too. In an eleventh-century tradition attested in North-Eastern Anatolia, Alexander is said to *hide his horns under a turban*, and children today still refer to his “secret horns” in their “loyalty oaths”.³¹¹ The turban and the concealment of the horns contributed to the assimilation of Alexander to the mythical Midas, leaving us a splendid example of motif-transfer and a multilayered tradition.

Variants and versions of the Alexander-Midas tale differ in the protagonist king and in the type of animal-ears which embarrass him; they are widely attested in Epirus, Thrace, Laconia, Zante, Crete, Lesbos, and Trabzon in the Pontus area.³¹² A variant from the Village of Katsidoni in North-Eastern Crete presents Alexander with a goat’s ear on the top of his head: εἶχεν εἰς τὴν κορυφὴν τῆς κεφαλῆς του τράϊνον αὐτί. The barber is replaced with a generic slave (δοῦλος), and the secret is whispered to a reed plant in a desert and not into a well. Then the plot follows the Epirote example with the shepherd and flute motifs. Alexander’s goat’s ear is at the centre of two other Cretan variants, the first from the village of Viannos and the second from Kastelli Fournis. In the latter, the well is substituted with a big stone.

In a variant from Laconia, it is not Alexander but the local king, called Lagianus, who is said to have a goat’s ear. Similarly, in a version attested in Zante, the Macedonian is replaced by an unnamed king. He is said to cover his goat’s ear with five καλύπτραι (veils, covers) because the Moerae had warned him that, once his secret was known to his subjects, he would die. The barber dug a hole and told the secret; a young fellow made a flute with the reed grown in that place and, once played, it announced the king’s truth. The king then, remembering his fate, took off the veils and

³⁰⁸ Doufikar-Aerts (2012) 69.

³⁰⁹ Doufikar-Aerts (2012) 71-72.

³¹⁰ Doufikar-Aerts (2012) 70.

³¹¹ Doufikar-Aerts (2012) 70: the children’s oath goes as follows: *Zülkenderin boynuzu var* (Alexander has horns), to which they answer: *Boynuzu var* (indeed has he).

³¹² Spyridakis (1965) 392-394.

died. Further to the little differences from the Epirote tale, this Zakynthian version is particularly interesting for the mention of the *kalyptra*, interpreted as a veil or as a turban, which is a residue of the motif transfer from the Anatolian background to Greece.

Two tales from the Eastern Greek speaking world present the horn motif variant instead of the animal ear.³¹³ In the first one, from the island of Lesbos, the shepherd builds a bagpipe with the reed sprung out of the well, whose sound reveals to the community that the king has a *τσιρατέλ*, a horn on his head. In the second variant, from Trabzon, grain spikes grow up from the well and children make whistles with them, which, when blown, disclose the king's secret.

A tale from Thesprotia (South-Eastern Epirus) has an unnamed prince ashamed of the baldness on his head. The storyline proceeds with the same structure: the barber finds the secret unbearable, whispers it into a well, reed grows up, a shepherd builds a flute with the reed, and the melody coming out of the flute tells the truth to everyone: *το βασιλόπουλο είναι κασιδιάρικο* (*the prince is bald*)! The "baldness" motif is attested also in a variant from the Turkish village of Eçeabat (ancient city of Madytos, Eastern Thrace). The tale refers to an unknown *βασιλές* (*basiles*, a corruption of the Modern Greek word *basilias*, king) who had both a *goat ear and baldness on the top of his head* (*τράγινο αυτί κι κασιίδα στην κορφή*); the rest of the plot follows the Midas-type.

E) Jealousy and Alexander's death

Folk tale motifs (Thompson): plant of immortality (D1346.5); giants (F531); remarkably strong man (F610).

This set of folk tales mirrors the people's attempt to explain the death of Alexander by introducing an envious friend or cousin who wants to get the great Macedonian out of his way. When a hero passes away, soon after his death myths and legends around his life and demise flourish: the community to which the hero was important has to find a

³¹³ Cf. the late four-century BC statue of Alexander-Pan stored at the Archaeological Museum of Pella: the Macedonian presents two little horns at the top of his head. Appendix I, n. 14.

reason for his loss, often resorting to magic and the supernatural.³¹⁴ Alexander the Great's death, still a mystery today, has stimulated Greeks' imagination since antiquity. Immediately after it, when the army was still in Babylon, rumours about his poisoning spread among his entourage and they are attested by the Alexander-historians, who identify in Antipater and his sons Iollas and Cassander the guilty party.³¹⁵ The tradition of the poisoning of Alexander made its way into Hellenic folklore via the numerous Greek recensions of *Romance* and, curiously, it has left a deep mark in the folk tradition of Zante, where different versions of the Macedonian king's intoxication and death are attested.

Tale from Tragaki, Zante: Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος και ο κακός του φίλος (*Alexander the Great and his bad friend*).³¹⁶

Μια φορά κ'έναν καιρό ήτουνά ένα ανδρόγυνο και εκλαιότουνά πώς δεν έκανε παιδιά. Το λοιπό μια νυχτία η βασίλισσα ωνειριάστηκε. Είδε μια γριούλα και τσ'είπε: "Μην πικραίνεσαι άλλο, κυρά μου, και θα κάμης ένα παιδί, που δεν θα υπάρχη άλλο στον κόσμο. Να! Πάρε και το νερό τση δύναμης ναν το ποτίσης με δαύτο, να σου γένη αντρειωμένο".

Όπως εξύπησε αναφαδιασμένη η βασίλισσα, ηβρήκε απάνου στο προσκέφαλό τση ένα μποτσονάκι ίσιαμε μια δαχτυλήθρα μεγαλούτσικη γιομάτο από ευτούνο το νερό. Το πήρε και το εφύλαξε απάνου στο καλύτερό τση κόνισμα. "Η η χάρη τση πρέπει να μ'ωνείριασε, η Παναγία, ή η μοίρα του παιδιού" είπε με το νου τση η βασίλισσα, κι ούτε του βασιλέα είπε τίποτσι μην παη και δεν στέξη το όνειρο, γιατί, βλέπεις, έτσι το λες. Δε στρέει.

Το λοιπό εγγαστρώθηκε κ'έκαμε ένα παιδί. Τι παιδί ήταν εκείνο! Όσο εμεγάλωνε εγενότουνά πράγμα ανέρπιστο. Να σε κάμω να καταλάβης, όσο εμεγάλωνε δεν το εχώραε τίποτσι. Το νερό τση δύναμης, βλέπεις. Έφτασε και εγίνηκε ψηλό ίσιαμε τα σύγνεφα. Του είχανε επίτηδες αγγειά δικά του, να τρώη και να πίνη: έκανε έτσι με το πηρούνι του κ'εσήκωσε ένα βόϊδι. Εσήκωνε

³¹⁴ Cf. De Rose, Garry (2005) 17-23 on the motifs of the hero's divinity, and of his death and return, in several folkloristic traditions.

³¹⁵ D. S. XVII. 118. 1-4; Plu. *Alex.* 77. 1-3; Arr. *An.* VII. 12 and 27. 1-3; Curt. X. 14-20; Justin XII. 13. 10.

³¹⁶ Minotos (1953) 687-688, n. 1.

με τα χέρια του ένα βουτσι γιομάτο κρασί, γύρευε από πόσα σταμνιά. Οι άνθρωποι εμένανε στατιστικοί, που τονε τηράγανε, γιατί από μικρός έκανε πράγματα αφύσικα. Για την ομορφιά του και την αντροσύνη του τονε βγάλανε Μεγαλέξαντρο.

Εκεί που έπαιζε σαν παιδάκι μια μέρα και εμάζωνε χαλίκια από τη θάλασσα, έκαμε ένα βουνό. Εμάζωνε πολλά και ογλήγορα ογλήγορα κ'έκαμε το Σκοπό. Από δαύτονε είναι γεναμένο το βουνό ευτούνο. Το ίδιο και το άλλο, που είναι απάνου το Κάστρο.

Το λοιπό ήρθε μέρα κ'είπε: “Με τη δύναμη, οπού έχω, εμένανε μου πρέπει να γενή δική μου ούλη η γής”. – “Να πας, παιδάκι μου, και να γενής ολουνού του κόσμου βασιλιάς με την ευχήν μου. Τήραξε μονάχα μην πας και πέσης”. (Εξαστόχησα να σου πω³¹⁷ πως η βασίλισσα εκεί που ωνειριάστηκε, η γριούλα τα είπε πως το παιδί αν τύχη και πέση καμμία φορά, δε θα κατασηκωθεί. Αν δεν έπεφτε, δε θα επέθαινε ποτέ. Γι'αυτούνο τότε πρόσεχε πάντα η βασίλισσα κι ωркиζότουνα κι ο ίδιος κ'έλεγε: “Να πέσω χάμου, αν δε σου λέω την αλήθεια”. Ευτούνος ήτουνα ο όρκος του. Βέβαια, τέτοιο μπόι που να μετασηκωθεί!).

Ετοίμασε το λοιπό ούλα τα πάντα, φουσσάτα, στρατιώτες, κ'έφυγε από τη χώρα του. Κανένας δεν τον έβανε κάπου. Ήτουνα φόβος, τρόμος. Επήρε χώρες μαό (i. e. πολλές). Αλλά μια μέρα ετσακώθηκε με τον καλύτερό του φίλο, τον πλέο μπιστικό, και τον έβρισε. Εκείνος, επειδής τότε σκιαζότουνα, εμούλωσε, δεν άναξε, περί από μέσα του είπε πως θαν τότε συγυρίση. Ο Μεγαλέξαντρος δεν ήτουνα κακός, ήτανε φούγας, και σε λίγο έπεσε και του μίλειε του φίλου του και τον είχε όπως πρώτα. Αλλά που εκείνος! Φείδι κολοβό! Από μέσα του εδούλευε. Επήγε το λοιπό μακρία χωρίς ναν τον ιδή κανείς και με ησυχία και με υπομονή εκατάφερε κ'έκοψε από τη ρίζα ένα δέντρο θεώρατο. Γιαμά το βάνει ποστίτσο όμορφα όμορφα και κανείς δεν τότε καταλάβαινε. Η μαύρη ψυχή εβάσταινε την κακία. Ύστερα λοιπό που εγύρισε, είπε στο Μεγαλέξαντρο: “Πάμε – λέει – πολυχρονεμένη μου, να κάνουμε έναν περίπατο, που είναι όμορφη μέρα;” – “Πάμε” – λέει. Ήξερε πως του άρεσε να ξεκολώνη τα μεγάλα δέντρα, για να δείχνη τη δύναμή του. Έτσι φθάσανε εκεί. “Ε! – λέει – Κοτζά μου δέντρο!” Ο Μεγαλέξαντρος επήρε φόρα κ'έκανε ναν το

³¹⁷ Tale told by Panagiotis Metanoios, an inhabitant of the village Tragaki.

τρανήξη. Κ'εκείνο, όπως ήτουνα ποστίτσο, πέφτει αμέσως, κ'έπεισε κι ο Μεγαλέξαντρος με το κεφάλι οπίσω. Ε! ε! ε! Που να σηκωθεί άλλο! Αν ήθελε δε συμβή ευτούνο, να ιδής ήθε να ζή ακόμα.

Once upon a time there was a royal couple who cried and despaired because they did not have a child, but one night the queen had a vision in her dream. She saw a little old woman who said to her: "Do not be sad any longer, my lady, and you will soon have a child so special that there will not be another alike in this world. Here you are! Take the water of strength and feed him with this, so that he shall be manly and courageous (*antreiōmeno*)".

When the queen woke up, still bleary, she found a little bottle, as tall as a big thimble and full with the magic water on her bedside. She took it and kept it above her favourite religious icon. The queen talked to herself: "Either divine mercy, or Holy Mary, or the child's fate must have appeared to me in my dream" and she superstitiously decided not to mention it, not even to the king, because, you see, once you tell a dream, it does not happen.

Thus she was pregnant and had a baby – and what a child! While growing up, he was becoming an unexpected thing; to give you an example, nothing could hold him, due to the water of strength. He was so tall that he could reach the clouds in the sky and he had special crockery to eat and drink: with his fork, he could lift a mule, with his hands, a puncheon full of wine – imagine how many jugs! People watching him were ecstatic, as since his childhood he did supernatural things, and because of his beauty and manliness they called him Alexander the Great.

Playing like every other little child, he once collected pebbles from the sea and he made a mountain. He gathered so many and so quickly that he made the Mount Skopos; this mountain in Zante and the other, on the top of which there is the Kastro (Venetian fortress in Zante), are both made by Alexander.

One day Alexander said: "Considering how strong I am, the entire world shall be mine". And his mother replied: "Go, my son, you have my blessing to become king of the entire world. Just be careful not to fall down". (I forgot to mention that when the queen saw the little old woman in her dreams, she was

told that her child would not stand up again if he fell but, if he did not fall, he would live forever. For this reason, the queen was always keeping an eye on him and Alexander himself used to swear this oath: "I shall immediately fall down, if I am not saying the truth!" Understandably, as tall as he was, how he could imaginably stand up again!).

So he prepared everything for his campaign, gathered the armies and soldiers, and he left his country. No one could stop him; he spread fear and fright and he took many countries. But one day Alexander argued with his best friend, the most trustworthy, and he offended him. Since he was jealous of Alexander, the friend did not react but swore to himself that he would take his revenge. Alexander the Great was not a bad person; he was a bit pettish, he would get angry easily but, after a little, he would forget and talk to his friend as if nothing happened. But his friend was a snake with a cropped tail (i. e. a jealous person)! Inside him, he was preparing his revenge: one day he went far away unnoticed by the others and with calm and patience he cut the roots of a huge tree and he replaced the tree so nicely that no one would understand that it was "fake". His soul was black out of his cruelty and, once back, he said to Alexander the Great: "My old friend, since it is a nice day, shall we go to have a stroll?" and Alexander replied "Let's go". The friend knew that Alexander liked tearing down big trees to show his strength, so they reached the place where the (cut) huge tree was: "Oh, look at that tree!" said the friend. Alexander speeded up to shake the tree but, as it was fake, it fell immediately, and the hero together with it, hitting his head. Alas, how could he stand up again! If this had not happened, Alexander would still be alive.

The beginning of the tale follows Pseudo-Callisthenes' tradition concerning the childless Macedonian royal couple and the long-desired gestation aided by supernatural help, motifs which characterise also the folk tradition on Alexander's descent from the Sun. In the tale, supernatural help is provided by an old lady, identified either with the Fate or the Holy Mary, in line with the mixture of pagan and Christian elements which is not unusual in Hellenic folklore.

Another common trait to the Zakynthian Sun-cycle is constituted by the exaggeration of Alexander's heroic characteristics: as a modern giant, he is capable of

inconceivable deeds, he razes trees to the ground with his unstoppable strength, he needs crockery created specifically for him because of his gluttony, and he dies after a fall.³¹⁸ These similarities between the Giants and the Macedonian, a real trend in folktales, are found also in demotic songs featuring Alexander or Digenes Akritas, where the two national heroes often overreact, lift mountains and knock down trees out of their anger, and overeat because of their ἀδηφαγία (excessive greed).³¹⁹ It is worth noticing that Alexander's αντροσύνη – from the Ancient Greek ἀνδροσύνη, a word which entails manliness, courage, virtue – and his gigantic stature are particularly recurrent motifs in the general folkloristic production of Zante on the hero. For example, a brief saying has it that “Androsynē was Alexander’s mother and Fire (Φωτιά) his slave”: in fact, Fire was always cooking for him, as the hero could eat three-hundred cows all at once!³²⁰

The quarrel with the best friend sheds a positive light on Alexander: in fact, the friend is described as a jealous and mean person, providing a justification for the Macedonian’s hot temper, which is a *topos* since antiquity.³²¹ Although Alexander gets angry and overreacts, the tale emphasises that he was a *phougas*, i. e. a choleric person who nevertheless does not hold a grudge, and a good person overall.

The childless queen, the water of immortality, the use of magic, and Alexander’s invincibility and unexpected death are motifs developed also in another tale from Zante, entitled Γιατί επέθανε ο Μεγαλέξαντρος (*Why Alexander the Great died*).³²² To these, new religious elements are added, which cast the Macedonian hero in Jesus’ lore: in fact, the Angel’s visit to the queen during her sleep (την ωνειρίασε Άγγελος Κυρίου πως θα ’γγαστρωθεί και θα κάμη παιδί σερνικό) brings to mind the Archangel Gabriel’s encounter with Maria and the announcement of Jesus’ conception.

In the tale, Alexander’s poisoning through a poisonous herb (βοτάνι τοῦ θανάτου) is a variant to the water of life / water of mortality; moreover, the

³¹⁸ Kyriakidis (1965²) 176-178; Politis (1975²) 145.

³¹⁹ For example, cf. Alexander’s deeds in Minotos (1953) 687-688, n. 1; 692, n. 9, with the Giants in Politis (1975²) 145; Kyriakidis (1965²) 176-178.

³²⁰ Minotos (1953) 692, n. 9.

³²¹ Cf., e. g., Ephippus, *BNJ / FGrH* 126, F 5: Alexander’s courtiers lived in a reign of terror because of his ill-temper; Plu. *Alex.* 4. 4: “the heat of his body (ἡ θερμότης τοῦ σώματος) caused Alexander to be choleric (θυμοειδῆ) and prone to drink (ποτικόν)”.

³²² Minotos (1953) 691, n. 5. For the original Greek text and translation, see appendix II, n. 16.

substitution of the historical Iollas, the official cup-bearer at the Macedonian court who allegedly poisoned Alexander, with an anonymous cousin is a folk simplification which nonetheless implies that the wrongdoer comes from the great hero's close circle. The motif of the cousin's jealousy is present also in a shorter version from the village Volimes of Zante, entitled *The envious cousin of Alexander the Great* (Ο ζηλιάρης ξάδερφος του Μεγαλέξανδρου).³²³ In this folk account, Olympias' pregnancy is not mentioned and prominence is given to the description of the cousin's ill feelings towards Alexander, which the latter ignited with his annoying childish jokes:

Alexander the Great, who was still a child, could overpower all his hundred cousins at once. He took them all in his arms and then sat above their heads – impossible for the poor fellows to move! What if they climbed a tree to eat fruits? Alexander would knock them off with a single kick. And all the branches of the tree are gone. For this reason, one of the cousins could not stomach Alexander at all and was jealous of him.

I do not know how the cousin replaced the water of immortality with which Alexander had been fed by his mother; but he drank the poisonous liquid. Had he not drunk, he would not have died.

Alexander's poisoning with the *water of mortality* follows the ancient tradition on the Macedonian's death: the Alexander-historians state that the poisonous water was extremely pungent and cold; it was collected from the Styx, the river of Hades,³²⁴ and brought from Macedon in the hoof of a mule, since no container would have resisted its corrosive power.³²⁵

³²³ For the Greek original, see appendix II, n. 17; cf. Minotos (1953) 691-692, n. 7.

³²⁴ Curt. X. 10. 17; Plu. *Alex.* 77. 4: water collected from a cliff in Nonacris. Pl. *NH* VIII. 6. 5: the cliff of Nonacris is in Arcadia and Greeks call Styx the water that trickles down from it; VIII. 18. 2: Styx is the water of Ades.

³²⁵ *AR* (α) III. 31. Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 77. 4: the poisonous water was carried in an ass's hoof; Curt. X. 10. 16: hoof of a draught-animal.

Alexander-traditions

In this section I shall focus on the figure of Alexander in the traditions attested in Macedonia, since the region represents the great conqueror's motherland and his cultural and political background. As a result of this close connection between the hero and the territory, the Macedonian Alexander-traditions have a predominant position in Hellenic Alexander-lore: in fact, they outnumber the folk narratives from the other Greek lands and they also convey the idea of familiarity with the hero, who seems to be still living and influencing the people's everyday life. This bond – almost a mutual ownership – between Alexander and the Macedonians is in fact constantly highlighted by the choice of the themes treated, such as the attribution of monuments to the great conqueror and the use of his historical and mythical persona to explain features of the Macedonian landscape, geographical names, or folk customs.

According to their content and purpose, traditions are here grouped into two main categories, geographical and aetiological.³²⁶ Geographical traditions are oral accounts which link Alexander the Great to a place familiar to the community, to a specific manmade infrastructure, ruins, archaeological sites, and bridges, or to natural elements, such as mountains, rivers, and water springs. These attributions, scattered throughout the Macedonian landscape, are kept alive especially among peasants living in small villages, where one can trace a greater tendency to ascribe buildings and areas to a blurred ancient era when Philip II, Alexander III, and Heracles ruled Macedon.³²⁷

In the province of Grevena (North-East of Mount Pindus in Western Macedonia) a local tradition maintains that on the banks of the river Venetikos imprints of Bucephalus' horseshoes can be found on a rock close to the stone bridge.³²⁸ They were left there when Alexander passed from the area and crossed the

³²⁶ To these categories, there should be added the "aetiologico-mythological" traditions, in which mythological motifs related to the Alexander-lore are used to explain physical phenomena. We have seen some examples of this group in the Nereid-cycle: people consider the Nereids responsible for hurricanes and call upon Alexander to calm their wrath.

³²⁷ G. F. Abbott (1903) 279.

³²⁸ Spyridakis (1953) 388.

river on horseback with a single leap. The animal's imprints are a matter of pride for the locals, for they provide "solid evidence" of the hero's passage in the region, which allows them to partake in his glorious deeds. With his long jump from one bank to the other of the river, Alexander is subtly cast in the tradition of the Ancient Giants, the Byzantine *Antreiōmenoi*, and the Modern *Sarantapēchoi*, whose footprints on the soil "are traced" in different areas of the Greek countryside.³²⁹

A similar tradition is attested on the southern slopes of the Mount Pindus, where the small village of Dragovisti, today's Polythea in Thessaly, lies. In this area the inhabitants say that it is possible to see traces of Bucephalus' horseshoes and his manger: τὰ ἴχνη τῶν πετάλων καὶ τῆς πάχνης τοῦ Βουκεφάλου. They also assert that during the nights a handsome knight still passes by their village on horseback, and that they believe this figure is Alexander riding Bucephalus.

A curious comparison is also given by an oral account from Schoinousa, a small island lying south of Naxos. The local tradition ascribes the shape of two stones visible on the road to the little natural harbour of Mersini to "the spear of Alexander the Great and the hoof of his horse Bucephalus": τὸ σπαθὶ καὶ ἡ ὄπλῃ τοῦ ἀλόγου τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου.³³⁰ It is striking to notice that even such a small community as the one living in Schoinousa wants to have a share in Alexander's glory and chose him as the local hero.

The inhabitants of Stavros of Chalcidice (about thirty km from Amphipolis) maintain that the mountain stretching above their village belongs to the Macedonian, and they call it Βουνὸ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου (*Mountain of Alexander*).³³¹ They also interpret columns found in the surroundings as the ruins of Alexander's νομισματοκοπεῖον (*nomismatokopeon*), the mint "he built" there a long time ago. As G. F. Abbott has already noticed, attribution of the mountain to Alexander is entirely appropriate in a district already associated with his close circle: Stavros is geographically very close to Olympiada – also known as Lympiasda, a corrupted version of the toponym – a village bearing his mother's name, and, more crucially, to Stageira, Aristotle's birthplace.³³² On the other hand, I would argue that reference to the mint in the Chalcidice area goes

³²⁹ Kyriakidis (1965²) 176-178.

³³⁰ Oikonomides (1957) 41, n. 25.

³³¹ G. F. Abbott (1903) 280; Spyridakis (1953) 388.

³³² Olympiada is about thirteen km far from Stavros; Stageira ca. fifteen km.

beyond folk associations and is based on a solid historical kernel: Philip II is famous for having taken great advantage of the mint of Amphipolis, and Alexander followed his father's types and minting policy probably until 332 BC.³³³ As mentioned above, the great conqueror's first coins were silver tetradrachms with the head of a beardless Heracles on the obverse, and an eagle or an enthroned Zeus on the reverse, in line with the symbols of power already long established in the iconography of Macedonian royal coinage;³³⁴ moreover, archaeological excavations have proved that the Amphipolis mint constituted the most important one in Macedon during the first years of Alexander's Persian campaign.³³⁵

At Drama, the inhabitants maintain that the palace of Alexander the Great can be found there;³³⁶ similarly, on the way from Drama to Cavala, near the archaeological site of Philippi, a group of four small columns is acknowledged by the locals as τὸ Παλάτι τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου (*the Palace of Alexander the Great*).³³⁷ The attribution of ruins in Eastern Macedonia to Alexander is, as in the case of Stavros discussed before, a natural choice in an area rich in archaeological sites closely related to the Macedonian kingdom. Specifically, Philippi was built by Philip II in 356 BC on the site of the Thasian colony Krenides, which had called upon the Macedonian king for

³³³ Troxell (1997) 86-89; cf. Le Rider (2007) 41: "gold and silver coins with the name and types of Philip II would have constituted Alexander's principal currency between October 336 BC and April 334 BC". For an overview of the scholarly debate about the chronology of Alexander's first coins, see Le Rider (2007) 8-19.

³³⁴ Kremydi (2011) 161-168; Price (1991) 30-31.

³³⁵ See Troxell (1997) 19-40 for a list of Amphipolis issues, dated ca. 332-310 BC; 73 for the list of hoards containing Amphipolis silver Alexanders; 86-90: Troxell argues that some of the coins normally attributed to the Amphipolis mint by the scholarship might be assigned to a mint in Philippi. Notwithstanding this, a mint in Philippi does not undermine the argument: the site is close enough to Stavros of Chalcidice and it is not unlikely that in the folk memory the two ancient mints have been merged together.

³³⁶ G. F. Abbott (1903) 279. Cf. with the tradition from Alistratē (Serres), which ascribes the area to the kingdoms of Philip and Darius, providing a folk etymology for the name of the inhabitants, Darnakides. The tale also links Drama and the toponym Cavala to Alexander (see below).

³³⁷ These two folk traditions can be compared to the saying regarding the famous temple of Poseidon built at Cape Sounion around 440 BC, for it is considered by some Greeks as one of the residences of the great Macedonian. Cf. Kondylakis (1887) 26, n. 4-5.

help against the Thracian threat.³³⁸ Moreover, according to one of the numerous folk traditions concerning the toponym Cavala, the name commemorates Alexander's taming of Bucephalus and is derived etymologically from the Late-Latin word for horse, *caballus*.³³⁹ The story is that, in order to win the steed's trust, the Macedonian took him for a ride eastwards, since he had noticed that he was afraid of its own shadow.³⁴⁰ Only when they reached Cavala was Bucephalus completely tamed.

Τὰ Λουτρά τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου (*The Thermal Baths of Alexander the Great*) is the name given to a stone complex belonging to the water-mill used by the *Colonia Pella*, the colony founded by Octavian in 30 BC 1.5 km from the Macedonian's birthplace.³⁴¹ When the tank of the Roman thermal baths was cleared during archaeological excavations in the 1970s, a huge quantity of coins of different eras was found, including 4,500 ancient ones and many issued by the Hellenic Republic. This heterogeneous coinage certifies that in Pella the custom of throwing coins in the hope that a wish would be granted by the divinity started centuries ago; in modern times, locals appointed Alexander as the lord of the hot springs, due to their proximity to his natal city, having forgotten their Roman origin.³⁴²

Geographico-aetiological traditions make use of the image of Alexander to explain and describe the natural and architectonic elements which shape the surrounding landscape. These accounts present the Macedonian taking an active role in the erection of new buildings, in order to embellish the environment or to commemorate an important event. The "Alexander the strenuous builder" folk motif has its archetype in the ancient narratives of the Alexander-historians, who highlighted the Macedonian conqueror's commitment in the erection of buildings in Alexandria of Egypt, and his eagerness to found new cities as landmarks during his campaign in the Eastern regions of the Achaemenid Empire.³⁴³

³³⁸ D. S. XVI. 8. 6-7.

³³⁹ For an overview of the different etymologies put forward for the name Cavala, see Lykourinos (2005) 71-72.

³⁴⁰ Plu. *Alex.* 6. 3.

³⁴¹ Chrysostomou (1998) 117. See appendix I, n. 15.

³⁴² Chrysostomou (1998) 118.

³⁴³ For the foundation of Alexandria of Egypt, see Plu. *Alex.* 26. 3-10; Arr. *An.* III 1. 5 - 2. 2. For Alexander's numerous city-foundations, see Plu. *De Alex.* I. 5 (= *Mor.* 328E) and AR (α) III. 35; cf. D. S. XVIII. 4. 3-4 for the Macedonian's *last plans*. See also below, chapter seven, the *Herodotean Alexander*.

In the plain of Serres, two big rocks are called Πέτρες τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου by the inhabitants of the town of Nigrita, for they believe that Alexander had cast them there “when god still considered the *antreiōmenoi* worthy (ἀξίωνε τοὺς ἀντρειωμένους)” – as muleteers of the region used to say.³⁴⁴ This tradition underlines once again the Macedonian hero’s abiding presence in the area: in fact, *Alexander the Great’s Rocks* are important not insomuch as they have reshaped the landscape, but because they are an eternal reminder of his heroic, gigantic physical strength, for he was able to lift and cast these two big stones. This is made clear by the association between Alexander and the *antreiōmenoi*.

In the small village of Aghios Basileios (close to Lake Koroneia, South-East of Laghadas), the ruins of a Byzantine tower are still visible to the passer-by. According to local tradition, the tower was erected by Alexander in the exact place where his daughter’s wedding was celebrated. This account is peculiar for two reasons: first, a private event in the Macedonian hero’s life is the occasion of the erection of a tower that changes the landscape of the village; secondly, the nature of the “private event” itself. The report that Alexander celebrated his daughter’s wedding is not only an almost unique reference to Alexander’s family life, but also one of the rare allusions to the existence of a daughter. In fact, in folk traditions Alexander normally appears to be childless, while historical accounts attest that he had two sons. The first one, Heracles,³⁴⁵ was born in 327 BC, his mother being Barsine,³⁴⁶ a Persian princess, daughter of the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia Artabazus II, and the ex-wife of Memnon of Rhodes, the commander of the Greek mercenaries in the service of the Persians. After the battle of Issus in 333 BC, Barsine was captured in Damascus by Parmenio and Alexander decided to take her as a concubine, not only for her political status, but also appreciating her beauty and her profound Greek education.³⁴⁷ In the aftermath of the great conqueror’s death, Heracles was backed as a pretender to the throne by his brother-in-law Nearchus,³⁴⁸ who was married to Barsine’s first

³⁴⁴ G. F. Abbott (1903) 280. Cf. Thompson’s index of folk tales motifs: giants (F531); giants as builders of great structures (F531.6.6); the remarkably strong man (F610).

³⁴⁵ Berve (1926) II. 168, n. 353; Heckel (2006) 139.

³⁴⁶ Berve (1926) II. 102-104, n. 206; Heckel (2006) 70.

³⁴⁷ Plu. *Alex.* 21. 4. Cf. Justin XI. 10. 2-3.

³⁴⁸ Curt. X. 6. 10-12.

daughter,³⁴⁹ the young boy and his mother were eventually killed by Cassander around 309/308 BC.³⁵⁰

The *Metz Epitome* informs us that the Macedonian hero, while still in the Indus River valley in 326 BC, had a second child by Rhoxane,³⁵¹ the daughter of Oxyartes, the Persian ruler in Sogdiana. This child is said to have died soon after his birth.³⁵² Rhoxane was pregnant for the second time in 323 BC,³⁵³ and, a little after Alexander III's death, she gave birth to Alexander IV³⁵⁴ who, being the only legitimate son of the great conqueror, was designated to reign alongside his uncle Philip III by the Macedonian army at Babylon.³⁵⁵ In ca. 311 BC, Alexander IV and his mother were assassinated by the ambitious Cassander, who wished to eliminate Alexander III's offspring in order to put an end to the Argead dynasty and take control of the kingdom of Macedon himself.³⁵⁶

The first precedent for an allusion to Alexander III's fictional daughter comes in the first letter addressed to Olympias in the β version of the *Alexander Romance*,³⁵⁷ in which the conqueror tells his mother about the Source of Life and how he cursed his daughter Kale for drinking the *athanato nero*. Kale and her mother Ounna, one of Alexander's concubines, are fictional characters unknown to the Alexander-historians of the first and second generation; but siblings, relatives, and concubines often populate Hellenic folklore about Alexander, and, as seen above, they play an especially prominent role in the copious versions of the Mermaid and Nereid cycles.

³⁴⁹ Arr. An. VII. 4. 6.

³⁵⁰ Justin XV. 2. 3; D. S. XX. 28. 1-2.

³⁵¹ Berve (1926) II. 346-347, n. 688; Heckel (2006) 241-242.

³⁵² *Metz Epitome*, 70.

³⁵³ Curt. X. 6. 9 says that Rhoxane was six months pregnant at the time of Alexander III's death, whereas Justin XIII. 2. 5 states that she was in her eighth month.

³⁵⁴ Heckel (2006) 18-19, n. 3.

³⁵⁵ Justin XIII. 4. 1-3.

³⁵⁶ D. S. XIX. 105. 2; Justin XV. 2. 5.

³⁵⁷ AR (β) II. 41. For Alexander's fatherhood, see also Politis (1980²) 348-349: according to a Parian folktale entitled Ο Γιός της Γριάς (*The Son of the old Lady*) a man-eating Gorgona is forced to stop harassing mankind by a little boy gifted with herculean strength. The Gorgona swears to the young hero by saying: "I swear to my mother the Sea and to my father Alexander (ὀρκίζομαι εἰς τὴ μάννα μου τὴ Θάλασσα καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο) that I shall not harm anybody".

In Hellenic aetiological traditions the presence of the Macedonian hero is required to give the reason for a certain phenomenon or custom. These accounts often share the same motifs present in the *Alexander Romance* and developed in the folktales and myths, such as the quest for immortality, gigantic strength, Bucephalus' supernatural features, Olympias' difficulty in remaining pregnant, and a confused memory of the Macedonian's relationships with Philip, Darius, and Roxane. In any event, Alexander's historical semblance is pursued through his acting for a definite purpose within a defined community.

A folk tradition about women gifted with great courage is attested both in Macedonia, in the area called Roumlouki of Emathia (Ρουμλούκι Ημαθίας) around Giannitsa, and in Southern Thessaly, at Pharsala and Sophades.³⁵⁸ The inhabitants of these small towns claim that, when the Macedonian army lost bravery and fortitude at the sight of the enemy and the soldiers started to withdraw from battle, the women stood up and promptly helped Alexander to win the fight. For this reason, the Macedonian conqueror ordered the men to wear kerchiefs and women to put on helmets. Through a role reversal, which portrays humiliated soldiers with female scarves and honoured women with a *perikephalaia*, the ancient helmet with feather-crest, this oral account provides a curious explanation of the peculiar hairstyle and headdress of the women living in Pharsala, Sophades, and in the area of Roumlouki. Here below it is reported the Thessalian version of the folk tradition, entitled ἡ βασιλιᾶς Ἀλέξανδρου καὶ οἱ Καραγκούνισσις (*King Alexander and the Karaghounisses*):³⁵⁹

Τὸν παλαιὸ κινό, εἶχε μιὰ φρουρά ἡ βασιλιᾶς Ἀλέξανδρου πολέμου ἰκεῖ κατ'τὰ Φέρσαλα. Οἱ Θεσσαλοὶ ποῦ ἦντασαν μαζί του ἤρθι στιγμή κ'ιδείλιασαν κὶ τὸν ἄφ'καν κ'έφ'γαν. Τότες οἱ γυναῖκεις τουν ποῦ φέρναν νιρὸ 'ς τοῦ στρατό, καθὼς εἶδαν τοὺς ἄνδρις νὰ φεύγουν, ἄρπαξαν τᾶρματά τουν, στάθ'καν, πουλέμ'σαν κ'ἰνίκησαν.

Ἡ Ἀλέξανδρου λοιπὸ γιὰ νὰ τιμήση τὴν παλληκαριά τουν κὶ γιὰ νὰ ντρουπιᾶσ' τοὺς ἄντρις, ἔβγαλε διαταγὴ νὰ φορέσουν τὰ μαντήλια τοῦν

³⁵⁸ Politis (1965²) II. 640, n. 8.

³⁵⁹ The Thessalian version is provided because already attested on paper by Politis (1965²) I. 6, n. 8. Karaghounides is the name of the inhabitants of Southern and Eastern Thessaly.

γυνικῶν οἱ ἄντρις καὶ τοῦν ἀντρῶν τοῖς περικεφαλαίς οἱ γ'ναῖκις. Κί'άποῦ τοῦν κίρὸ ἰκείνου φοροῦν οἱ Καραγκούνηδες μαῦρα μαντήλια 'ς τοῦ κιφάλι, κ'οἱ γ'ναῖκις τουν φοροῦν περικεφαλαίς.

Long ago king Alexander kept his troops at a military post under Pharsala. The Thessalians who were with him cowered when the moment of the fight came; so they abandoned him and fled away. Thus their women, who were bringing water to the army, after seeing the men flee away, grabbed their weapons, stood there (in front of the enemy), fought and won.

In order to honour their intrepidity and to shame the men, Alexander ordered that the men would wear the women's scarves and the women the men's helmets. Since then, the Karaghounides wear black kerchiefs on their head, and the Karaghounisses wear a *perikephalaia*.

Since antiquity, the attention Alexander devoted to his attire has been a matter of interest: Ehippus of Olynthus says that the Macedonian used to don sacred vestments during his banquets (e. g. clothing and horns of Ammon), adopted the guise of Artemis or Hermes while driving his chariot, and wore Hermes' sandals and *petasus*³⁶⁰ when spending time with his friends.³⁶¹ During battles, Alexander wore a κράνος (*helmet*), which, for example, protected his head from the unexpected severe blow of Rhoesaces' sword in battle at the Granicus River, as Diodorus,³⁶² Plutarch,³⁶³ and Arrian³⁶⁴ attest in their accounts. In particular, at chapter 16. 4 of the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch states that Alexander “was notable for his light shield and his helmet's crest (τοῦ κράνους τῆ χαίτη), on both sides of which there was fixed a plume admirable for size and whiteness (ἐκατέρωθεν εἰστήκει πτερὸν λευκότητι καὶ μεγέθει θαυμαστόν)”. This image of the Macedonian hero with his impressive helmet adorned with plumage and a high crest has surely left a mark in the Alexander-Reception during

³⁶⁰ The *petasus* was a wide-brimmed hat with a conical crown worn in Ancient Greece; the one worn by men had a low crown, while that worn by women a tall one.

³⁶¹ Ehippus, *BNJ / FGtH* 126, F 5 (= Ath. XII 53, 537E-538B).

³⁶² D. S. XVII. 20. 6.

³⁶³ Plu. *Alex.* 16. 4.

³⁶⁴ Arr. *An.* I. 15. 7-8.

the period of the Hellenic Revolution against the oppression of the Turks (1821-1832). A fine example of the use of Alexander III with the aim of inspiring the awakening of patriotic consciousness in the Greeks is the portrait of the Macedonian conqueror in the front page of Rhigas Pherraios' *Pamphlet* (1797), in which the helmet with a crest is clearly visible.³⁶⁵ Alexander and his symbolic helmet played an important role in the Greek Struggle for Macedonia (1904-1908) too, as demonstrated by N. Engonopoulos' famous painting entitled *The two Macedonians: Alexander the Great and Pavlos Melas* (1977),³⁶⁶ where the brave heroes are standing alongside each other. A stylised Alexander – recognisable only by the tall red crest of his helmet – is depicted with his left arm on Melas' shoulder in a friendly gesture, almost creating a bridge between ancient and modern battles for freedom, between the fight against the Persians and the one against the Ottoman Empire.

Although the role of women in war is rarely displayed and often overshadowed by that of men, we can assume that with this folk tradition the inhabitants of Pharsala, Sophades, and of the Roumlouki area wanted to praise their women for their endurance in crucial moments of the forging of the Hellenic Nation, as on the occasion of the women's mass-suicide in Souli and in Naoussa under Turkish assault.³⁶⁷ An ancient precedent to this tradition on women's bravado is attested by Plutarch in his account of the war between Sparta and Argos in 494 BC:³⁶⁸

[245D] When Cleomenes, king of the Spartans killed many [Argives] (but not as many as 7,777, as some people fabulously say) and marched up against the city, divine resolution and courage made the young women resist the enemy on behalf of their fatherland (ὄρμη καὶ τόλμα δαιμόνιος παρέστη ταῖς

³⁶⁵ For Alexander's image on the front page of the pamphlet, cf. appendix I, n. 17.

³⁶⁶ Engonopoulos N., *Οι δύο Μακεδόνες. Μέγας Αλέξανδρος και Παύλος Μελάς (The two Macedonians. Alexander the Great and Pavlos Melas)*, 1977. For the painting, see appendix I, n. 18.

³⁶⁷ Women in Souli (Epirus) committed a mass suicide with their children in order to escape enemy in 1803 during the local uprising against the local Ottoman ruler Ali Pasha (the so-called "Dance of Zalongo"); inspired by the Souliotes, women in Naoussa (Emathia, Western Macedonia) jumped from a cliff in the cold river Arapitsa to avoid their capture by the Turks in 1822. These women are considered a symbol of integrity and courage against the Ottoman rule.

³⁶⁸ Plu. *Mulierum Virtutes* 4 (= *Mor.* 245C–245F); cf. Hdt. VI. 77-82; Paus. II. 20. 8-10. A similar story featuring women at war is described by Aeneas Tacticus in his *Poliorcetica* XL. 4-5.

ἀκμαζούσαις τῶν γυναικῶν ἀμύνεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος). Under Telesilla's leadership, they took the weapons and surrounded the walls standing alongside the battlements (ἡγουμένης δὲ τῆς Τελεσίλλης ὄπλα λαμβάνουσαι καὶ παρ' ἑπαλξιν ἰστάμεναι κύκλω τὰ τείχη περιέστεψαν).

[245E] [...] Some say that this fight was on the seventh day of the month; others that it was on the first day of the month, which is now called the fourth, but was anciently called Hermaeus by the Argives. On this day, even now, they perform the Hybristika, a festival in which women clothe themselves with men's coats and cloaks, [245F] whereas the men put on women's veils and headdresses (καθ' ἣν μέχρι νῦν τὰ ὕβριστικά τελοῦσι, γυναῖκας μὲν ἀνδρείους χιτῶσι καὶ χλαμύσιν, [245F] ἄνδρας δὲ πέπλοις γυναικῶν καὶ καλύπτραις ἀμφιεννύντες).

The Macedonian and Thessalian traditions are evidently based on the ancient Argive story, as the two key motifs of the plot are the same: the women defend their country and clothing customs are reversed in order to commemorate and honour the women's courage. A variant is known in Velventò (Pieria), where women say that they wear the γκιβιζί, their traditional red silk foulard, to commemorate a war around Palaiokastro in which men fled away and women took over the fight, eventually defeating the enemy. The king of Velventò is anonymous, but the plot remains similar to the Karaghounisses' tradition in all its basic elements.³⁶⁹

A Macedonian tradition from Alistratē in the region of Serres tries to explain some linguistic feature of the area around Nestus by reshaping some facts of the life of Alexander already present in Pseudo-Callisthenes' account, and merging them to new ones.³⁷⁰

Ἀπέ τις Φίλιπποι ἴσαμε το Τσαϊλίκι ἦταν η Φίλιππας. Ἀπ' ἐκί και πέρα ἦταν η Δάρις ἢ Βασιλιάς. Για τούτο και σήμερα ἀκόμη κείνει που κάθονται κατὰ σε κείνα τα μέρια: Ροδολείβος, Ζέμαλι, λέγονται Δαρνάκιδες κι ὄλο με το "Δάρι" μιλάνε. Λ. χ., δάρι θα πάμε (ἀραγε θα πάμε);

Του Δάρη η θυγατέρα πήρε τον Αλέξαντρο.

³⁶⁹ Politis (1965²) II. 640, n. 8.

³⁷⁰ Spyridakis (1953) 386-387.

Όντας γεννήθηκε η Αλέξαντρος γεννήθηκε και το Βουδοκέφαλο. Το έδωκεν η Δάρης στον Αλέξαντρο. Ήταν σουμαδιακό άλογο. Ξεκινούσε απ'το παλάτι του Φίλιππα και στην Καβάλα ταιργιαζότανε, για τούτο και την είπανε Καβάλα. Σουμαδιακό είναι κοντά στο χάνι και στο παχνί που έτρωγε κριθάρι τ'άλογο.

Η Δάρης και η Αλέξαντρος πίνανε απ'ένα ποτήρι κρασί, που πηγαίνανε με το ζεντζίρι, σουμαδιακό σα βαρέλι ήταν. Πήγαινε πάνω απ'τη βάλτα. Σε μια κακή ώρα έσπασε το ζεντζίρι κ'έγινε η Βάλτα. Ήταν που θα τούρκευε η χώρα και πού θα χανόταν η Χριστιανοσύνη, για ταύτα έσπασε το ποτήρι.

Όταν πέθνησεν η Αλέξαντρος, η γυναίκα της [του] έβγαλε τον κόσμο έξω για να του πη, λέγει, κάτι. Τότες έβγαλε το σπαθί της [του Αλέξανδρου] και σκοτώθηκε οκτώ μηνώ [έγκυος]. Αν γεννούσε το παιδί, τόσο όμορφο ήταν, απ'ο κόσμος στο μάτι δεν θα γλεπόταν. Τώρα χάθηκεν ή ράτσα. Οι αδερφές του πέσανε στον Ουρδανοπόταμο, και βγαίνουν μια φορά το χρόνο και ρωτούν: “Ζαει ο βασιλιάς Αλέξαντρος;” Και άμα πης όχι, τότε θυμώνουν. Πρέπει να πης: “Ζάει και βασιλεύγει στην Δράμα”.

From Philippi to Tsailiki Philip was the ruler; from there onwards Darius was the King. Therefore, even today those who dwell in those areas – Rodoleivos and Zemalti – are called Darnakides and often use the word “dari” when speaking. For example, “*dari* are we going?” Meaning: *so*, are we going?

Darius' daughter took Alexander as her husband.

On the day that Alexander was born, Bucephalus was born too and Darius gave him to the Macedonian. He was an astonishing horse: he used to start his ride from the palace of Philip and he was stopping in Cavala, a place which suited him; for this reason, the city was called Cavala. The horse looked impressive close to the inn and the manger where he ate barley [for his thew].

While going with the stagecoach, Darius and Alexander were drinking a glass of wine, which was of a remarkable size, similar to a barrel. The stagecoach was crossing over a mud flat, and in a very unlucky moment the chain broke and it became Valta (i. e. they sank in a muddy territory, called Valta, today's Cassandreia, after the Greek word βάλτος, marsh). In that same moment, the glass broke into pieces, since it was approaching the time in

which the country was going to be taken by the Turks and Christendom was going to be lost.

When Alexander died, her [his] wife asked all the people in the room to go out, claiming that she wanted to talk to her husband in private. Then she took her [his] sword and she killed herself, eight months pregnant. If she bore to life the child, it would have been of a stunning beauty, as no one else in the world. Now the bloodline is lost for good. Alexander's sisters fell into the river Jordan and once a year they come out of the river and ask: "Is King Alexander still alive?" and, if you say no, they get angry at you. You ought to reply: "He lives and rules in Drama".

It is worth mentioning that this tradition constitutes one of the few folk accounts dealing with Alexander's descent from Philip and wedding in an entirely Northern Greek setting: in fact, he appears as Philip's son, and neither Olympias nor her affair with Nectanebo are mentioned; his birthplace is placed in Eastern Macedonia, in Philippi, and not in the city of Pella as attested by the historians.

The geographical restaging of the story within the Eastern Macedonian background goes even further, for Philip II is portrayed as the ruler of the region between Philippi and the river Nestus, whereas Darius III is depicted as the ruler of the area around Serres – a reminiscence of Macedon's submission to the Persian Empire at the end of the sixth century BC. Locals claim that their name *Darnakides* and the word *dari* come from the period when Darius I campaigned against the Scythians and subjugated several Thracian peoples on his way back to Persia.³⁷¹ The Achaemenid king's general Megabazus was tasked with the completion of the conquest of the Balkans,³⁷² and in 512 BC envoys were sent to the Macedonian king Amyntas I to ask for submission.³⁷³ According to the local tradition of Alistratē, *Dari* was the locals' exclamation of fear when chased by the Persians.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Hdt. IV. 121-144.

³⁷² Hdt. V. 1-2; 15-16. Cf. Olbrycht (2010) 343-345.

³⁷³ Hdt. V. 17-21.

³⁷⁴ For the different explanations and etymologies of the words *Darnakides* / *dari* put forward by scholars, see Goudentzakis P. (2000), *Δαρνακοχώρια. Η ονομασία Δαρνάκας*, <http://darnakas.gr/darnakasonomasia.htm> [accessed on 05-10-2016].

The second aetiological explanation, which concerns the toponym of the city Cavala, adds to the strongly Macedonian geographical characterisation of this folk narration: in the Greek mindset the place is famous for Alexander's alleged visits on horseback. As seen before, the Greek word *καβάλα* is a linguistic loan from the Medieval Latin "caballus" and the Italian "cavallo", and it means "on horseback". This etymology is strengthened by the local folklore featuring the couple Alexander-Bucephalus, a symbol of eternal friendship. In the account, the Macedonian hero and his horse are also said to have a common natal day, as a reassertion of the affinity between them. This deep bond casts them in a mythological dimension: in fact, as Alexander considers himself a new Achilles,³⁷⁵ Bucephalus can be seen as a new Balius or Xanthus, the two immortal horses which were given by Poseidon to Peleus, Achilles' father, as a gift for his wedding to Thetis. The two steeds are characterised by stunning characteristics, such as sharp intelligence, incredible swiftness, and a legendary strength and loyalty to their charioteer. The immortal horses are thus described by Oppian in his *Cynegetica*: "to horses beyond all mortal creatures cunning Nature has given a subtle mind and heart. Always they know their own dear charioteer and they neigh when they see their glorious rider and greatly mourn their comrade when he falls in war".³⁷⁶ The author includes Bucephalus among the immortal horses,³⁷⁷ and indeed also in the *Phyllada* the steed has all the characteristics of a superior, divine breed: he is gifted with incredible force, he neighs only at Alexander's stroke, and he mourns deeply when his king dies, insomuch that he dies as well.³⁷⁸

The loss of Christendom due to the Turks' arrival while Alexander and Darius were drinking is variant of a common theme in demotic songs related to the fall of Constantinople (τα δημοτικά τραγούδια της Άλωσης). In these songs, the tragic loss occurs while two Hellenic heroes – usually Alexander and Constantine Palaeologus –

³⁷⁵ For Alexander's emulation of Achilles, see Stewart (1993) 78-86. Differently, Heckel (2015) 21-33 suggests that Alexander's likeness to Achilles was not his personal goal but rather the product of the sources' rhetoric. See also Maitland (2015) 1-20.

³⁷⁶ Opp. C. I. 221-225.

³⁷⁷ Opp. C. I. 229-230: "Bucephalus, the horse of the belligerent Macedonian king, fought against men in arms".

³⁷⁸ Pallis (1989) 162.

are bingeing at the table. Here below I quote an example from Thrace, entitled *Of Alexander and Konstantis* (Του Αλέξανδρου και του Κωσταντή):³⁷⁹

Alexander King and Kostantis together
Together they ate, together they drank at a marble board
Together by their side they had their horses tied
And while they ate and drank and enjoyed themselves
a small child sings a paeon and says:
You are eating, drinking and feasting well
But the Turk defeated the Rhomios and took the empire
And if the Turk defeated the Rhomios, he took the empire too
The fish we were frying fell in the cold water of a spring...
the half-fried fish jump up to the ceiling
and they hear the voice of God: the City will become Turkish.

In the tale form Alistratē, after Alexander passed away, his eight-month pregnant wife³⁸⁰ killed herself with his spear, explaining the end of the Argead dynasty in the same fashion as in the *Phyllada*. Moreover, the metamorphosis in river-deities of the Macedonian' sisters constitutes one of the numerous variations of the Mermaid and Nereid's types. The striking element is the geographical setting chosen: Alexander's sisters are said to dwell in the Ουρδανοπόταμος (*Ourdanopotamos*), a corruption of the name of the river Jordan, which, as a baptism site, has a firm place in the Christian tradition, but also points to the influence that the Jewish tradition had in Northern Greek popular culture. In fact, it should be noted that, until the World War II, Jewish communities lived in Northern Greece, with Thessaloniki as their biggest centre.

In order to calm the spirits of the Nymphs sisters of Alexander, the inhabitants of Alistratē say that Alexander is still living and ruling in Drama, the closest city (about twenty-five km away from their village).

³⁷⁹ Fourtounis V., Οι θρήνοι για την Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης (*Mournings for the Fall of Constantinople*), <http://www.fourtounis.gr/arthra/2012/05/28/28-05-2012.html> [accessed on 06-10-2016] = appendix II, n. 18 (Greek original lyrics).

³⁸⁰ See Justin XIII. 2. 5.

This survey on the Reception of Alexander the Great in Modern Hellenic Folklore concludes with a twentieth-century *historical* folktale attested in Western Macedon, entitled Η Προμαντεία για τη Γέννηση του Μεγάλου Αλεξάνδρου (*The Divination about Alexander the Great's Birth*). A *historical* folktale is the result of a contamination of genres, which well suits my attempt to show the fluidity and continuity of the Greek Alexander-lore: as traditions, it has a historical kernel and it is held as true; nevertheless, it presents marked traits typical of folktales, such as the choice of the protagonists, the bucolic geographical setting, and fantastic elements.³⁸¹

In Upper Macedonia – as today's Western Macedonia used to be called then – there were two shepherds, who worshipped King Philip and they were very proud of him. Mitros Nepoleos and Kitsos Larios tended their flocks in bordering pastures, of which the boundaries were set by a huge stone. In that place, gods used to have a chat and relax when tired. The two shepherds became friends and every day they let their sheep graze carefree while they were having their lunch together on the stone.

All Macedonians were longing for an heir to the throne, but above all Western Macedonians, who considered the king as entirely theirs, since his great-grandfather and grandfather were from their area. In addition, Queen Olympias was from Epirus, which borders Western Macedonia.

One day there were celebrations in the village and the two friends slaughtered a lamb and roasted it on a spit. And once they had eaten and drunk wine to their heart's content, Mitros Nepoleos, who knew also divination, looked at the shoulder of the lamb. He was pensive and stared at the shoulder for quite a long time, while Kitsos Larios was watching him in agony. And suddenly, something strange happened: Mitros' eyes sparkled with joy, he stood upright and started shouting and dancing out of his happiness.

- My Macedonia – said Mitros – a great glory awaits you (Μακεδονία μου, μεγάλη δόξα σε περιμένει).

Kitsos Larios fearing lest Mitros had gone mad, asked him:

- Hold on, Mitros, have you gone crazy? Please sit down and explain what the signs show. What do you see? Tell me.

³⁸¹ Paparoussopoulou (2004) 11-14. For the Greek original, see appendix II, n. 19.

Then Mitros Nepoleos sat down and showed the signs to his friend.

- Look here, Kitsos, an heir will be born and he will become a great king indeed. My mate, listen to what I tell you. Look at how torrents spread everywhere in Macedonia and horses run towards every direction and all round there is much wealth made by god, my dear friend, and it is coming from far away.

- Mitros, do you reckon that this will happen? Oh friend blessed by Zeus, sit and I shall tell you my dream then. To me it seems so strange, but you can explain it.

Mitros Nepoleos sat cross-legged and said:

- Tell me, my friend, be quick! I cannot resist.

- So, last night I slept a little late, as if someone were closing my eyes, wanting me to see something in the dark. In the dream, I saw all the flocks of Macedonia, both those in the mountains and those in the plains; every ewe gave birth to a white lamb, but one, which had a black lamb (είδα όλα τα κοπάδια της Μακεδονίας, βουνίσια και καμπίσια ούλες οι προβατίνες γέννησαν άσπρα αρνιά. Μόνο μια γέννησε μαύρο). And besides, a miracle happened: a big reddish ewe gave birth to a white falcon (ένα θαύμα. Μια μεγάλη ρούσα προβατίνα γέννησε ένα άσπρο γεράκι). And the falcon... my dear Mitros, what to say... as soon as it was born, it opened its strong wings wide and flew far away. The falcon flew very high and it was followed by smaller hawks; all of them together supposedly roamed the entire world.

One day the black lamb fell seriously ill and the ewe that gave birth to the white falcon bit with its teeth many other lambs. But in the end, the ewe was stung by a black bat and it became severely sick, and you would have thought that it was lamenting night and day for its pain. So Mitros, explain this long dream, so long that I could not get up. I tried to open my eyes but there again the invisible force insisted and I kept sleeping. I can not explain it, but you, please explain it to me, as you know the art of soothsaying.

- Hold on a bit, Mitros. Your dream is extraordinary and important; the last sign, however, does not us foretell something good: it predicts some calamities. But this bad omen is at the end of the dream and, who knows, it is just a dream after all. But here the shoulder "states" it clearly: we shall have a successor and

there will not be another one like him in this world (θα΄χουμε διάδοχο και μάλιστα που δεν έχει ματαγεννηθεί άλλος τέτοιος στον κόσμο).

So the two happy friends ate, took their flocks, and everyone went to his pastures and corral for milking.

After five days Alexander the Great was born. Criers were running from village to village with a megaphone (funnel) and proclaimed that a successor to the Macedonian throne was born: Philip has a son. The first one to learn about Alexander’s birth was Mitros Nepoleos, who had gone down to the village on business and heard the news. And when he went up the mountain and reached his own pasture, he joins his hands together in the shape of a funnel and shouted at the opposite mountain, where Kitsos Larios was:

– Heyyyy Kitsooo, do you hear me eh? The lamb’s shoulder told the truth; did you hear that? Olympias gave birth to a child: the successor came. Our Great King has a son! The child we all desired arrived and he shall be great, do remember what I say. Listen to this too: Philip conquered Potidaea the same night that the blessed child was born. And what else?!? General Parmenion defeated the Tseplekides in battle (ο Φίλιππος πήρε την Ποτίδαια την ίδια βραδιά που γεννήθηκε ο ευλογημένος. Αμ τ΄άλλου; Ο στρατηγός Παρμενίων νίκησε στη μάχη τους Τσεμπλέκηδες). Wasn’t I right? I never get the omens wrong. Macedonia will be glorious: the successor has Fortune on his side.

- Heyyy Mitros, I have not heard everything and I am coming close to you so that you can tell me the entire story – shouted Kitsos Larios from the other side.

- Listen to the rest, Kitsos. Now that I was coming back from the village, I passed the great river of the forest, and it was full of deer. As I have told you, the newborn is lucky.

This story came down by word of mouth into the folk tradition until today.

As we know, the ancestors of King Philip reigned in Argos Orestiko in Upper (today’s West) Macedonia. From there they went down to Lower (today’s Central) Macedonia (οι πρόγονοι του βασιλιά Φίλιππου βασίλευαν στο Άργος Όρεστικό της Άνω (Δυτικής) Μακεδονίας. Από εκεί ξεκίνησαν προς την Κάτω (Κεντρική) Μακεδονία).

The friendship of shepherds; the pride of the Macedonians for their king; the divination power and the explanation of dreams. The impetuous rivers symbolised the uprising of the state and the people.

The ewes which gave birth to white lambs symbolised the prosperity of the state; the reddish ewe was Queen Olympias and the falcon Alexander the Great. The other hawks were his generals, the campaign in Asia and his victories. The lambs, which were bitten and killed by the queen were Alexander the Great's half-brothers.

The shepherd had foretold, through these symbolisms, Alexander's birth, his victories, his glory, his death and the dissolution of the empire.

While the rural background, the protagonists, the use of magic and of allegory, and the undefined (but human) setting are all distinguishing features of folktales, this narration is peculiar because it also has a pronounced historical characterisation: it concisely presents basic events of the Argead kingdom and of Alexander's empire in order to educate the audience, to help it value its glorious ancient past.

In particular, the tale is very specific on geographico-historical details, as it presents the Argeads' history as *local* history: it starts with the ancient distinction between Upper and Lower Macedon, which correspond *grosso modo* to today's Western and Eastern Macedonia. The geographico-political division of Macedon into two districts and the Macedonian kings' descent from Argos Orestikon are well attested in the ancient sources. At II. 99. 1-2, Thucydides writes that, while Lower Macedon was ruled by the Temenid king Perdicca, the Upper part was populated by highland peoples, such as the Lyncestians and the Elimeiotae, guided by their own kings but allied and subjects to the Temenids; at II. 99. 3, the historian states that the Temenids themselves were from Upper Macedon, as they descended from Argos Orestikon.³⁸² Furthermore, the stress on the Temenids and Olympias' descent are used to tie Alexander to Western Macedonia, to reaffirm that the inhabitants of these lands are the real owners of the great conqueror.

The tale's description of Alexander's birth reminds us of Plutarch's narration³⁸³ of the victorious events that characterised the day:

³⁸² Cf. Hdt. VIII. 137-139.

³⁸³ Plu. *Alex.* 3. 4-5.

To Philip, however, who had just taken Potidaea, there came three messages at the same time: [5] the first that Parmenio had conquered the Illyrians in a great battle, the second that his race-horse had won a victory at the Olympic games, while a third announced the birth of Alexander. These things delighted him, of course, and the seers raised his spirits still higher by declaring that the son whose birth coincided with three victories would be always victorious. [Transl. Perrin].

The bucolic background and the shepherds' fascination with the figure of Alexander the Great are two features that will be found also in Theodore Angelopoulos' film *Megalexandros*, which includes a folktale told by a shepherd in its plot and presents Alexander as a messianic hero come to save the peasants' community.

Furthermore, the movie shares various elements with the Hellenic folkloristic production, such as the Christianisation of the Alexander's myth, the motif of the dragon-slayer, and scene costumes, which remind us of the folk painter Theophilos' naïf art.

Chapter Three
The Polysemy of Alexander the Great in Theodore Angelopoulos’
film “Megalexandros”

*La politica di Alessandro è la volontà carismatica di un capo:
ha la capacità di rendere oscuro ogni suo gesto.*
*(Alexander’s politics is the charismatic will of a leader:
He has the ability to make each of his actions obscure.)*

Massimo, Italian Anarchist³⁸⁴

Theodore Angelopoulos’ film *Megalexandros* is a further step in the long path of the Reception of Alexander the Great in Greece, the almost twenty-four-century-long chain of reflection on, adaptation and appropriation of the Macedonian king’s deeds and image. It represents the director’s idea of the Great Conqueror, but it also draws our attention to Modern Greek history and to what Alexander III means to Greek people now. The aim of the chapter is to examine the different aspects in Angelopoulos’ view of Alexander: ancient-historical, mythological, religious and modern-political. This analysis will help us understand the Athenian director’s symbolic use of antiquity, and the way he puts it in dialogue with his contemporary political reality.³⁸⁵

Shot in 1980, it is Angelopoulos’ fifth full-length movie, and comes after the first of his filmic trilogies, composed of *Μέρες του '36* (*Days of '36*, 1972), *Ο Θίασος* (the *Travelling Players*, 1975), and *Οι Κυνηγοί* (*The Hunters*, 1977).³⁸⁶ These three works saw the light during the difficult years of the Regime of the Colonels, the military junta which ruled in Greece from 1967 to 1974,³⁸⁷ and of the following controversial

³⁸⁴ Angelopoulos (1980) 01:47:22 – 01:47:31.

³⁸⁵ For Angelopoulos’ biography and filmic production, see Raphailidis (2003); Ciment M., “Angelopoulos, Theodoros”, in: *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers, Encyclopedia.com*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/movies/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/angelopoulos-theodoros> [accessed on 07-10-2016]. For a general introduction on filmic studies, see Monaco (2009⁴), especially 24-71; for the reception of Classics in films, see Blanshard, Shahabudin (2011) 1-14. For the flyer advertising the film *Megalexandros*, see appendix I, n. 24.

³⁸⁶ Themelis (1998) 171-173.

³⁸⁷ Athenian (1972) 71-156; Gallant (2001) 197-203.

premiership of Constantine Caramanlis (1974-1980).³⁸⁸ In the background, they all display the political hardships which the Modern Greek nation had to endure during the dictatorship of the General Metaxas (1936-1941),³⁸⁹ the Nazi occupation (1941-1944),³⁹⁰ and the post-war civil strife (1946-1949).³⁹¹ Thus, notwithstanding Angelopoulos' disapproval of the harsh regime of the Military Junta and of right-wing policies, he escapes censorship by concealing his criticism and translating it backwards to the pre-war period.

Megalexandros matches this trilogy, since it deals with the social and political problems of Modern Greece in the first three decades of the twentieth century, but it also sublimates it, by breaking the boundaries between history and mythology, religion and politics. It clearly shows the director's concern for the loss of certainties that the left-wing ideology's defeat bore with it,³⁹² and the need to re-think the agenda of the Hellenic state and history in general. In fact, through this film, the director's aim is to provide us with a broad political consideration about the mythification – and the subsequent demythification – of a liberator who, once he has reached power, becomes a tyrant.³⁹³

The film begins with a Macedonian shepherd telling us the fairy tale of a foreign king who occupies Greece. Thus the protagonist of the story, named Alexander, after having seen the depths of the earth, gathers a group of Macedonian warriors living in the mountains in order to free his country.

The next scene opens with the New Year's Eve Ball which takes place in the old Parliament in Athens: the atmosphere is cheerful, since we are in 1900 and a new century is going to begin. In the meantime, a group of brigands manages to escape from prison and one of them runs into a dark forest. The mystery of his release from jail and his arrival into the wood is suggested by the compelling soundtrack, a folk tune played with a flute. There he finds a white horse bound to a wooden stake with a rope, and an Athenian-like helmet, illuminated by the moonlight. By wearing the helmet and

³⁸⁸ Woodhouse (1982) 213-236; Gallant (2001) 203-208.

³⁸⁹ Gallant (2001) 157-159.

³⁹⁰ Gallant (2001) 162-173.

³⁹¹ Gallant (2001) 173-177; Bordwell (2005) 143.

³⁹² Alberó, *Οι δρόμοι για την εξορία*, 2:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed 25-11-2012]; Estève (1995) 1.

³⁹³ Xanthopoulos (1985) 144; Estève (1995) 1; Ziakas (1995) 16.

riding the horse, the brigand ceases to be an outlaw; he becomes the reincarnation of the great Macedonian conqueror.³⁹⁴

After midnight, a company of English aristocrats, following in the footsteps of Lord Byron, goes to Cape Sounion in order to celebrate the event in the temple of Poseidon, where they receive a sudden attack from Alexander's men. This is a clear reference to the "Dilessi massacre", when in 1870 the brigands of the Arvanitakides brothers kidnapped, and later killed, three English aristocrats, an Italian servant, and a Greek tour guide, who were on the way back from their journey to the site of Marathon. Afterwards, Alexander writes a letter to the Queen and the ambassador of England, promising that he would not do any harm to the hostages, if they (the Queen and the ambassador) were to intercede with the Greek government on their behalf. He demands the return of the lands to their legitimate owners, the peasants, and a general amnesty for himself, his brigands, and the other prisoners in the mountains. Thereupon, Alexander starts the journey back to his village, where, at his arrival, he is acclaimed as a saviour by the inhabitants.

Shortly after, problems arise: during the Macedonian hero's long absence, the peasants have changed the village into a commune led by a socialist teacher, in which everything, joy and labours, is shared; there is no property, and men and women have the same rights. The brigands cannot come to terms with the new status quo, and they clearly show it by imposing a climate of terror, slaying their opponents and the common cattle. Alexander secludes himself from his countrymen: he does not join the community's life, and he behaves harshly, without giving any explanation. His unbreakable silence – due to his inability to talk to his people – worsens his social exclusion; he is no more perceived as a saviour, but as a tyrant. Secretly, Alexander sends his secretary to the Greek Prime Minister in order to reach agreement with the Power he was once fighting against. A fake trial is established in the village, so that the brigands would be granted their freedom, the peasants their lands, and the hostages released. Yet, unexpectedly, the Macedonian bandit kills the chief prosecutor and eventually the English aristocrats and the socialist teacher. In this bloodshed, the Queen's army besets the village. Alexander, wounded and with his hands dirty with blood, arrives at the main square, where he falls down to the ground. The villagers, outraged by his tyrannical behaviour, which has destroyed their peaceful community,

³⁹⁴ See appendix I, n. 25.

surround and overwhelm him. When the circle opens again, a marble head is what is left of the mythical Macedonian hero, as if broken and fallen from the body of an ancient statue.

The last scene of the film shows at dawn a “little Alexander” entering a modern city – the contemporary Athens – on horseback: the myth is not dead, but the Greek nation needs to learn from the past and find its new way by itself.

Megalexandros deals with Greek history, politics, and culture, but also anticipates themes that will be extensively developed by Angelopoulos in his following films: the protagonist’s silence and his social exclusion; travels, exiles and nostalgia for our own fatherland; and coldness and hardships of life in Northern Greece – the opposite of the commercial sunny image of the islands of the tourists. The title *Megalexandros* itself underlines the complexity of the director’s interpretation:³⁹⁵ it is the name given by the Greek folk tradition to the mythical figure of Alexander III. In fact, the appellation with the article and the adjective in the attributive function Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μέγας / ὁ Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος makes it clear to the Greek-speaking audience that it refers to the Macedonian king of the fourth century BC, Alexander the Great; whereas the compound noun Μεγαλέξανδρος³⁹⁶ embraces a variety of historical and fictional personas, which the director reused and reshaped in his personal Reception of the Macedonian conqueror. Thus, the film is not about Alexander the Great as a historical figure, but as a hero, a semi-god, a myth out of history.

In the opening scene, the first filmic folktale created by Angelopoulos for his *Megalexandros* is presented. A Macedonian shepherd looks into the camera and tells us a story about a bandit called Alexander, who *once upon a time* gathered a group of select Macedonians in order to free the land overpowered by a foreign king.³⁹⁷ “After

³⁹⁵ Horton (1999) 15; Georgakas (2000) 172; Mitchell (2001) 28.

³⁹⁶ Also spelt Μεγαλέξαντρος (*Megalexantros*), which is the more popular, dialectal form of the name Angelopoulos opted for.

³⁹⁷ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:02:32-00:04:14: Μια φορά, στα παλιά τα χρόνια, ένας ξένος βασιλιάς κίνησε να πάρει τη γη που κατοικούσαν οι πρόγονοί μας. Ο Αλέξανδρος, τότε, που καταγόταν από τους Ελλούς, μια φιλή αρματωμένουν που όριζε τα γύρω βουνά, σύναξε διαλεχτούς Μακεδόνες, χάλασε τον ξένο και λευτέρωσε την γη μας. Νικώντας και λευτερώνοντας λαούς και γλώσσες, είδε τα βάθη της Ασίας. Angelopoulos reworked a folktale on Alexander which is told in the area of mount Parnassus: see Stathi (1997) 327, fn. 1.

having overcome and freed various peoples and languages, he saw the depths of Asia. One afternoon, while he was sitting and looking at the sun that sunk into the great river, he felt sad. On that night he abandoned his companions and left, all alone, to see the end of the world". Thanks to this expedient, *Megalexandros* appears like an oral popular story handed down through the centuries;³⁹⁸ a clear link to the *Alexander Romance*, and to the folkloristic production,³⁹⁹ which, as discussed above, provided a variegated set of legendary accounts related to the Macedonian king's mighty conquest of the *oecumene*. For centuries his life, deeds and travels have been sung, reworked and developed by Greeks both in prose and in verses under the umbrella-name of Pseudo-Callisthenes;⁴⁰⁰ from this rich tradition Angelopoulos derived the "god-like atmosphere", the mythical aura that surrounds the protagonist, and the sense of adoration that permeates the villagers and the viewers at his arrival to the village.

Nonetheless, *Megalexandros* is not just a fairy tale, a myth, or a dehistoricised narrative: in fact, as much as the folk Alexander, the celluloid hero keeps a historical semblance, sharing some traits, such as the virtue, the desire for new adventures, and the physical strength with the Macedonian king of the ancient historians. Inside this historical frame, the narrative is enriched by symbolic and mythological aspects of previous and later times. Moreover, the second main frame of reference in the film is the way the image of the Macedonian general is exploited by the leaders of the Greek politico-historical scene spanning from the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1940s.

As a result, according to Hardwick's classification of the various modes of Reception,⁴⁰¹ *Megalexandros* can be considered a *hybrid* by means of an *appropriation*, since it merges Greek traditions of different periods and uses them to sustain its purpose: to serve as a critic to every form of despotism.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Ziakas (1995) 22; Horton (1999) 62.

³⁹⁹ Xanthopoulos (1985) 142-143; Ciment (1998) 92; Mitchell (2001) 28.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. the *Phyllada* in prose and the *Rhimada* in verses.

⁴⁰¹ Hardwick (2003) 9-10: a *hybrid* is a fusion of materials from classical and other sources (in this case, Byzantine and Modern Greek); an *appropriation* is the use of an ancient image or text to sanction ideas or practices.

⁴⁰² Ziakas (1995) 15-16; Ciment (1998) 92; Porton (1999) 108-109; Barthélémy, Μια ποιητική της Ιστορίας, 5-9: <http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

The ancient historical substrate

At first glance, Angelopoulos' protagonist seems to have nothing in common with the Macedonian king who defeated Darius III in 330 BC and conquered Persia. Nevertheless, two symbolic elements (the horse and the helmet),⁴⁰³ the pupil-teacher relationship, and the protagonist's obscure origins link *Megalexandros* tightly to antiquity.

From ancient sources, we know that in his youth, Alexander III receives from his father Philip II a strong-willed horse, as a prize for having succeeded in its taming.⁴⁰⁴ This black Thessalian steed is characterised by a mark in the shape of an ox's head, thence the name Alexander chooses for it, Bucephalus.⁴⁰⁵ The great conqueror and his horse become inseparable and fight together until the time of the battle of the Hydaspes against Porus in 326 BC, when it dies because of fatigue and old age.⁴⁰⁶ In the various recensions of the *Alexander Romance*, Bucephalus is described as a marvellous steed, with big horns and fierce nature.⁴⁰⁷ Since he is capable of devouring human beings, Philip II decides to confine him alone in a stable, into which he throws his opponents.⁴⁰⁸ When Bucephalus hears Alexander's voice, for the first time he shows his gentle side and, as a docile animal, licks his hand. He is so meek (μειλίχιον) that the young Macedonian prince is able to ride him without bridles.⁴⁰⁹ With the time passing, their bond becomes very strong and, as Bucephalus is told about his master's death, it dies "exploding" (ἔσκασεν) in his stable because of unbearable sorrow.⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, the artistic representations of the Macedonian king riding or taming his

⁴⁰³ Horton (1999) 45; Stathi (1999) 65.

⁴⁰⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 6. 2-3.

⁴⁰⁵ Arr. *An.* V. 19. 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Arr. *An.* V. 19. 4-5.

⁴⁰⁷ Ps.-Call., *Φυλλάδα* = Pallis (1989) 79: "A very beautiful and marvellous horse, with a sign on one of his legs, the right one, in the shape of an ox's head (εις είδος βοϊδιού κεφάλι), and with horns, a pichis [about seventy cm] long (με κέρατα, και αυτά μεγάλα μίαν πήχην)".

⁴⁰⁸ AR (α) I. 17. 2: [Ptolemy says]: "This is Bucephalus, which your father secluded because it is anthropophagus (άνθρωποφάγον)".

⁴⁰⁹ AR (α) I. 17. 3: "The horse, after hearing Alexander's voice, neighed for a second time, but not as usual, in a terrifying and distressing way, but sweetly, as if tamed by a god (ἀλλά μειλίχιον, τάχα ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἐπιτασσόμενος)".

⁴¹⁰ Ps.-Call., *Φυλλάδα* = Pallis (1989) 162.

horse are numerous: the bas-relief carvings on the sarcophagus built by Abdalonymus in the late fourth century BC, the *Alexander Mosaic* in the House of the Faun at Pompeii dated to the first century BC, and the *Equestrian Alexander*, a little bronze statuette of the first century BC / first century AD found in Herculaneum, are just a few examples.⁴¹¹

In the film, the special relationship between Alexander and his horse is maintained: the bandit, escaping from prison, finds himself in a holy wood; in order to become Megalexandros, he has to ride the horse which – apparently – is there waiting for him to come, and to wear a helmet mysteriously placed at the top of a wooden stake.⁴¹² Moreover, as a knight, he arrives on horseback at the village and is acclaimed by its inhabitants:⁴¹³ this chivalrous image and the warm welcome he receives entail the identification with the great conqueror.⁴¹⁴ A literary parallel to the importance of the steed's role for the myth-making of Alexander III can be found in the oracle the Pythia gives to Philip II: only the one who is able to mount Bucephalus will be the King of all the *oecumene*.⁴¹⁵

The second element, the helmet, is a typical feature of the ancient warrior. The Macedonian soldiers wore different ones from period to period: during the fifth and fourth centuries BC, they had Illyrian-type helmets; later on, the Thracian-Phrygian-type. In several fourth-century BC depictions, cavalrymen are portrayed wearing the characteristic Macedonian *καυσία*, a broad-brimmed hat made of leather. The Successors used to wear an Attic-type helmet, with a tall crest and cheek flaps.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Appendix I, n. 20. For other examples in ancient art, see Pandermalis (2004) 24-31. In the twentieth-century, Alexander the Great was depicted on several occasions by the Greek painter Theophilos, who also took pleasure in being photographed masked as the Macedonian conqueror (see Tsarouchis (1967²) 13-27). One of Theophilos' most famous works is the fresco entitled "Ἐφιππος Μέγας Αλέξανδρος (*the Equestrian Alexander the Great*, painted before 1920) which is now stored at the Museum of Folklore in Athens (inventory number 3095); see appendix I, n. 22.

⁴¹² Angelopoulos (1980) 00:11:47-00:14:15.

⁴¹³ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:36:52-00:39:40; 00:55:36-00:56:34.

⁴¹⁴ Ziakas (1995) 27.

⁴¹⁵ AR (α) I. 15: "Ὅστις τὸν Βουκέφαλον ἵππον διὰ μέσης <τῆς> Πέλλης ἀλλόμενος ὀδεύσει".

⁴¹⁶ Adam-Veleni (2005) 51.

Alexander III's own κράνος is mentioned by the Alexander-historians in their account of the battle of the Granicus River,⁴¹⁷ when Rhoesaces attacks and hits him on his head.⁴¹⁸ Plutarch also provides a description of the Macedonian's whole armour, which adds to his charisma:⁴¹⁹ an iron helmet, a girded Sicilian vest, a *linothōrax* (a breastplate of two-ply linen) from the spoils taken at Issus, a sword and a belt. In line with the Alexander-historians' accounts, the numismatic evidence too attests the figure of a warrior king, whose military role and virtue in the battle are emphasised by his *kranos*. In 1980 in the Saqqara necropolis a group of bronze coins from Memphis was found, which displays a beardless male head with a curved helmet on the obverse; and a winged horse (Pegasus), a wreath, and the letter A on the reverse.⁴²⁰ According to M. J. Price,⁴²¹ this small denomination bears the head of Alexander III wearing a Phrygian-type helmet, and it is datable between November 332 and April 331 BC, during the great conqueror's stay in Egypt. Therefore, it represents one of his earliest known portraits. Probably, this kind of bronze coins was minted by local authorities both to show their loyalty to the Macedonian rule and to cover the need of small exchange for everyday life activities.⁴²² Moreover, a group of coins called the *Porus medallions*⁴²³ presents on the obverse a soldier on horseback, equipped with Greek armour. The scene describes the moment of the agile horseman's attack against the war elephant, which is carrying a warrior and a mahout. On the reverse, a Greek soldier on foot is portrayed, wearing a Phrygian-type helmet and keeping in his hand a thunderbolt, Zeus' symbol. The hypothesis that these medallions attest Alexander III's victory against Porus on the obverse, while presenting him as a semi-divine warrior – thanks to his attributes, the thunderbolt and the gear – on the reverse, is well grounded.

⁴¹⁷ D. S. XVII. 20. 6; Plu. *Alex.* 16. 4; Arr. *An.* I. 15. 7-8.

⁴¹⁸ For Alexander's *kranos* and its Modern Greek Reception, see above the tradition of the women's helmet in Roumlouki.

⁴¹⁹ Plu. *Alex.* 32. 5-6.

⁴²⁰ Dahmen (2007) 9-10.

⁴²¹ Price (1991) 33. *Contra*: Le Rider (2007) 171-179.

⁴²² Dahmen (2007) 9-10.

⁴²³ Dahmen (2007) 6. For a complete study on Porus medallions and the Elephant tetradrachms, see Holt (2003), especially 117-138.

Similarly, in *Megalexandros* the Attic-type *kranos* itself constitutes the power of the leader:⁴²⁴ when the protagonist wears it, he is Μέγας (great), he is invincible; his people see in him the reincarnation of Alexander III, who came in order to save them from foreign oppressors and poverty. Without it, he shows all his weakness, falling ashore unconscious, struck by an epileptic fit.⁴²⁵ Furthermore, his unexpected prominent baldness highlights his troubled personality, which has little in common with the secure image of a triumphant knight. Angelopoulos said he had been inspired by the ancient Greek tradition, which considered epilepsy as a sacred illness: Alexander is punished by the gods for his *hubris*, his desire to go beyond the limits.⁴²⁶

Both the symbolic elements, the horse and the helmet, have a twofold meaning in the film, linking the hero also to the mythological and political substrate respectively, which will be discussed later on.

The pupil-teacher relationship is the third reference to the historical Macedonian king. Plutarch attests that Philip II wanted the best teacher for his son, and so he summoned to court Aristotle from Stageira.⁴²⁷ Together with the philosopher, Alexander spends two years learning literature, ethics and politics in the Nymphaion of Mieza. According to the *Alexander Romance*, during a lesson, the philosopher asks some of his students what they would give him if they ever became a king. All of them promise him big rewards, only Alexander replies as a real sage, saying that he will decide when the moment comes, since there is no certainty of the future. And Aristotle, proud of his student, hails him as κοσμοκράτωρ, the world ruler.⁴²⁸ In the film, when Alexander arrives at the village, he gives a long hug to his teacher, as a

⁴²⁴ Stathi (1999) 56.

⁴²⁵ Stathi (1999) 68.

⁴²⁶ Ciment (1998) 94: in the interview, the Greek director mentions Hippocrates as the ancient source for the belief that epilepsy is due to the possession by a god. This is a common opinion in Greece but, reading more carefully *De Morbo Sacro*, 1, it is clear that the father of medicine takes for granted a natural cause: *περὶ μὲν τῆς ἱερῆς νούσου καλεομένης ᾧδ' ἔχει: οὐδέν τι μοι δοκᾷ τῶν ἄλλων θειοτέρη εἶναι νούσων οὐδὲ ἱερωτέρη, ἀλλὰ φύσιν μὲν ἔχει ἢν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ νοσήματα, ὅθεν γίνεται. Φύσιν δὲ αὐτῇ καὶ πρόφασιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐνόμισαν θεῖόν τι πρῆγμα εἶναι ὑπὸ ἀπειρίας.* The attribution of epilepsy to a divine cause can possibly be the result of a misinterpretation of the widely read Herodotus' *Histories* (III. 33); see R. Thomas (2000) 30-35. Cf. also the Alexander and the Sun cycle and the discussion about the tradition on the Macedonian's *hubris*.

⁴²⁷ Plu. *Alex.* 7. 2-3.

⁴²⁸ AR (α) I. 16. 5.

demonstration of his affection.⁴²⁹ This gesture is even more relevant, if we consider that in the rest of the plot the bandit is constantly alone, an outcast in his own community.

The enigmatic figure of a child of about ten years old is always present at the most decisive moments of the community's life. For example, during the feast to welcome Alexander and his men to the village, he has an emotional breakdown, perhaps a foreboding that things are going to worsen; when some villagers are unjustly executed, he throws his food on the ground together with his countrymen as a symbol of protest against tyrannical rule; when the English army besets the village, he manages to flee on a mule. Angelopoulos stresses his authorial point of view:⁴³⁰ he is not interested in telling plainly who this child is, because he wants to engage his viewers, who have to interrogate themselves and actively reflect on what they see on screen. In the director's mind, this child represents both the bandit's stepson and Megalexandros, the everlasting myth that will reach the modern city (Athens) at the end of the film, bringing hope for a new beginning to the Greek nation.⁴³¹ Little Alexander witnesses the destruction of his village by a tyrant, who was supposed to save it, and by foreign powers and economical interests. As he feels lost and incapable of understanding the situations he is experiencing, he secretly goes to visit the imprisoned teacher of the village, in order to learn some political principles. We see him repeating his mentor's words: "Property is... Power is...".⁴³² The scene reveals a strong attachment of the child to his teacher: in fact, in a tragic situation, when the village is under attack and a curfew has been imposed by the bandits, he seeks refuge in him.

The filmic Alexander's obscure origins remind us of the politico-historical debate about Alexander III's ethnicity. Just as the kingdom of Macedon was considered in antiquity a less-developed region at the borders of the Classical Hellenic world, often showing many points of contact with the adjoining barbaric tribes, both Classical

⁴²⁹ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:59:49-00:59:59.

⁴³⁰ For *art cinema*, see Bordwell (1979) 59-64.

⁴³¹ Georgakas (2000) 176; Schütte, Ένας τοπογράφος χρονοταξιδευτής, 5:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

⁴³² Angelopoulos (1980) 02:30:36-02:32:16.

and Modern historians have tried to challenge the great conqueror's Greekness.⁴³³ In the folktale of the Macedonian shepherd, the protagonist is said to belong to the Έλλοί, a Greek warrior-tribe living in the mountains around Dotsiko, in Northern Greece, where the film is shot.⁴³⁴ Interestingly, in antiquity the priests of Zeus at the oracle of Dodona in Epirus were called *Helloi*; it might be that Angelopoulos wanted to highlight Alexander III's link to Zeus.⁴³⁵ Later on in the film, when the kidnapped English aristocrats have already reached the village, the Greek tour guide shows them the house where Alexander used to live with his step-mother. He introduces the second filmic tale, explaining that Alexander, still in his childhood, *mysteriously* appeared to the community and was found on the slopes by the peasants – thus alluding to his ambiguous descent.⁴³⁶

The mythological substrate

In his cinematic production, Angelopoulos often makes use of images and symbols taken from the past, and he frequently quotes tragedies and poems. The mythological substrate of *Megalexandros* duplicates and combines the two major spheres of the Greek legendary culture: the Classical and the Byzantine. In fact, the protagonist shares the legendary aura with which Alexander the Great has been invested by the passing of time and, above of all, he himself has a strong mythological characterisation, due to the epileptic crises, that depict him as “the chosen by the

⁴³³ An example of fierce critique against the Macedonian “Greekness” is Demosthenes; see his *Philippica*, III. 31: “Philip [...] though he is not only no Greek, nor related to the Greeks, but not even a barbarian from any place that can be named with honour, but a pestilent knave from Macedonia (Φιλίππου [...] οὐ μόνον οὐχ Ἕλληνας ὄντος οὐδὲ προσήκοντος οὐδὲν τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ βαρβάρου ἐντεῦθεν ὄθεν καλὸν εἰπεῖν, ἀλλ’ ὀλέθρου Μακεδόνας), whence it was never yet possible to buy a decent slave”. *Contra*, Isoc. *To Philip*, 32-34. Much ink has been spilled on Ancient Macedonians’ ethnicity; the leaders of the opposite views are: Borza (1990) 93: the evidence is too scanty to prove that Macedonians spoke Greek and, thus, were Greeks; and Hatzopoulos (2011) 73: “The Macedonians satisfied the *objective* criteria of Greekness enumerated by Herodotus”. See also above, fn. 50.

⁴³⁴ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:02:32-00:04:14.

⁴³⁵ For the Helloi, see Str. VII. 7. 11: πότερον δὲ χρὴ λέγειν Ἑλλούς, ὡς Πίνδαρος, ἢ Σελλούς, ὡς ὑπονοοῦσι παρ’ Ὀμήρῳ κεῖσθαι.

⁴³⁶ Angelopoulos (1980) 02:04:14-02:05:46.

god”,⁴³⁷ whose truth has to stay hidden. Because of his different nature, Alexander is always silent; he barely speaks twice⁴³⁸ in the film, and only with his dead wife’s wedding-dress – hanging on the wall still dirty with blood – thus underlining his solitude. His inability to form personal relationships is further highlighted by the fact that, when he needs to negotiate with the government, he writes a letter or sends his secretary; as he tries to communicate with the villagers, he is immediately stopped by an epileptic fit.⁴³⁹ The god wants him to be apart, to neglect the community life.

A mythological reference lies in the hero’s family relations as well: like a new Oedipus,⁴⁴⁰ his origins are unknown; according to the Greek tour guide’s story, when he was found as a child by the villagers, only one woman in the village managed to approach him, becoming his foster-mother, whom he eventually married. Thus, Alexander embodies the tragic hero, being incapable of running away from his destiny: on the day of his marriage, his step mother-bride is shot in the chest during an attempt made by the landowners to kill him. Day by day, this loss makes him even more distant from the reality, and the wedding-dress’ presence, the symbol of the woman’s absence, maddens him.⁴⁴¹ In the *Alexander Romance*, Alexander kills his “biological” father Nectanebus and shows great affection for his mother Olympias, a sentiment which is particularly displayed by the letters he sends to her during his campaign in Asia.⁴⁴² Interestingly, in a fairy tale from Epirus, Olympias’ name is replaced with that of Rhoxane: the parental and the bridal role are overlapping, with clear references to the Oedipus-complex. In fact, the folk Alexander kills his father unknowingly and marries his mother, who eventually in the Epirotic folk tradition has taken the name of the first historical bride.⁴⁴³

⁴³⁷ Xanthopoulos (1985) 144; Barthélémy, *Μια ποιητική της Ιστορίας*, 6:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

⁴³⁸ Angelopoulos (1980) 01:02:30-01:02:31; 02:15:40-02:16:43.

⁴³⁹ Ciment (1998) 94.

⁴⁴⁰ Ziakas (1995) 36; Rollet, *Το θεάτρο έναντι της εικόνας*, 2:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

⁴⁴¹ Ziakas (1995) 36; Stathi (1999) 56.

⁴⁴² E. g., see the affectionate words Alexander addresses to Olympias in *AR* (ε) 34. 1; even a “rigorous” historical source as Arrian does not fail to mention the letter the Macedonian writes to his mother (*An.* VI. 1. 4).

⁴⁴³ Veloudis (1977) introduction, γγ’-γγε’.

The θεοφαγία (*theophagia*, the act of devouring the god) staged towards the end of the film offers another subtle mythological implication:⁴⁴⁴ Alexander, as Prometheus, is eaten because he has gone too far beyond the limits, and he will free the villagers only with his own end.⁴⁴⁵ With a primitive orgiastic ritual of flesh-eating, the villagers destroy him but also ingest and metabolise him: Alexander is in every one of us. He is the cultural, historical and political heritage which we have to deal with.⁴⁴⁶ This scene is so powerful because of the director's artistic blending of mythology, ancient and modern history: first, the marble head left in the square after the *theophagia* symbolises the psychological burden that every Greek has to bear, for the Classical and the Byzantine tradition are now felt as oppressive,⁴⁴⁷ as an obstacle to the free intellectual expression of contemporary society. Secondly, it is a cross-reference in the film: after the slaughter of the chief prosecutor and the judges, who had come to the village in order to stage a trial, Alexander justifies himself to his dead wife's dress, saying that *he woke up with a marble head in his hands, exhausting his elbows, and that he does not know where to lay down.*⁴⁴⁸ He clearly feels confused. Here the protagonist is quoting the first three lines of poem 3 of George Seferis, one of the most famous Greek poets of the twentieth century.⁴⁴⁹ This poem describes the

⁴⁴⁴ Angelopoulos (1980) 03:08:08-03:14:11.

⁴⁴⁵ Alberó, Οι δρόμοι για την εξορία, 2; Barthélémy, Μια ποιητική της Ιστορίας, 6: <http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

⁴⁴⁶ Ziakas (1995) 52-53; Georgakas (2000) 176; Myrsiades (2011) 52.

⁴⁴⁷ Horton (1999) 34-35. See appendix II, n. 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Angelopoulos (1980) 02:16: 28-02:16:44.

⁴⁴⁹ Seferis G. (1935), *Μυθιστόρημα (Mythical Narrative)*, 3: Μέμνησο λουτρών οἱς ενοσφίσθης | Ξύπνησα με το μαρμάρινο τούτο κεφάλι στα χέρια | που μου εξαντλεί τους αγκώνες και δεν ξέρω πού να | τ' ακουμπήσω. | Έπεφτε στο όνειρο καθώς έβγαινα από το όνειρο | έτσι ενώθηκε η ζωή μας και θα είναι πολύ δύσκολο να | ξαναχωρίσει. | Κοιτάζω τα μάτια. Μήτε ανοιχτά μήτε κλειστά | μιλω στο στόμα που όλο γυρεύει να μιλήσει | κρατώ τα μάγουλα που ξεπέρασαν το δέρμα. | Δεν έχω άλλη δύναμη | τα χέρια μου χάνονται και με πλησιάζουν | ακρωτηριασμένα. "Remember the baths where you were murdered. | I woke up with this marble head in my hands; | it exhausts my elbows, and that I do not know where | to lay it down. | It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream | so our lives became one and it will be very difficult for it | to disunite again. | I look at the eyes: neither open, nor close. | I speak to the mouth which keeps trying to speak | I hold the cheeks which have broken through the skin. | I do not have any more strength. | My hands disappear and come toward me | mutilated" [based on Keeley, Sherrard (1986²) 7]. On Seferis (1900-1971), see Beaton (1991), especially 89-109 for *Mythistorēma*.

same state of mental weariness that the Macedonian bandit himself experiences in the film, since he is the hostage of his own myth.⁴⁵⁰

Angelopoulos' *theophagia* brings forth also another allusion to the historical Alexander: Olympias used to participate in orgiastic rituals in order to celebrate Dionysus;⁴⁵¹ and the Macedonian conqueror himself nourished such a strong fascination with the Nysan god that he wanted to reach India in order to follow in his footsteps.⁴⁵²

Further to its historical importance, the celluloid Bucephalus is qualified by a mythological meaning too. In fact, with his totally white coat, he does not recall Alexander the Great's black Thessalian steed described in the ancient sources and depicted in the *Alexander Mosaic*,⁴⁵³ but he rather reminds us of the legendary Pegasus. Possibly, this mythological interpretation of Bucephalus can be explained by the characterisation as marvellous steed with horns he receives in the *Phyllada*,⁴⁵⁴ and in many medieval miniatures⁴⁵⁵ and modern paintings.⁴⁵⁶

A second reason for Angelopoulos' choice of a white Bucephalus potentially lies in the identification of Alexander with St George, the dragon-slayer, who is often depicted with a white horse. As discussed above, the theme of the *dracontoctonia* has been popular in Greece since Antiquity, and in Greek mythology there were several heroes slaying monsters:⁴⁵⁷ Bellerophon kills the Chimaera, Perseus the Medusa, Heracles the Hydra, and Apollo Python.⁴⁵⁸ These mythological heroes were merged and substituted by saints in Christian times,⁴⁵⁹ and St George is the most famous Byzantine restyling of the slayer-hero type and of the defender of Christendom.

⁴⁵⁰ Estève (1995) 1.

⁴⁵¹ Plu. *Alex.* 2. 5-6. Carney (2006) 88-103.

⁴⁵² For Alexander's fascination with Dionysus, see Goukowski (1981) 8-18.

⁴⁵³ See Stewart (1993) 130-157; Cohen (1997) 1-2.

⁴⁵⁴ See above, fn. 407.

⁴⁵⁵ See Mertzos (2009) 41: Alexander III riding a white horse in a miniature of the Greek codex of the *Alexander Romance* from the Hellenic Institute in Venice.

⁴⁵⁶ See Hadjinikolaou (1997) 188-201.

⁴⁵⁷ Politis (1871) 134-172; *idem* (1980²) 371.

⁴⁵⁸ Apollod. *Bibliotheca*, I. 4. 1. For an overview of the different versions of the myth of Apollo slaying Python in the ancient sources, see Fontenrose (1959) 20-22.

⁴⁵⁹ Kyriakidis (1965²) 185.

In the film, this mythological and religious overlap is made quite clear at first by the folk tune sung during the dinner Alexander has with his fellows before reaching the village, which sets the name of the Macedonian hero alongside that of the Saint.⁴⁶⁰ The lyrics are as follow:⁴⁶¹

Άγιε ψωμί, άγιε κρασί.
Άγιε ταγή τ' άλογα.
Μεγαλέξανδρέ μου, αγέρα
και Άγιε Γιώργη μου, φονιά.

Άγιε βουή, άγιε σιωπή.
Άγιε ο Μέγας Λόγος.
Μεγαλέξανδρέ μου, ήλιε
και Άγιε Γιώργη μου, φονιά.

Άγιε σπαθί, άγιε πληγή
Άγιε η οργή του αιμάτου.
Μεγαλέξανδρέ μου, χύμα
και Άγιε Γιώργη μου, φονιά.

Oh blessed the bread, blessed the wine.
Oh blessed the hay for the horses.
Oh, my Megalexandros, (you are like) air,
and my St George, (you are) the slayer (dragon-slayer).

Oh blessed the sound, blessed the silence.
Blessed the Great Word.
Oh, my Megalexandros, (you are like) the sun,
and my St George, (you are) the slayer (dragon-slayer).

Oh blessed the sword, blessed the wound.

⁴⁶⁰ Horton (1999) 62.

⁴⁶¹ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:42:31-00:44:36.

Oh blessed the wrath of the blood.
Oh, my Megalexandros, (you are like) the soil,
and my St George, (you are) the slayer (dragon-slayer).

This song depicts the simplicity of rural life, which needs only air, sun, water, and earth to perpetuate itself, while bread and wine symbolise the Holy Communion. Megalexandros, like St George, is the dragon-slayer, but for the villagers his importance goes beyond the heroic action of saving them from the peril: he is in fact compared with the vital elements of the agricultural world. Thus, Megalexandros is at the same time a source of life and hope, the nation's freedom-fighter, the avenger of the evil, and an Orthodox Christian saint.

Secondly, in the square of the village, in front of a group of admirers, Alexander poses for a photograph in the act of killing a dragon drawn on a canvas.⁴⁶² The figure of the dragon is present also in other traditions on Alexander the Great, such as the Chinese and the Persian;⁴⁶³ nevertheless, the use of the canvas reminds us of one of the most important products of Modern Greek popular art: the shadow theatre, known as *Karaghiozis theatre* after the name of its protagonist. It originated in Asia Minor during the Byzantine-Ottoman period, when many peoples were living side-by-side, giving to this form of drama a unique multicultural character. During the nineteenth century it was brought to Greece, and Angelopoulos is referring particularly to, and restaging, this Hellenic re-elaboration of the shadow theatre. In the Karaghiozis' play,⁴⁶⁴ a huge snake – or a dragon, according to a different oral tradition – has occupied the water-spring of the village and keeps the local ruler's daughter hostage. Many villagers try to kill the beast, but no one is able to, as it is too big and ferocious. Alexander, having heard of this peril, decides to go to the village and to slay the dragon, although Karaghiozis warns him that all the other contenders have been

⁴⁶² Angelopoulos (1980) 02:05:47-02:07:41. Xanthopoulos (1985) 147. See appendix II, n. 27.

⁴⁶³ See Ogden (2012) 277-294.

⁴⁶⁴ See Michopoulos (1972) 17-80 for the script of the play *Alexander the Great and the Cursed Snake / Dragon*; appendix I, n. 19 for Spatharis' representation of the fight between Alexander and the snake. Cf. Sifakis (1984) 16-79 for a discussion of the two Karaghiozis plays featuring Alexander the Great (*The Cursed Snake* and *The Riddles of the Veziar's daughter*).

swallowed by the terrifying animal. Showing his renowned courage and longing for new adventures, Alexander enters the dragon's cavern and kills it.

It is worth noting that in the Karaghiozis play the Macedonian hero's gear is composed of elements of both the Classical and the Medieval Christian tradition: he wears an Athenian type helmet, a Byzantine breastplate, and has a cross at the top of his spear. Therefore, it can be argued that in the oral folk tradition a "shift" occurred in the hunting practice of Alexander the Great: the famous "lion-hunter"⁴⁶⁵ was appointed, alongside St George, to kill the dragon, the devil enemy. In the nineteenth century, the shadow theatre reused this version of the legend, already popular in Byzantine folk songs and fairy tales, definitively replacing on stage the Saint, the traditional dragon-slayer, with the Macedonian conqueror.⁴⁶⁶ In fact, *Karaghiozis* is a form of art that retrieves famous personas, popular values and symbols, and creates a new reality for them:⁴⁶⁷ Alexander is portrayed as a sort of messianic hero who frees the nation from the oppressor, the Ottoman Empire; the on-stage act of slaying the dragon is equivalent to the crushing of the Turkish yoke and aims at awakening his people. As a result, Alexander appears as the epitome of the freedom-fighter of the Greek Revolution.⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, partly because of his own political propaganda, the great conqueror has been fighting for Hellenic liberty since Antiquity.

The religious substrate

The legend of St George is not the only religious hint in the film: in his journey back to the village, Alexander stops near the banks of a river and baptises a group of inhabitants of the countryside;⁴⁶⁹ men shout his name, women run towards him in order to bring him food and water, and to touch him, as if he were invested with supernatural powers. Afterwards, when he enters the community on his horse, he is

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 40. 3: "a Spartan ambassador who came up with him as he was bringing down a great lion, said: 'Nobly, indeed, Alexander, you struggled with the lion for kingship' (καλῶς γε, Ἀλέξανδρε, πρὸς τὸν λέοντα ἠγώνισαι περὶ τᾶς βασιλείας)".

⁴⁶⁶ Veloudis (1977) introduction, πδ'-πθ'.

⁴⁶⁷ Caimi (1990) 30.

⁴⁶⁸ Caimi (1990) 61; Estève (1995) 1; Mitchell (2001) 28.

⁴⁶⁹ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:39:41-00:40:17.

acclaimed as a saviour with yells of joy.⁴⁷⁰ In the scene of the banquet,⁴⁷¹ which evokes parallels with Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, all the religious characterisation of the protagonist is openly displayed: Angelopoulos' Alexander is a Christ-like figure;⁴⁷² he is sitting in the middle of a long table and around him are gathered his companions, visibly twelve as the Apostles. The folk tune and the slow panning of the camera add a mystical element to the atmosphere. Moreover, another allusion to Christ occurs when the Macedonian bandit poses for a picture: his men, holding the canvas, are again twelve.

This interpretation of Alexander fits well into the general trends of Greek customs: the whole ancient culture has to be reworked in order to be accepted by the Orthodox religion;⁴⁷³ however, the result is rather provocative, as Megalexandros is both a Christ-like figure and a dark hero.

The political substrate

As mentioned before, thanks to the patriotic themes of the *Karaghiozis theatre*, Alexander the Great has become a freedom-fighter, one of the heroes of the Greek Revolution of 1821. In the film, Alexander defines himself as the "captain of the rebels",⁴⁷⁴ who, unable to win justice from the Government, decide to go to the mountains and establish their own rights. The Macedonian's rebels remind us of the so-called κλέφτες⁴⁷⁵ and αρματολοί,⁴⁷⁶ armed people who ran away from the oppression of the Ottoman Empire and gathered on the Greek mountains in order to fight for the liberty of their country. They used to steal for a living, hence their name *klephts*, from the ancient Greek verb κλέπτω, "to rob".

⁴⁷⁰ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:55:36-00:59:27.

⁴⁷¹ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:40:18-00:42:46. See appendix I, n. 26.

⁴⁷² Ciment (1998) 100.

⁴⁷³ Stathi (1999) 65.

⁴⁷⁴ Angelopoulos (1980) 00:30:40-00:31:42.

⁴⁷⁵ Stasinopoulos (1979) lemma Κλέφτης, I. 411-412.

⁴⁷⁶ Stasinopoulos (1979) lemma Αρματολοί, I. 171-172; Fleming (2000) 169-170.

Another reference to the klephts is presented by the filmic allusion to the “Dilessi affair”.⁴⁷⁷ Just as the brigands led by the Arvanitakides brothers did in 1870, Alexander kidnapped a group of English aristocrats in order to blackmail the Greek government and receive an amnesty. In both cases, the request was refused, as to do so was against the constitution. The Prime Minister was given the answer by the Macedonian’s bandits that what has been made by Greek people, can also be unmade.

However, the director’s intention is to link his Alexander mainly to Theodoros Kolokotronis, as the choice of costume shows:⁴⁷⁸ like this famous rebel, considered “the spirit of the Greek Revolution”, the Macedonian bandit of the film wears a black uniform composed of a cotton shirt, a woollen waistcoat, a belt, a spear, the traditional *fustanella*, and *tsarouchia* (leather shoes with pompoms on the top).⁴⁷⁹ Moreover, the helmet, which we have seen as a strong symbolic element signifying power and familiarity with the image of Alexander the Great to the film’s protagonist, was used by Kolokotronis himself, who also desired to embody the Macedonian Liberator.⁴⁸⁰

On the base of Kolokotronis’ statue in front of the old Parliament in Athens, the following inscription has been carved:

Ἐφιππος χωρεῖ | γενναῖε στρατηγέ | ἀνὰ τοὺς αἰῶνας | διδάσκων τοὺς λαοὺς |
πῶς οἱ δοῦλοι γίνονται | ἐλεύθεροι.

On horseback he advances, | oh brave general, | through the centuries, |
teaching people | how slaves become | free.

Interestingly, Greeks usually refer to Alexander the Great with the words “cavalier”, “general” and “liberty”.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ For the Dilessi Affair, see Jenkins (1961); Stevens (1989); Koliopoulos, Veremis (2010) 50-53. For the parallels between the Arvanitakides and Megalexandros, see Myrsiades (2011) 45.

⁴⁷⁸ Stasinopoulos (1979) lemma Κολοκοτρώνης Θεόδωρος, l. 438-461; S. Spencer (2000) 900-902.

⁴⁷⁹ Ziakas (1995) 61.

⁴⁸⁰ Ziakas (1995) 62; Estève (1995) 1. See Theodoros Kolokotronis’ statue wearing his noticeable helmet with a tall crest in appendix I, n. 23.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. the appellation “Μέγας Στρατιλάτης (the Great General), who freed the Greek cities” in Asia Minor from the Persian yoke.

Still, Angelopoulos' fascination with history goes further. He wants his Alexander provided with a thick beard,⁴⁸² in order to remind us of Thanassis Klaras (1905-1945), better known as Aris Velouchiotis, the famous guerrilla captain and founder of ELAS (Ελληνικός Λαϊκός Απελευθερωτικός Στρατός, *Greek People's Liberation Army*), who played a leading role during the Resistance against the occupation of the Axis powers in Greece (1941-1944).⁴⁸³ Thanks to his charisma, energy, and military ability, Velouchiotis became very soon a living-myth for his fellow rebels – hence his guerrilla nickname, Aris (Άρης), as the Greek god of war – whereas he was very much hated by his political opponents because of his harshness and stubbornness.⁴⁸⁴ Probably, Aris' fighting ability and his ambiguous character drove the director to see in him a new Alexander the Great.⁴⁸⁵ In fact, both of them are controversial leaders: first beloved by their people, then hated because of their tyrannical behavior.

The comparison between the celluloid Alexander and Velouchiotis is sagaciously built not only on their appearance – the beard – but also on the similarity of their actions: the protagonist's infliction of the death penalty on one of his men for having attempted to rape an English hostage is a subtle parallel to Aris' execution of a man for having stolen an animal.⁴⁸⁶ The two heroes share the same brutality, as they follow their own code of justice and they do not permit any kind of opposition against their will;⁴⁸⁷ they both dream of building the bulk of their revolution against the foreign exploitation of their motherland from small communities in the mountains,⁴⁸⁸ but fail because of their growing despotism.

⁴⁸² Porton (1999) 107.

⁴⁸³ Chatzipanagiotou (1975) 37-44; Chalandrinos (2009) 6-13. For further bibliography, cf. Bourbouhakis (2000) 1696-1697.

⁴⁸⁴ Chalandrinos (2009) 13.

⁴⁸⁵ Barthélémy, Μια ποιητική της Ιστορίας, 6:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

⁴⁸⁶ Dimitrakis (2009) 45.

⁴⁸⁷ Myrsiades (2011) 49.

⁴⁸⁸ Chatzipanagiotou (1975) 38-39.

Conclusions

Through the centuries, Alexander the Great's personality has been enriched by new experiences and he has assumed many roles: from the invincible conqueror to the national Greek freedom-fighter against the oppressor; from the promoter of Hellenic culture to the champion of the Orthodox-Christian religion; from the curious pathfinder to the wise philosopher; from the passionate reader to the patron of the arts. But Angelopoulos' Alexander encompasses all at once disparate figures of history and mythology from antiquity to the modern day:⁴⁸⁹ not only is he a Christ-like figure, a liberator, a hero of the village, he is also a bandit who has secretly escaped from prison, incapable of talking to his people and sheltering behind his tragic memories. He is more a brigand than a conqueror; nervous and cruel, he imposes his paranoid actions onto the village, disrupting the balance in it; and, at the end, he becomes a tyrant.

The reason for the director's choice to portray Alexander in this way lies in his desire to "study people", to observe human behaviour: no matter what your initial beliefs and motives are, as you reach power, you incline towards despotism. We are all power-thirsty, all corrupted. The scene of the *theophagia* symbolises this political idea: the tyrant, the former legendary hero Megalexandros, is in every one of us. This is what Angelopoulos experienced in his life, during the politically unstable years of the Greek Civil War, in the Regime of the Colonels and in the film-making of *Megalexandros*. In fact, ironically, he became a "tyrant" to his crew, which started to write slogans against him on the walls of the village of Dotsiko. Nevertheless, the director leaves a message of hope to his viewers: little Alexander manages to run away on his mule from desolation. He symbolises the Greek nation entering the city – a new era – with all the experience gained from the history of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on the reason why this film, although acclaimed abroad as one of Angelopoulos' masterpieces, winning the Leone D'Oro (Golden Lion) as best film at the Film Festival of Venice in 1980, has not enjoyed good fortune in the director's native land. This rejection was primarily due to political causes: the Left, in its attempt to rehabilitate the Resistance fighters of the World War

⁴⁸⁹ Stathi, Θεόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος: Το Ταξίδι στα όρια της Ιστορίας, 3:

<http://www.theoangelopoulos.gr/avaluseis.php?lng=Z3JlZWs=> [accessed on 25-11-2012].

II, did not like the brigands' cruelty;⁴⁹⁰ while the Right never appreciated the director's openly socialist views and considered the parallelism of a brigand with St George inappropriate.⁴⁹¹

Secondly, *Megalexandros* was poorly received by the Greek audience for cultural reasons as well: it touches the Greeks' national pride, as it reminds them that if their nation has been freed and unified, they owe it to the *klephts*; but it is a chapter of their history they want to conceal. Furthermore, a tyrannical interpretation of Alexander the Great was too harsh to be accepted. People will not stand for their national hero – their myth – to be destroyed.

⁴⁹⁰ Georgakas (2000) 177.

⁴⁹¹ Georgakas (2000) 178.

Section two: Ancient Greek Alexander-Receptions

Chapter four
Ancient Myth-Making of Alexander.
Why it still matters

After the analysis of the Reception of Alexander the Great in Modern Greek folklore and cinema, this section focuses on his Ancient Greek adaptations, namely on how the Macedonian hero is reshaped and rewritten by ancient authors according to their politico-philosophical and literary aims. In these narratives Alexander is not important *per se*; instead, he becomes a historiographical mirage who enables political and moral discussion, and reflection on Hellenic cultural identity, religion, and history. In this introduction, I argue that the Alexander-historians and Julian still matter today not inasmuch as they, as single authors, are part of the popular imagination, but because of their representations of Alexander, which triggered trends in the interpretation of his persona and actions that are still important to today's Greeks.

Many authors contemporary with Alexander the Great wrote about his Eastern campaigns, and they took great liberties in interpreting his character. His court writers were influenced by their own experience of the Macedonian conqueror and they illustrated different sides of his personality; after his death, various authors pursuing specific propaganda needs glorified or vilified him. For example, Callisthenes shows a generally favourable approach: he is supportive of the campaign against the Achaemenid Empire and, with the endorsement of the recognition of Ammon's paternity of Alexander at Siwah, he creates the image of a heroic king.⁴⁹² In their narratives, Ptolemy highlights Alexander's military genius, Onesicritus describes him as a philosopher, and Nearchus depicts a kind conqueror driven by his longing for geographical discoveries. In contrast, Ehippus presents the Macedonian as a megalomaniac and an unrestrained drinker, a negative representation which serves the anti-Macedonian political factions in the years of the Lamian war (323-321 BC).⁴⁹³ Thus, according to their purpose, the Alexander-historians re-elaborated the Macedonian king's persona and career, and attributed to him characteristics and deeds of the ancient mythological heroes or of the protagonists of Herodotus'

⁴⁹² Cf. Pearson (1960) 37-38.

⁴⁹³ Pearson (1960) 16-20; Schachermeyr (1973) 609-610; Spawforth (2012) 169-213. *Contra*, Gadaleta (2001) 97-144.

Histories, the most authoritative source on the Persians at that time. The recurrence of myths of colony-foundations, genealogies, stories of wondrous births and deaths, monumental deeds and journeys, oracles, dreams, deceits, luxury, and curiosity for the exotic in these authors' narratives suggests that they were following some patterns in the story-telling.

The Modern Reception of Alexander is an amplification of a set of tales and tropes already present in the Alexander-historians, and the study of the ancient narratives shows us how the literary mirage was created, i. e. how the Greek mythification of Alexander started. In fact, these authors' Reception of Alexander informed to a great extent today's Greeks' understanding of the Macedonian king, as they created many of the bodily and moral traits of the Modern Alexander: their fictional hero became the epitome of the invincible conqueror, of the Panhellenic freedom-fighter, of the Hellene spreading the "light of Greek culture" to foreign people and paving the way to Christianity.

As much as the artists at his court, Alexander's successors, called the Diadochoi, also had a share in keeping his memory alive: they contributed to the myth-making of his persona that had already started during the Persian campaign, they created their own Alexander, and they used their friendship with him – or their contiguity to members of his family, such as his sisters, Rhoxane, and his son Alexander IV – to lay their political claims.⁴⁹⁴ The Successors modelled their style of leadership upon the Macedonian conqueror's image and their kingdom upon his political and territorial legacy: it can thus be said that, although he was not the first Hellenistic king, Alexander laid the foundations of the Hellenistic world.⁴⁹⁵

Ptolemy is a peculiar example of Successor, as he was also an Alexander-historian and exploited both roles to strengthen his position as ruler of Egypt: in his *Histories*, he stressed Alexander's great generalship, statesmanship, and righteousness; his reshaping of the Macedonian conqueror influenced not only the

⁴⁹⁴ For the manipulation of Alexander by the successors in the aftermath of his death, see Howe (2013) 57-61.

⁴⁹⁵ Erskine (2011) Introduction, XVI, states that, although Alexander was not the founder or the creator of the Hellenistic world, he was its catalyst, as his actions set in motion the transformations that occurred in the Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period; Lane Fox (2011) 6 emphasises that Alexander was not the first Hellenistic man, but his legacy to the Hellenistic age was decisive.

way he constructed his royal image before his Egyptian subjects, but also his role of Alexander-like leader before the Greeks. Ptolemy still matters today for two reasons: first, he had the merit of teaching to future generations how to use the image of the Macedonian king in a positive way, leaving aside all the excesses and the extravagances that absolute power brings together with it. Secondly, he showed the importance of Alexander III's body and of the exploitation of the Macedonian hero's heritage as the basis of claims to legitimacy of rule. This act of power can be paralleled with the political agenda of different Greek governments: as a reverse of Ptolemy, in the 1990s the government of Costas Simitis blocked Liana Souvaltzi's excavations in Alexandria, afraid that the discovery of Alexander's tomb in Egypt would be a "hot potato" at a delicate moment in tense negotiations with FYROM; by contrast, in continuity with Ptolemy, in 2012 the government of Antonis Samaras welcomed the reopening of excavations of the Kasta Hill in Amphipolis, and Greek mass media still encourage the idea that Alexander's corpse will be found and finally restored to its real owners (the Macedonian Greeks, i. e. the Greeks from the North).

Julian is one of the historical figures who decisively marked Hellenic history: he was a restless writer, a philosopher, a soldier, and the only Christian ruler of the Roman Empire who apostatised. His reception of Alexander is based on a set of well-known motifs used in the philosophical and rhetorical schools of his time and is dictated by his literary, historiographical, and political interests, such as the study of the personalities of the Roman Emperors, Hellenic history, and the Persians. Julian's impact as a fervent supporter of pagan traditions, of Neoplatonism, and of Ancient Greek culture in general has made him the Hellene *par-excellence*, and, as defender of Hellenicity, he has almost automatically become an Alexander-like figure in both the Ancient and Modern Greek mindset. However, because of his apostasy, during the long Middle Ages Julian symbolised the cruel despot and the enemy of the Christians, and several accounts of his misbehaviours started circulating.⁴⁹⁶ The most famous tale about "the evil Apostate" is still told among Orthodox and Coptic Christian communities and presents St Mercurius killing Julian for his greed and impiety; the legend is also represented in many church icons, which display the saint on horseback with a long spear and Julian lying on the ground, a reverse of the folk tradition of

⁴⁹⁶ For the early Byzantine reception of Julian, see Lomas Salmonte (1990) 307-309. For Christian legends on his death, see Baynes (1937) 22-29.

Alexander / St George slaying the evil dragon. Thus, although initially banned by Byzantine culture – permeated by Orthodox religion and administered almost exclusively by the Church – Julian was never forgotten by the Greeks: under Ottoman rule, erudite Greek circles, influenced by the European Renaissance and its new interest in Classics, rediscovered the Apostate as a skilled writer and promoter of Hellenic culture; in 1877, the diplomat and playwright Cleon Rizos Rangavis published a tragedy entitled *Ἰουλιανὸς ὁ Παραβάτης* (*Julian the Transgressor*), in which the Emperor is portrayed as a romantic hero fighting for the *Greek genos'* good against the oppression of the church.⁴⁹⁷ A second theatrical play, with the same title but less provocative, was dedicated to Julian by Nikos Kazantzakis in 1945. Written during the years of WWII, this tragedy presents the Emperor as hero who is doomed to fail and spends the last days of his life torn by his own doubts and passions. Notwithstanding his emotional state of mind, Julian remains resolute in his purpose to fight for Greek freedom against the Persians.⁴⁹⁸ In the 1920s and 1930s, Constantine Cavafy also became concerned with Julian and his polyvalent nature, and he composed twelve poems, the so-called *Ἰουλιανά*. The poet's attitude towards the Apostate is complex: each poem offers a different occasion for blaming the Emperor for having dared to oppose the Christian religion and to restore paganism as the official creed of the Roman Empire; however, the reader will not fail to notice the subtle irony with which Cavafy points to Julian's allegedly foolish decisions. In fact, from the 1920s onwards the poet showed an increasing engagement with the religious questions opened by the Apostate and the twelve poems seem to suggest that he is looking for a dialogue with his hero rather than a reason to censure him. Through a discussion with Julian – the epitome of the tension between being a Hellene and a Roman, a pagan and a Christian – Cavafy can meditate on his own doubts and difficulties in reconciling his double nature of “sensualist Greek and Christian Orthodox”.⁴⁹⁹

In their engagement with the past, both Cavafy and Kazantzakis singled out the life-story of Julian and Alexander the Great as a way of interpreting their own culture and dialoguing with their Greekness, their Hellenic cultural identity. Similarly, in the 1970s, the athlete, politician, and writer Christos Zalokostas composed an encomiastic

⁴⁹⁷ Rangavis (1877) introduction, θ' -ι'; ιζ' -κζ'.

⁴⁹⁸ Kazantzakis (1964) 125-319.

⁴⁹⁹ Bowersock (1981) 102-104.

interpretation of Alexander's cultural impact⁵⁰⁰ and a romance on Julian.⁵⁰¹ These three authors are representative of a new trend in the Greeks' twentieth-century mindset, in which Alexander the Great and Julian are not only two influential figures who continue to fascinate both folklore and the scholarly and literary production but, crucially, have also become inseparable from each other. This fascination can thus be interpreted as a Modern Greek *adaptation*⁵⁰² of the Late Antique Reception of Julian, which made of him a New Alexander, or an Emperor imitating the Macedonian conqueror; in fact, already in the fourth century AD the two Greek heroes were frequently put alongside each other and were the object of philosophical and politico-military discussion.

Since antiquity, Alexander had the role of a catalyst, prompting Greek people to rediscover, reinvent, and take refuge with, their past and traditions; through Alexander, Greek heritage is jealously defended against "the other", be it the Persian, or any ancient and modern foreign enemy.

⁵⁰⁰ Zalokostas Ch. (1971) *Alexander the Great, the precursor of Jesus*: see above, fn. 49.

⁵⁰¹ Zalokostas Ch. (1974) 'Ιουλιανός ο Παραβάτης.

⁵⁰² Hardwick (2003) 9: an *adaptation* is "a version of a source developed for a different purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation".

Chapter five
Ptolemy's Alexander: between historiography
and self-description

καὶ αὐτῷ βασιλεῖ ὄντι αἰσχρότερον ἢ τῷ ἄλλῳ ψεύσασθαι ἦν.

“being a king himself, to him telling lies was more disgraceful
than to any other man”.

Arrian, *Anabasis*. Proemium 2.

In the fourth century BC a new idea of kingship was brought about by Alexander's career, the propaganda of his entourage, and the political and philosophical thought that sought to give a rational and moral basis to monarchy. Now it was no longer seen as a barbaric and tyrannical type of rule at the edges of the civilised Greek world, but as a constitution that could assure peace to the weakened Greek poleis.⁵⁰³ The Diadochoi, following Alexander as an example of leadership and taking advantage of the political turmoil, presented themselves as the benefactors who brought stability to the territory they ruled, and, at the same time, as heroic, victorious generals in the battlefield; their rule was justified not by descent but by their likeness to Alexander, their charitable actions, and their ability “to command an army and govern a state wisely”.⁵⁰⁴

Among the Successors, Ptolemy (367-283 BC) indeed embodied the characteristics required by the Hellenistic king: the appellation he was given, Σωτήρ (Saviour),⁵⁰⁵ and the administration of the whole empire he was offered at Triparadisus in 321 BC confirm it. Ptolemy was a self-made man, persevering and rational; his long career shows how, first, he elevated himself among the other companions before Alexander III's eyes and, secondly, thanks to his judicious and balanced policies, which

⁵⁰³ Walbank (1984) 62-63; Bingen (2007) 17.

⁵⁰⁴ Suda, βασιλεία (*basileia*). οὐτε φύσις οὐτε τὸ δίκαιον ἀποδιδούσι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰς βασιλείας, ἀλλὰ τοῖς δυναμένοις ἡγεῖσθαι στρατοπέδου καὶ χειρίζειν πράγματα νουνεχῶς.

⁵⁰⁵ Paus. I. 8. 6 says that the name was conferred on Ptolemy by the Rhodians who wanted to thank him for the help he offered during Demetrius Poliorcetes' siege in 304 BC; Arr. *An.* VI. 11. 8 states that some people (wrongly) believe that Ptolemy was called *Soter* after defending Alexander with his shield in the attack on the Mallians. Cf. Clitarchus *BNJ / FGrH* 137, F 24 (= Curt. IX. 5. 21). For a discussion of the surname *Soter*, see Hazzard (1992) 52-56.

created the basis for his recognition as the rightful heir to Alexander's throne, he gradually succeeded in becoming accepted as the King of Egypt by both Greeks and Egyptians and in strengthening his kingdom.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on salient steps in Ptolemy's progress towards kingship and the legitimisation of his power, and, in particular, on the use he made of his relationship with Alexander the Great to reach his purpose. Furthermore, it intends to articulate the literary profile of the Macedonian conqueror in Ptolemy's historical work and to see how it overlaps with the image which the author wanted to promote of himself.

Ptolemy the politician: his ascent to power and "legitimisation-programme"

Born in 367/6 BC, Ptolemy was the son of Lagus, a man of uncertain noble lineage from Eordea, and of Arsinöe, through whom he could claim descent from the clan of the Heraclidae, the ancestors of the Macedonian royal family of the Argeads.⁵⁰⁶ During his youth, as a member of the Macedonian aristocracy, he joined Philip II's βασιλικοὶ παῖδες (Royal Pages)⁵⁰⁷ and, although about ten years older, he was among the privileged group of Alexander's companions. In fact, when in 337/6 BC the "Pixodarus affair" was discovered by the king, Ptolemy was exiled together with Harpalus, Erigyus, and Nearchus,⁵⁰⁸ as being part of Alexander's inner circle. The Lagid was recalled to Macedon only when Alexander seized the throne in the aftermath of his father's assassination.⁵⁰⁹

Little is known about the beginning of Ptolemy's career as a soldier in Philip II's army and, later, in Alexander's one; probably, at the age of twenty-nine, he participated in the decisive battle of Chaeronea against the anti-Macedonian alliance guided by Athens and Thebes (338 BC),⁵¹⁰ and in 335 BC it is likely that he witnessed the siege and the destruction of Thebes, of which we still possess his personal version

⁵⁰⁶ Eordean: Posidippus, *AB* 88. 4; Arr. *Ind.* 18. 5; son of Lagus: Paus. I. 6. 2; Arr. *An.* VI. 28. 4; age (date of birth): Luc. *Macr.* 12. Berve (1926) II. 329-330, n. 668.

⁵⁰⁷ For the Royal Pages, see Carney (2008) 145-164.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Berve (1926) II. 75-80, n. 143 (Harpalus); 151-152, n. 302 (Erigyus); 269-272, n. 544 (Nearchus).

⁵⁰⁹ Plu. *Alex.* 10. 1-3; Arr. *An.* III. 6. 5.

⁵¹⁰ Ellis (1994) 3.

of the incident, as handed down by Arrian.⁵¹¹ The following year in May Ptolemy followed Alexander in the Asiatic campaign, and in 331 BC he also took part in the special expedition to the oracle of Ammon in Libya.⁵¹² It is striking how, although always present at crucial moments of the first years of Alexander III's rule and military actions, according to the ancient sources Ptolemy apparently occupied no prominent position until after Philotas' execution in 330 BC. However, in his own narrative, Ptolemy describes the important tasks with which he was entrusted by his king in November 333 BC, when (so he claims) he helped in the pursuit of King Darius and of the fleeing Persian generals after the battle of Issus.⁵¹³ Furthermore, Arrian – whose ultimate source is Ptolemy – states that in January 330 BC the Lagid commanded a group of three thousand soldiers and inflicted a severe blow on the enemy in the clash against the satrap of Persia Ariobarzanes at the Persian Gates in the Zagros Mountains.⁵¹⁴ The veracity of these two claims has been questioned by modern scholarship, since in the *Anabasis* they are described with emphatic and dramatic tones,⁵¹⁵ whereas neither of them is attested in the Vulgate, which had no reason to overshadow Ptolemy's achievements. It is therefore likely that the Lagid overstated the role he played both at Issus, by exaggerating the enemies' losses to show the dominance of Alexander's army,⁵¹⁶ and at the Persian Gates, where he might have ascribed to himself Philotas' leadership of troops who, according to Curtius (V. 4. 30),

⁵¹¹ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 3 (= Arr. *An.* I. 8): the attack against Thebes is presented as an unauthorised action of Perdikkas – a description which sheds a negative light on Ptolemy's enemy and exculpates Alexander for the destruction of the city. Bosworth (1980.a) 80: "Arrian's account of the attack on Thebes is unitary, and there is no doubt that this whole chapter is extracted from Ptolemy [...] his narrative differs from the other extant sources in almost every way"; Sisti, Zambrini (2001) 326. Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 11. 4-5; Polyæn. IV. 3. 12; D. S. XVII. 11-12 ascribes to Perdikkas a leading role in the irruption into the Cadmeia which brought about the Macedonian victory.

⁵¹² Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 8 (= Arr. *An.* III. 35).

⁵¹³ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 6 (= Arr. *An.* II. 11. 8).

⁵¹⁴ Arr. *An.* III. 18. 9.

⁵¹⁵ For example, see the bridge of corpses of the Persians at Issus and the barbarians "cut into pieces" in the fight against Alexander at the Persian Gates.

⁵¹⁶ For the Macedonian propaganda based on the enemies' disproportioned casualties, see Sisti, Zambrini (2001) 427.

were ordered by the king to take a different route and eventually made a second attack on the enemies, causing their slaughter.⁵¹⁷

With the arrest of the guard Demetrius,⁵¹⁸ suspected of complicity in the plot allegedly staged by Philotas,⁵¹⁹ Ptolemy was rewarded for his fidelity and services with appointment to the role of *σωματοφύλαξ* (bodyguard).⁵²⁰ The office of the *σωματοφυλακία* brought the Lagid closer to his king, which surely strengthened the bond of friendship between them; in fact, from that moment onwards, Ptolemy was entrusted with important tasks more frequently. For example, in 329 BC he was sent to Sogdiana with a small troop to capture Bessus,⁵²¹ who at that time represented the major obstacle to Alexander's claim to the Achaemenid throne. Then, during the Sogdian and the Indian campaigns, Ptolemy often appeared as an influential companion and soldier: in 328 BC he was assigned the command of one of the five units into which Alexander had divided the army to face the revolt of Spithamenes;⁵²² and in 327 BC, probably together with Leonnatus,⁵²³ he revealed to Alexander the

⁵¹⁷ Bosworth (1980.a) 328-329; Heckel (1992) 223-224; Sisti, Zambrini (2001) 516-517. Cf. Seibert (1969) 8-10: since the passage refers to a *Ptolemaios* without the patronymic Lagus, we should consider him as the son of Philippus and not to the future king of Egypt. For Ptolemy son of Philippus, see Berve (1926) II. 336 n. 671.

⁵¹⁸ Berve (1926) II. 135 n. 260.

⁵¹⁹ For the Philotas' affair, see Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 13 = Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 22 (= Arr. *An.* III. 26); D. S. XVII. 79-80; Plu. *Alex.* 48-49; Str. XV. 2. 10; Curt. VI. 7. 1-VII. 2. 38; Justin XII. 5. 1-8. Cf. Hamilton (1969) 132-138; Rubinson (1977) 409-420; Bosworth (1980.a) 359-363; Badian (2000.a) 64-69; Sisti, Zambrini (2001) 540; Adams (2003) 113-126; Reames (2008) 165-181, with further literature at p. 176, fn. 2.

⁵²⁰ Arr. *An.* III. 6. 6; 27. 5; VI. 28. 4 (= Aristobulus *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 50). Berve (1926) II. 330 n. 668; Heckel (1992) 223.

⁵²¹ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 14 (= Arr. *An.* III. 29. 6-30. 5).

⁵²² Arr. *An.* IV. 16. 2-3. The other four units were led by Hephaestion, Perdikkas, Coenus, and Alexander himself; thus, if we consider the names Ptolemy was associated with, it becomes clear that he was a fully-fledged member of the Macedonian king's inner circle. Differently, Curtius (VIII. 1. 1) reports that the army was divided in three parts between Alexander, Coenus, and Hephaestion; however, it is not unlikely that in the Sogdian and Indian contexts Ptolemy was assigned a preminent role, and the tripartite division may be due to a small oversight of the historian.

⁵²³ While Curtius (VIII. 6.22) reports that the pages' conspiracy was foiled by both Ptolemy and Leonnatus, Arrian (*An.* IV. 13. 7) remembers only Ptolemy. Understandably, in his historical account

Pages' conspiracy led by Hermolaus. Furthermore, during the difficult operations against the Aspasians, Ptolemy acted as the king's right-hand general.⁵²⁴ Ptolemy surely overstated his own tasks and merits in his descriptions of the Sogdian and the Indian campaigns, but his continuous presence at key moments and his rise up in the hierarchy make it undeniable that Alexander had him in his group of privileged friends.

From 330 BC until the end of his reign, Alexander sought to include Persian etiquette and offices in the Macedonian court; among them, the title of ἐδέατρος, describing the person charged with supervision of all the food and the drinks designed for the King, was particularly prestigious because it entailed propinquity to the ruler and great confidence in the chosen person. Thus, Ptolemy's appointment to the role of *edeatros* in 324 BC provides further evidence of the growing trust Alexander had in his companion, not only as a skilled general, but also as an intimate friend.⁵²⁵

The Macedonian king's death on 10 June 323 BC caught his army unprepared and, within a short time, his fellow countrymen had to find a solution for the government and the organisation of the recently constituted vast empire. Ptolemy was the first to suggest the partition of rule and of the domains into independent satrapies, appointing people according to their virtue and their merit.⁵²⁶ Nevertheless, his idea of breaking with the past tradition and the lineage of the Argead family was too progressive for the military assembly and was therefore discarded.⁵²⁷ Eventually, at

Ptolemy takes the full credit, aiming at appearing as an indispensable companion in Alexander's campaign.

⁵²⁴ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 18 (= *Arr. An.* IV. 24. 1-25.4). Cf. Sisti, Zambrini (2004) 441: Ptolemy emphasises his role in the Indian campaign not with the aim of presenting himself superior of Alexander, but as his *ideal lieutenant*. *Contra*, Seibert (1969) 22.

⁵²⁵ See Collins (2012.a) 414-420. In his history (*FGrH* 138, F 30 = *Arr. An.* VII. 26. 3) Ptolemy rejects the alleged poisoning of Alexander III not only because he wanted to produce a less fictional account of the Macedonian's deeds, but also because he was his *edeatros*. Were these legends proved to be true, he would have been responsible for not having completed his duties. Strikingly, in the *Liber de Morte*, where the description of the poisoning and the accusation against the guilty party are narrated, Ptolemy is portrayed with positive tones: see Bosworth (2000) 207-241. Possibly, the core of the *Liber de Morte* originated in Egypt, in a background favourable to Ptolemy: for the similarities between the *Liber* and Clitarchus, cf. Baynham (1995) 60-77.

⁵²⁶ Curt. X. 6; Justin XIII. 2.

⁵²⁷ Hölbl (2001) 12; Heckel (2006) 338. *Contra*, Green (1990) 119 sees Ptolemy's proposal as "quintessentially Macedonian", because he envisaged a "ruling council of the king's friends".

Triparadisus he managed to obtain the government of Egypt,⁵²⁸ while Philip Arrhidaeus, Alexander III's brother, was nominated king and ruler of the empire as a whole.⁵²⁹ It was also decided that Alexander IV, the still unborn son of Rhoxane, was to join in Arrhidaeus' kingship.

Ptolemy's satrapship (323-305 BC) was characterised by intense fights among the Diadochoi about Alexander III's throne,⁵³⁰ but it was also an important period of preparation for the complete legitimisation of his rule as Egyptian pharaoh in the following years.⁵³¹

In 322/1 BC, when Alexander's coffin was ready to be taken to the Oasis of Siwah, in order to be buried in the temple of Zeus-Ammon as he had requested,⁵³² Ptolemy went to Syria on the excuse of paying honours to the carriage on its way. His real intention, however, was to steal the corpse of the king.⁵³³ Undeniably, Ptolemy started his journey to kingship in a very ingenious fashion: he had understood that nothing could be a more powerful link to Alexander than the ownership of his body, which constituted the "heritage of the empire".⁵³⁴ It was clear to everyone that with this act the son of Lagos had not simply stolen a body, but had taken by force the great conqueror's consent to his power, a legitimisation of it before the Greek and the Egyptian population.⁵³⁵ In fact, by taking care of the funeral ceremonies as every Argæad or Achaemenid would have done with his predecessor, his aim was to present

⁵²⁸ Arr. *FGrH* 156, F 1. 5; F 9. 34-38 for the settlement at Triparadisus in 321 BC; Curt. X. 10. 1-5.

⁵²⁹ D. S. XVIII. 2.

⁵³⁰ For an overview of the wars of the Diadochoi in the period 323-276 BC, see Shipley (2000) 40-51.

⁵³¹ Walbank (1993) 100-103 explains Ptolemy's overseas acquisitions (Coele Syria, Cyprus) as a means to protect the Egyptians borders and to secure the materials which could not be found or produced in Egypt. According to Walbank's view, since the very beginning of his satrapal rule Ptolemy planned to make of Egypt a powerful and self-sufficient kingdom.

⁵³² Justin XIII. 4. Cf. Paus. I. 6. 2: the coffin was directed to Aegae. Probably Pausanias relates the personal plans of Perdikkas: in fact, as commander-in-chief of the Companion cavalry and the alleged holder of Alexander's ring, he was surely interested in having the Macedonian conqueror buried in the traditional royal city. See Bevan (1927) 19.

⁵³³ D. S. XVIII. 28. 2-4; Str. XVII. 1. 8; Paus. I. 6. 3; Ael. *VH* 12. 64. Erskine (2002) 170.

⁵³⁴ Erskine (2002) 171. Lane Fox (2015) 172: "Ptolemy had been Alexander's life-long friend and now he became the guardian of his relicts".

⁵³⁵ See D. S. XVIII. 28. 4-6. It is highly probable that Perdikkas rushed to Egypt as he wanted to prevent the burial of Alexander by Ptolemy.

himself as the lawful heir of Alexander III, king of Macedon and of the Persian Empire, and pharaoh of Egypt.⁵³⁶

Initially, Ptolemy entombed the corpse in Memphis, where it had to rest until a sumptuous tomb in Alexandria, the so-called Σῆμα / Σῶμα (Sēma, memorial / Sōma, body), was completed.⁵³⁷ The construction of this sepulchral monument, which soon became the prestigious centre of the royal cult of Alexander, is a turning point in the Lagid's satrapal administration, since it was strictly connected to the transfer of the capital from Memphis to Alexandria. The date of the move to the new capital and completion of the tomb are not certain, but since the "Satrap Stele", dated to 311 BC, mentions "the fortress of King Alexander, chosen of the Sun, son of the Sun" as Ptolemy's residence, we can take this year as a *terminus ante quem*.⁵³⁸ As a date, 311 BC had an overall symbolical meaning in the general's policy: in fact, since 323 BC Ptolemy had been ruling as the satrap of the Kings Philip III and Alexander IV up to 317 BC and of King Alexander IV alone until ca. 311 BC, when the latter was murdered by Cassander. Although the Lagid continued the "fiction of the satrapal rule" until 304 BC,⁵³⁹ his change of capital meant a break with the past and the start of a new period of personal (fully Ptolemaic) authority.⁵⁴⁰

Ptolemy's choice of Alexandria as his own seat of government was symbolic itself: the city was considered the most prestigious among Alexander's city-foundations, and his impressive royal palace there had a big cultural and political impact even centuries after his death.⁵⁴¹ The Lagid took Alexander's palace and

⁵³⁶ Cf. Green (1990) 13-14: it was customary for the kings in Macedon to assert their right to the throne through the burial of their predecessor; Meeus (2009) 242: "the one who could bury the king legitimised himself as the true heir of Alexander".

⁵³⁷ D. S. XVIII. 26-28; Str. VIII. 1. 8; Paus. I. 6. 3; Svet. *Aug.* 18; *AR* (α) III. 34. 6. Bevan (1927) 19.

⁵³⁸ For the "Satrap Stele" and an English translation of its hieroglyphic text, see Bevan (1927) 28-32.

⁵³⁹ Bevan (1927) 27-28; Stewart (1993) 241: "Demotic papyri dated to January / February 304 BC by the regnal years of Alexander IV, whom Cassander had murdered (about) six years earlier, show that Ptolemy resolutely maintained this fiction up to the moment that he assumed the diadem".

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Worthington (2016) 129-142: there are parallels between Ptolemy's move of the capital and Alexander's burning of Persepolis in 330 BC, since they are both symbols of new eras which break with the previous Achaemenid and Pharaonic traditions.

⁵⁴¹ Diodorus (XVII. 52) in particular highlights the cultural and political importance Alexandria had for both Alexander and the Ptolemies; cf. 52. 4: "Alexander ordered the erection of a palace magnificent in size and massiveness. And not only Alexander, but also almost all of those who ruled Egypt after him

attached to it the Sēma containing the sarcophagus of the Macedonian conqueror; this architectural connection symbolised the strength of the friendship among the two companions, whom not even death could divide.⁵⁴²

Already before the institution of the Ptolemaic cult, in Alexandria the Macedonian king was worshipped as Κτίστης, the founder of the city. During the Persian campaign, Alexander sought to promote the idea of his divine descent from Zeus-Ammon;⁵⁴³ however, as the Greek fashion dictated, he had neither his own temples, nor priesthoods in his subject cities.⁵⁴⁴ Ptolemy evolved Alexander's religious rhetoric about his divine nature and established a second type of cult in Alexandria:⁵⁴⁵ the worship of the ruler, which had both a political and religious bearing. In fact, the priest in charge of it was chosen from the court aristocracy and, since he acted also as the eponymous magistrate of the royal calendar, his name was used to date both Greek and demotic contracts.⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, by instituting a new ritual of Alexander, the son of Lagos reasserted his strong bond to the great conqueror, who was the protector of his land. Religion was the *instrumentum regni* which helped him to construct his image of unique legitimised successor, by taking care of the Macedonian's memory and glory, and monopolising the visual elements of the worship, which he entrusted to the priests *he* chose. Thus, it is clear why at first Ptolemy designated his brother Menelaus as priest for several consecutive years:⁵⁴⁷ he wished to make the cult even more effective and widespread, and left his imprint by making it a "family business". The creation of the cult of the ruler led to the institution of a dynastic one,⁵⁴⁸ which

down to our time embellished the palace with lavish constructions"; 52. 5: "by many the city is counted as the first in the entire *oecumene* for beauty and riches and luxury".

⁵⁴² Svet. *Aug.* 18: *regem se voluisse ait videre, non mortuos*. As Erskine (2002) 164 has pointed out, during his visit to Alexander's tomb the Emperor Augustus was asked by the Alexandrians whether he wanted to see the bodies of the Ptolemies, since, in their mind, Alexander was closely related to the Ptolemaic dynasty. The bond between Alexander and the Ptolemies was fostered by the Ptolemies themselves since the time of Lagos and it constituted a quasi-identification between them.

⁵⁴³ See above, fn. 93 and 94.

⁵⁴⁴ Fraser (1972) 213; Goukowsky (1978) 60-61.

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. Walbank (1993) 121: Ptolemy I's ruler cult of Alexander can be traced back to the Macedonian conqueror's attempt to secure deification. Stewart (1993) 247 dates the cult after 311 BC.

⁵⁴⁶ Walbank (1984) 97; Bingen (2007) 20; Lianou (2010) 126-127.

⁵⁴⁷ Bingen (2007) 20.

⁵⁴⁸ Walbank (1993) 121.

put Ptolemy I alongside Alexander the Great in a unified and sole family. Consequently, it strongly reinforced the fictitious link between the latter and the Ptolemaic dynasty. The ritual was established in 280 BC by Soter's son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, and it reveals that Ptolemy I's propaganda had succeeded, since it was fully accepted by his subjects.

At the same time as this, stories about Ptolemy's descent from Philip II – and the consequent blood relation to Alexander – started to circulate, and it is highly probable that they were a product of the Ptolemaic court itself.⁵⁴⁹ The legend has it that a concubine of Philip II, named Arsinoë, became pregnant by him. In order to raise her child, she decided to marry Lagus, a man of uncertain ancestry. The Lagid's iconography of the Alexandrine public buildings and of the numismatic evidence followed on from this legendary half-brotherhood: groups of statues displaying the duet Ptolemy-Alexander were erected in different spots of the Egyptian city and coins featuring Alexander made it clear that Ptolemy's rule brought prosperity under Alexander's aegis.⁵⁵⁰ Furthermore, the golden coinage from c. 300 BC represents Ptolemy I on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse, a clear reference to Zeus and the Argead family.⁵⁵¹

In 306 BC, after Demetrius Poliorcetes' victory at Salamis of Cyprus over the son of Lagus, his father Antigonus Monophthalmus proclaimed himself king;⁵⁵² then all the other Successors followed his example. It is worth noticing that Ptolemy managed to make his royal proclamation more powerful than everyone else, with his typical awareness of the need for legitimacy under Alexander's protection: in fact, he chose to wait for his coronation until the next anniversary of the great conqueror's death.⁵⁵³ Moreover, upon becoming pharaoh of Egypt, Ptolemy was thereby recognised son of Ammon, and he took Alexander's throne name (*beloved of Amun, chosen of Ra*), pairing himself once more to the great Macedonian.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ Satyrus, *FGRH* 631, F 1. Stewart (1993) 229; Ellis (1994) 2; Heckel (2006) 335.

⁵⁵⁰ Stewart (1993) 241.

⁵⁵¹ Lianou (2010) 129-130.

⁵⁵² *Plu. Dem.* 18. 1; cf. *D. S. XX.* 53. 2-3.

⁵⁵³ Hölbl (2001) 21.

⁵⁵⁴ Goukowsky (1978) 133-134.

In addition to his religious and iconographic exploitation of Alexander, Ptolemy also opted for bureaucratic tweaks for the purpose of legitimisation. In fact, the documents of the satrapal period report a double dating system: demotic texts relate both the years of Alexander IV's kingship and of Ptolemy's government as a satrap; only after his accession to the throne do they start counting 305/4 BC as the first year of Ptolemaic royal rule.⁵⁵⁵ Conversely, Greek papyri and inscriptions do not bear any change in their dating, but keep always 323 BC as the first year, even during the kingship.⁵⁵⁶ This choice was made in order to enhance the link to Alexander III, as if indicating that he bestowed his power directly to Ptolemy.

During his kingship (305/4–283/2 BC), Soter made also further important steps towards the acceptance of his rule by both his Graeco-Macedonian and Egyptian subjects, presenting himself as the patron of culture and a moral-religious reformer. Like his predecessor Alexander, Ptolemy fostered Hellenic culture, supporting historians and having philosophers as councillors;⁵⁵⁷ the erection of the Museum together with the Library aimed at a cultural propaganda in which Greek literature, philosophy and science were to be equal to the illustrious Egyptian knowledge.⁵⁵⁸ Three personalities are tightly linked to his court: Manetho, who wrote a *History of Egypt*;⁵⁵⁹ Hecataeus of Abdera, who in his narration on Egyptian customs, entitled *Aegyptiaca*, left us an idealised image of Ptolemy I, as a king beloved by both the Egyptians and the Greeks;⁵⁶⁰ and Demetrius of Phaleron, whose political views helped create a philosophical basis for Soter's agenda.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁵ See fn. 539.

⁵⁵⁶ Turner (1984) 128; Hölbl (2001) 21-22; Bingen (2007) 29. For Ptolemy's coinage, see Dahmen (2007) 9-14.

⁵⁵⁷ Fraser (1972) 311.

⁵⁵⁸ Bouché-Leclercq (1903) 128; Walbank (1984) 73; Green (1990) 80-91 on Ptolemy's patronage; Bingen (2007) 25-27.

⁵⁵⁹ Manetho, *BNJ / FGrH* 609. For an introduction to Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*, see Dillery (2015) vii-xxxiii; 301-353.

⁵⁶⁰ Hecataeus, *BNJ / FGrH* 264, F 21 (= J. *Against Apion*, II. 186): "Now, Hecataeus also says these things: that after the battle in Gaza Ptolemy acquired control over the Syrian regions, and a large number of people, seeing Ptolemy's mildness and concern for humanity (τὴν ἡπιότητα καὶ φιλανθρωπίαν τοῦ Πτολεμαίου), wanted to accompany him to Egypt and be involved in matters there". F 22 (= J. *Against Apion*, II. 44): "And Ptolemy son of Lagus also had views about the Judaeans dwelling in Alexandria similar to those of Alexander". Walbank (1984) 73.

The Lagid acted also as the champion of a moral-religious reform,⁵⁶² by instituting the cult of Serapis, a Hellenised deity deriving from the association of the Egyptian sacred bull Apis with Osiris-Dionysus.⁵⁶³ Ptolemy's aim was to unify the Graeco-Macedonian element with the Egyptian one through the worship of one and the same god; although Serapis was not widely worshipped by Egyptians, it was at least evident that the king was respectful of their ancient traditions and religion; for the Greeks in Alexandria, the worship of Serapis meant loyalty to the Ptolemaic dynasty. Soter presumably hoped that just as Zeus-Ammon created the pretext for Alexander's divinisation, Serapis would have awarded him a divine status as well.⁵⁶⁴

So far, I have suggested that Ptolemy's career was characterised by steps which brought him to an increasingly closer relationship to Alexander: in fact, Soter actively sought to highlight and strengthen this tie, in order to legitimise his power in Egypt and to establish his dynasty. In his political venture, the *sōmatophylakia*, the ownership of Alexander's body, and the construction of the *Sēma* together with the constitution of a ruler cult, represent the most significant turning points, most of which occurred during his satrapal rule. Thus, Ptolemy's historical work was plausibly composed in that period, in which it was important to present himself as Alexander's "right-hand man".⁵⁶⁵ In his own narrative, Soter comes across not only as the indispensable general of the Macedonian king, but also as the alter-ego: the glorying self-representation and the self-identification with Alexander provide him with a fictional authorisation to rule.

Ptolemy the historian

Before examining the literary profile of Alexander III in Ptolemy's narrative, some preliminaries must be discussed in regards to its topic and genre, aims, and date of

⁵⁶¹ Demetrius of Phaleron, *FGrH* 228; Hölbl (2001) 26.

⁵⁶² Bouché-Leclercq (1903) 112-113. Manetho, *BNJ* / *FGrH* 609, T 3 (= *Plu. De Iside et Osiride* 28 = *Mor.* 361F-362A).

⁵⁶³ Serapis originated from the indigenous Memphite worship of Apis, in which the sacred bull was associated to Osiris in his after-death form. The priests in Memphis provided early and loyal support to both Alexander and Ptolemy, and also to the latter's successors; see Fraser (1972) 249-50; 253-5.

⁵⁶⁴ Ellis (1994) 30; Pfeiffer (2008) 387-408.

⁵⁶⁵ Howe (2009) 216; 229.

composition. First, only thirty-three fragments have survived⁵⁶⁶ and, of these, twenty-five are found in Arrian's *Anabasis*. They deal mostly with military matters,⁵⁶⁷ but provide also geographical, ethnographical, and religious details, and insights into the Macedonian camp: for example, on the occasion of the pact of *philia* instituted between the Celts and Alexander the Great, an interesting ethnographical detail on the Celts' fear that heaven might fall down is included;⁵⁶⁸ a fragment provides geographical details on the region of Colchis, the so-called land of the Amazons;⁵⁶⁹ the account of Philotas' death sheds light on Macedonian law;⁵⁷⁰ the portents on the way to Siwah are revisited in a religious and political key;⁵⁷¹ Callisthenes' execution after the Royal Pages' conspiracy gives insights into life in the Macedonian court.⁵⁷² The variety of topics covered in the extant fragments points to a historical work dealing with the years of Alexander III's rule: in fact, they include events in the Balkans, in Greece (Thebes) and in Asia until the very end of the campaign and the death of the

⁵⁶⁶ See Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138. For the English translation, Robinson (1953) 183-198. For the count of the fragments: F 1 - F 30 are surely attributed to Ptolemy (as F 26 presents two variants (a, b) and F 28 three (a, b, c), we count thirty-three fragments in total). F 31, 32, and 33 are dubious; F 34 and 35 are appendices.

⁵⁶⁷ See Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 1: expedition in the Balkans against the Thracians and the Triballians; F 3: destruction of Thebes; F 4: number of troops gathered by Alexander for the Asian campaign; F 6: Persian casualties at the battle of Issus; F 14: capture of Bessus; F 15: assault on a Sogdian city; F 18: fight against the Indians and Ptolemy's duel against an Indian leader; F 20: battle at the Hydaspes against Porus and his son; F 25: the fight against the Malli and Alexander's wound.

⁵⁶⁸ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 2. For more fragments on ethnographic matters, see F 11, which explains why the Macedonians shave themselves before battle, and F 21, which attests the name of the Glausians, an Indian tribe conterminous to Porus' dominion.

⁵⁶⁹ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 28. Fragments on geographical details are: F 5, a discussion of the name of the city of Anchiale; F 10, on the location of the battle of Gaugamela; F 22, about the Indian river Acesines; F 31 (dubious), on a colony on the Tanais; F 33 (dubious), a description of the land of the Sarmati.

⁵⁷⁰ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 13. Further fragments on political matters are: F 7 on the respect of Persian women captured at Issus; F 12 on the Uxians' tribute; F 17 about Callisthenes' execution.

⁵⁷¹ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 8.

⁵⁷² Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 16. For more fragments about the life at the Macedonian court and in the Macedonian army, see F 23, on the mutiny at the Hyphasis and Alexander's reaction, and F 30, which attests Alexander's last days and death.

king.⁵⁷³ Moreover, military actions and digressions on toponyms are common topics in *Histories*, whereas geographical details and descriptions of life at court are rarely included in strictly military accounts.⁵⁷⁴

In his *Histories*, the son of Lagus aimed at presenting Alexander as the epitome of the good monarch, ascribing to him all the values which were important to his own self-promotion as (Hellenistic) king; the strong military characterisation is due to the author's point of view: in the first instance, he is a soldier.⁵⁷⁵ Thus, through the description of the Balkan, the Asiatic and the Indian campaigns, Ptolemy stressed Alexander's military genius, rigorous fairness, and piety, which not only were the *aretai* of the ruler, but also helped him eulogise (or justify) the great Macedonian, the "basis" of his dominion.⁵⁷⁶

The date of composition has long been the subject of scholarly discussion: the only certainty is that Ptolemy wrote after Alexander's death, as Arrian states in his proem.⁵⁷⁷ The fact that in the proem of the *Anabasis* Ptolemy is called *basileus* though does not entail that he composed his account when he had already become king, as it would be an overstatement of Arrian's precision: Arrian wrote a long time after, when it was common practice to refer to Soter with his regal title. The fragments themselves give no clue about a possible period of composition of Ptolemy's *Histories*, and

⁵⁷³ I reject the idea that Ptolemy was a memoirist: in fact, Alexander III has a role too prominent to be a secondary character in a book of someone else's memoirs; however, since Ptolemy presented himself as the king's best man, his book undoubtedly reflects his personality as well. Cf. Ellis (1994) 19: "we cannot know when he wrote his history. We cannot be overly confident of its purpose or content. We would expect a book which reflected the personality of its author. We would expect a calm, factual, level-headed account by a practical soldier and magistrate. A man who was not in a hurry. A cautious, patient, but surely not unbiased man, who told the truth from his own point of view". *Contra*, Levi (1977) 56-57: Ptolemy's fragments were part of an autobiographical account.

⁵⁷⁴ Differently, Pearson (1960) 206-210 and Pédech (2011²) 294 interpret Ptolemy's work as pure military history.

⁵⁷⁵ Jacoby (1930) 499 thinks that Ptolemy wrote an historical work with the aim of rationalising the legends (τὰ λεγόμενα) about Alexander the Great. Due to his practical personality, Ptolemy surely left us a more rationalised image of Alexander, but I would not consider the suppression of romantic and fanciful elements his main goal: in fact, the Lagid too made use of magic in his account (cf. the talking snakes in F 8) and of legends in his political propaganda (e. g., his brotherhood to Alexander).

⁵⁷⁶ Pédech (2011²) 315-316.

⁵⁷⁷ Arr. An. Pro. 2.

scholars can only speculate. In my opinion, Ptolemy's writings saw the light in the last two decades of the fourth century BC during his rule as satrap of the Macedonian kings Philip III and Alexander IV or at the very beginning of his kingdom in Egypt,⁵⁷⁸ when he put the greatest efforts into legitimising his own power; the *Histories* fit nicely this attempt, for they offer an example of long-lasting friendship among companions and stress the personal bond between the general and his king. In fact, through a historical narrative about Alexander the Great, Ptolemy could easily use the image of this particular Macedonian king to build the desired moral and political basis to his rule.⁵⁷⁹ Moreover, if indeed – as Bosworth⁵⁸⁰ suggested – the fictitious *Will* of Alexander in the *Liber the Morte* is to be dated to 311 BC and attributed to Ptolemy, we have further evidence for thinking that he was making use of historiography as a tool to support his policies in his satrapy.

Two major difficulties lie in the interpretation of these fragments: the definition of the chronological nexus between Ptolemy, Aristobulus and Clitarchus' historical narratives, and Arrian's use of his sources.

Ptolemy and Clitarchus

We possess scanty biographical details on Clitarchus, but it is highly probable that he belongs to the Alexander-historians of first-generation⁵⁸¹ and maybe he also took part

⁵⁷⁸ Scholars in favour of a dating of the *Histories* in the satrapal period: Errington (1969) 241; Levi (1977) 52; Bosworth (1980.a) 23; Bingen (2007) 22. Scholars dating the *Histories* in Ptolemy's old age: Jacoby (1930) 499; Pearson (1960) 192; Hammond (1993) 196-197; Ellis (1994) 19; Lane Fox (2015) 165.

⁵⁷⁹ Levi (1977) 52. Cf. Roisman (1984) 385: Ptolemy wrote "simply for the sake of writing history".

⁵⁸⁰ Bosworth (2000) 207-241.

⁵⁸¹ Prandi (1996) 66-71; *eadem* (2012) 15-26. For Clitarchus' chronology, see also *BNJ* 137, T 1b = *P.Oxy.* LXXI, 4808 ll. 9-16: this recently found anonymous papyrus dated to the first / second century AD attests the presence of the historian Clitarchus at the Ptolemaic court, where he was staying in quality of preceptor of Ptolemy IV Philopator. Provided that Philopator was born around 244 BC and ruled 222-205 BC, according to this testimony Clitarchus' birth must have occurred after 310 BC, a date which contradicts all the extant biographical information.

in the Persian campaign.⁵⁸² His importance in understanding Ptolemy's work is to be found in the description of the episodes in which the two historians diverge.

In the assault against the Sydracians,⁵⁸³ Clitarchus narrates that Ptolemy earned the epithet Soter for having protected Alexander from the blows of the enemies with his shield;⁵⁸⁴ but Ptolemy himself claims that he was engaged in another mission.⁵⁸⁵ The general scholarly point of view is that Clitarchus must have written earlier than Ptolemy – otherwise he would not have contradicted the king – and that Ptolemy composed his *Histories* after him to rationalise some of the legends which had been spread on Alexander and the Persian campaign.⁵⁸⁶ But three points should be considered: first, there is a general confusion in the sources in regards to this assault,⁵⁸⁷ and Arrian talks about two different military actions, one against the Oxydracians and one against the Malli (*An. VI. 11. 3; 8*),⁵⁸⁸ a fact that may explain the incongruences with Ptolemy's account; secondly, the absence of evidence for Ptolemy's use of the nickname Soter, probably attributed to him after the help he gave to the Rhodians against Demetrius Poliorcetes in 304 BC,⁵⁸⁹ suggests that Clitarchus took the liberty to use it to flatter the king and to strengthen the association between Alexander and the Lagid;⁵⁹⁰ thirdly, if we consider the story of the Amazon queen's

⁵⁸² Clitarchus, *BNJ / FGrH* 137, T 5 = D. S. II. 7. 3. I agree with Jacoby (*FGrH* IIB, 485)'s cautiousness in including Clitarchus in the group of historians who followed Alexander: in fact, Diodorus separates them chronologically with the term *hysteron* (after).

⁵⁸³ Sydracae: D. S. XVII. 98; Str. XV. 1. 8; Curt. IX. 4. 15; cfr. Arr. *An. VI. 11. 3*: Oxydracians.

⁵⁸⁴ Clitarchus, *BNJ / FGrH* 137, T 8 and F 24 (= Curt. IX. 5. 21).

⁵⁸⁵ Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 26.a (= Arr. *An. VI. 11. 8*); F 26.b (= Curt. IX. 5. 21).

⁵⁸⁶ Hammond (1993) 196-197; Lane Fox (2015) 165; Prandi (2016) commentary to Clitarchus, *BNJ* 137, F 24. *Contra*, Pearson (1960) 242; Pédech (2011²) 234-237.

⁵⁸⁷ Curtius (IX. 5. 14-18) reports that Peucestas, Timaeus, Leonnatus, and Aristonus were present at the Indians' attack against Alexander; Plutarch (*Alex.* 63) names Peucestas and Limnaeus; Arrian (*An. VI. 10-11*) attests Peucestas, Leonnatus and Abreas. Ptolemy denied his presence, but he is named by both Clitarchus (*BNJ / FGrH* 137, F 24) and Plutarch (*De Alex.* I. 2 = *Mor.* 327B; II. 13 = *Mor.* 344D, where he appears together with Limnaeus and Leonnatus).

⁵⁸⁸ D. S. XVII. 98-99.4

⁵⁸⁹ Paus. I. 6. 2 and I. 6. 6.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Prandi (2016) commentary to *BNJ* 137, F 24.

visit to Alexander – attested in Clitarchus and dismissed by Ptolemy⁵⁹¹ – we understand that the two historians aimed at writing two different types of historical narrations. Therefore, there is no need to interpret one work as a correction of (or a deviation from) the other: as Clitarchus was free to elaborate on fictional elements, such as the Amazons, he was able to fabricate stories on Ptolemy's bravado in other contexts.

Another significant disagreement between the two historians occurs with the analysis of Alexander's reasons for burning Persepolis and of the role Thais played in it. Athenaeus (XIII. 37, 576DE) states that Clitarchus (*BNJ / FGrH* 137, F 11) considers the Athenian *hetaira* the cause of the fire in the palace of the Achaemenids;⁵⁹² Arrian (*An.* III. 18. 11-12), who takes on board Ptolemy's interpretation of the event, explains Alexander's decision to burn Persepolis down as a political act serving Panhellenism and revenge against the past Persians' wrongdoings. The divergence in the sources can be easily bridged by considering that Ptolemy had personal interests in concealing Thais' involvement in the drinking bout which led to the destruction of the Achaemenid capital, since he was married to her and had children from her (*Ath.* XIII. 37, 576E); furthermore, in consonance with his own political aims, it was better to present the incident as a rational decision of Alexander for the benefit of Greek freedom rather than an inconsiderate act of vandalism due to drunkenness.

⁵⁹¹ See Plu. *Alex.* 46. 1: Clitarchus (*BNJ / FGrH* 137, F 15) is among the supporters, whereas Ptolemy is among the detractors of Alexander's encounter with the Amazons. Cf. also Clitarchus *BNJ / FGrH* 137, F 16 and Onesicritus *BNJ / FGrH* 134, F 1 (= D. S. XVII. 77. 1-3; Curt. VI. 5. 24-32; Justin XII. 3. 5-57; Str. XI. 5. 4): Alexander meets Thalestris. Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, F 21.b, has pointed out that the episode of the Amazons omitted by Aristobulus and Ptolemy and reported by Arrian (*An.* VII. 13. 2-3) is not the legendary encounter with the Amazon queen described in the Vulgate, but a different event which apparently took place in Media, when the satrap Atropates presented Alexander with a hundred women dressed as Amazons, whom the Macedonian king rapidly dismissed to protect them from potential rape by his troops – according to the *topos* of Alexander's chivalry towards women. Allegedly, Alexander sent these women back with a message for their queen, as he intended to visit her in order to conceive a child.

⁵⁹² Cf. D. S. XVII. 72 and Plu. *Alex.* 38: Thais has a leading role in the fire in Persepolis; Curt. V. 7. 3-5 acknowledges the *hetaira's* role but he highlights Alexander's own responsibilities in the act.

Ptolemy and Aristobulus

The chronological relationship between Ptolemy and Aristobulus is complicated by the use Arrian makes of their historical writings, for they constitute his two privileged sources⁵⁹³ and, although many times they present different accounts of the same facts, in the *Anabasis* they are often quoted as a couple to sanction or disapprove events in Alexander's campaigns.

According to Lucian,⁵⁹⁴ Aristobulus lived beyond the age of ninety years old and began to write his history in his eighty-fourth year, i. e. around 290s-280s BC. On the basis of their discrepancies, scholars have stated that Ptolemy must have written after him in the 280s BC to correct his travel companion. In my opinion, we should not attribute to Ptolemy the role of someone rationalising or correcting the writings of other historians simply because we read him through the prism of Arrian's *Anabasis*. It is undeniable that Arrian found the two historians' accounts the most congenial to his taste as writer and that their content well served his panegyric presentation of Alexander's deeds,⁵⁹⁵ but this does not entail that Ptolemy (or Aristobulus) wrote a military history with the aim of rationalising *ta legomena* about the Macedonian king as Arrian himself proclaimed. Ptolemy surely wanted to present a rational Alexander, as he created the image of an even-tempered, righteous king, but he was aware that he could not stop legends flourishing about the Macedonian and his great conquests; on the contrary, he also exploited romantic and mythical elements, such as divine recognition from the snake-god Ammon and his own alleged blood-ties to Alexander as son of Philip II and Arsinoë.⁵⁹⁶ Furthermore, we should bear in mind that Pseudo-

⁵⁹³ In his proem (*An. Pro.* 1-2), Arrian declares that he privileges Aristobulus and Ptolemy as main sources for two reasons: first, they both joined Alexander III in the Asiatic campaign and wrote after the great conqueror's death in Babylon, having therefore no interest in concealing the truth; secondly, the latter became a king and, consequently, telling lies was not appropriate to him. Furthermore, at V. 7. 1, Arrian reasserts his agreement with the accounts of the two companions.

⁵⁹⁴ Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGtH* 139, T 3 (= Lucian, *Macr.* 22).

⁵⁹⁵ Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, T 6.

⁵⁹⁶ See also Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGtH* 139, F 49.b (= Str. XV. 2. 5-7): during the march in Gedrosia, Ptolemy was wounded by one of the Oritai's arrows, which were smeared with poison. In his dreams, Alexander saw the root which would cure Ptolemy and saved his life. In the Vulgate tradition, the story of Ptolemy's wound and Alexander's dream is transferred from the Gedrosian desert to Harmatelia, a

Callisthenes' *Romance* had its origin in Egypt in the third century BC: the Ptolemaic court recognised the importance of, and prompted, fiction in the transmission of Alexander's deeds.

Aristobulus' historical work was published and at least partly composed after the battle of Ipsus in 301 BC, which is mentioned in F 54 (= Arr. *An.* VII 18.5); however, we know from Lucian⁵⁹⁷ that Aristobulus was already drafting his history in the years of the Persian campaign: in fact, while sailing on the Hydaspes river, the historian is said to have read aloud his description of the heroic *μονομαχία* (duel) between Poros and Alexander, who unexpectedly reproached the historian for his flattery and threw the manuscript in the river.⁵⁹⁸ If we go beyond the anecdotal character of Lucian's testimony, the fragment itself, together with the accuracy and the attention to detail of some of Aristobulus' geographical and ethnographical excurses, suggests that indeed he was at least taking notes for a future narration during the expedition. Thus, since Aristobulus' work was an ongoing project, it is impossible to state whether Ptolemy wrote before or after him; we might only assume that at a certain point the two authors were writing simultaneously but independently. In fact, they gave diverging versions of the events which occurred in the Persian campaign either because they had a different experience of it or because they were reshaping history for a different purpose. In some cases, Ptolemy appears better informed,⁵⁹⁹ as he

Brahmin town (D. S. XVII 103. 7-8; Curt. IX. 8. 25-27; Justin XII. 10. 3). It is likely that Ptolemy's wound was invented by Clitarchus to serve Ptolemaic propaganda, as it associated him with Alexander and his divine snake-father Ammon; for the importance of the snakes in Ptolemy's propaganda, cf. *FGrH* 138, F 8 (= Arr. *An.* III. 3. 5); Ogden (2009) 152-155; 162; Howe (2013) 63.

⁵⁹⁷ Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 12 = Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, T 4 = F 44.

⁵⁹⁸ Another example of exaggeration of Alexander's generalship and endurance in battle is given by Aristobulus, *BNJ* / *FGrH* 139, F 46 (= Plu. *De Alex.* II. 9 = *Mor.* 341C): during the attack against the Malli, the Macedonian king received a blow of a club on his neck and was wounded by a two cubits long arrow at the chest. Ptolemy (*FGrH* 138, F 25 = Arr. *An.* VI. 10. 1) adds that air was hissing out of the wound, suggesting that the arrow punctured Alexander's lung. Notwithstanding the differences in their accounts, both the historians exaggerated the conqueror's wounds to stress his endurance and heroic acts. See Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, F 46.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. the treatment of the alleged plot of Philotas: both Ptolemy and Aristobulus emphasise Philotas' guilt to justify Alexander for the execution of the general and of his father. However, as Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, F 22 has pointed out, for the description of the trial and of the execution Arrian turns to the authority of Ptolemy alone (*FGrH* 138, F 13), as he was probably involved

belonged to the king's inner circle, or more biased,⁶⁰⁰ since he was personally involved in some events at court or in battle. Furthermore, Aristobulus wants to leave us the image of a self-restrained,⁶⁰¹ beneficent⁶⁰² Alexander, while Ptolemy aimed at presenting him as a match to his skills as general and ruler.⁶⁰³ Nevertheless, Aristobulus' Alexander is not perfect: he is politely reproached for his unstoppable desire for conquest⁶⁰⁴ and, differently from Ptolemy, whose representation of Alexander was shaped by a specific political agenda,⁶⁰⁵ Aristobulus does not always support the official version of events.⁶⁰⁶

in the process of the trial and he recounts what became the officially sanctioned version of the episode: Philotas was executed after being convicted of complicity for failing to inform Alexander about the plot. Similarly, in regards to Callisthenes' death, both Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 33 and Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 17 (= *Arr. An.* IV. 14. 3) try to exculpate their king: the former projects Alexander's clemency, stating that Callisthenes was not put to death but died of sickness, while the latter highlights Alexander's righteousness and respect for justice, claiming that Callisthenes was executed after a trial. See Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, F 30 – 33, especially F 33.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 29 (= *Arr. An.* IV. 8. 9): [regarding Clitus' murder] "Aristobulus does not state how the drinking bout originated, but attributes all the blame to Clitus alone". Aristobulus adds that, during the quarrel, Ptolemy held Clitus back; as Pearson (1960) 170 has pointed out, Aristobulus did not witness the symposium, as he was not part of the king's inner circle. Thus, he had to rely on the others' (Ptolemy's?) oral accounts and there is no need to hypothesise that he wanted to flatter the future king of Egypt. However, we do not possess Ptolemy's written version: since Arrian would have surely embedded it in his *Anabasis*, this was a deliberate omission to save Alexander's reputation. See Hobden (2013) 188-190 for the interpretation of Clitus' murder as political act.

⁶⁰¹ Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 7a; 8; 30; 59; 62: Alexander was not a heavy drinker.

⁶⁰² For example, Aristobulus plays down Alexander's responsibility in the deaths of Philotas (*BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 22), Clitus (F 29) and Callisthenes (F 31) and he presents him as a clement king (F 33, 55, 58).

⁶⁰³ Cf. Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 14 (= *Arr. An.* III. 29. 6-30.5): in the pursuit of Bessus, Ptolemy becomes a New Alexander and the Macedonian king is presented as a righteous judge (see below). In Aristobulus' version of the capture of Bessus (*BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 24 = *Arr. An.* III. 30. 5), Ptolemy plays a minor role: Spithamenes and Dataphernes hand Bessus over to Alexander and he simply escorts them. See also Diodorus (XVII. 83. 7-9) and Curtius (VII. 5. 19-26; 36), who do not mention Ptolemy at all.

⁶⁰⁴ Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 55 and 56.

⁶⁰⁵ A clear example of Ptolemaic propaganda is *FGrH* 138, F 8 about Alexander's journey to Siwah: cf. Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 13-15 (= *Arr. An.* III. 3-4). Ptolemy left us a unique version of the march to the shrine of Ammon, which differs from the narrations of the other two contemporary authors Callisthenes and Aristobulus in two points: the appearance of two talking snakes (instead of two ravens) and the chosen way back from the Oasis of Siwah to Egypt. Ptolemy's replacement of the ravens with

To summarise, the chronological relation between the works of Alexander's two soldiers is unknown to us; but if we accept that the Lagid composed his historical narrative in the aftermath of the Macedonian conqueror's death, then it can reasonably be presumed that Aristobulus *published* his *Histories* after him, as we know that he wrote part of them during his old age (surely after Ipsus) and he indeed seems to have manipulated Alexander's personality and political acts freely, according to his own taste.⁶⁰⁷

In any event, rather than the two Alexander-historians' chronological relation, the statement of Arrian's accuracy in handling his sources is more important to our attempt to reconstruct the great conqueror's image in Ptolemy's fragments. Bosworth has compared passages in which Curtius and Arrian name a common source and he has pointed out that, although Arrian rewrites it, reshaping it stylistically, he retains the source's original substance.⁶⁰⁸ Thus, from the *Anabasis* we can recover at least the "essence" of Ptolemy's *Histories*; this allows us to speculate further and presume that

snakes is not a casual choice but was meant to legitimise his claims to Egypt: they were associated with the cult of Ammon and they supplied an allusion to Olympias' legendary conception; see Bosworth (1980.a) 272-273. Regarding the route back to Egypt, I agree with Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, FF 13-15 that "it is tempting to suppose that Ptolemy's other variant, that Alexander returned to Egypt via Memphis, also has its roots in Ptolemaic propaganda, rather than assuming that Arrian drew a mistaken inference from Ptolemy's narrative" [as stated by Bosworth (1980.a) 274]. In fact, by linking Siwah, where Alexander was recognised as Ammon's son, to Memphis, the ancient capital of the Pharaohs, "Ptolemy sought not only to legitimise Alexander's divine status, but also to pave the way for his own eventual ruler cult". In my opinion, this connection Siwah-Memphis-divinity appears more powerful if we assume that Ptolemy's historical work was written in the years 321-311 BC when he was a satrap in Memphis and he wanted to demonstrate his legitimate inheritance of the rule in Egypt.

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, FF 26, 27, 51. Aristobulus' description of the capture of the seventh Sogdian fortress (F 26 = Arr. *An.* IV 3. 5 = Ptolemy, *FGrH* 138, F 15) is quite indicative of his free stance on political matters: Ptolemy claims that the besieged Sogdians surrendered immediately, while Aristobulus says that Alexander captured this city also by force. Similarly, Curtius (VII. 6. 17-23) attests a strong resistance by the city and the campaign is presented as difficult and bloody. Pearson (1960) 166-167 dismisses Aristobulus' account, however, it is likely that he is offering a genuine narration whereas Ptolemy a propagandistic one, which highlights Alexander's invincibility. Cf. Hammond (1983) 142; Bosworth (1995) 20-21; Pownall (2013) commentary to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139, F 26.

⁶⁰⁷ Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, T 3 (= Lucian, *Macr.* 22).

⁶⁰⁸ Bosworth (1988.b) 39.

the fragments we possess reflect to a high degree what Soter did actually write. However, the reconstruction of his narrative and the interpretation of the extant fragments is extremely complex because there is no clue of what has been lost.

Alexander III's literary profile in Ptolemy's *Histories*

In Ptolemy's thirty-three fragments, Alexander appears as a great conqueror, an ingenious captain and a fair king: there is no place for cruelty, harsh behaviours and excessive luxury in the descriptions of his deeds. In contrast with the Vulgate, which is interested in trivial aspects of the Macedonian's personality as well, Ptolemy tries to build the idealised image of a rational and just monarch, which could serve as a model to himself.⁶⁰⁹ Furthermore, by justifying Alexander for his errors, Ptolemy defends his actions as well, as his power and public image are strictly intertwined with those of his king. In fact, it is worth noticing that Alexander's well-known tyrannical acts, such as the burning of Persepolis, the assassination of Clitus during a drinking bout, and the imposition of the προσκύνησις (obedience) are concealed. Their absence is even more striking if we think that in the other sources Ptolemy is related to or involved in each of these episodes: the great conqueror is incited by Thais, the Lagid's *hetaira*, to destroy Xerxes' palace; during the quarrel between the two companions (Alexander and Clitus), Ptolemy, being the king's *sōmatophylax*, tries to hold Clitus back; as a member of the Macedonian nobility, he probably also felt uncomfortable with the growing "orientalism" of his king.

Wherever a trustworthy historical narration requires the depiction of Alexander as a severe ruler, a justification for his actions is always provided. For example, in F 13 (= Arr. An. III. 26), the Macedonian king is very lenient and does not immediately pay credit to rumours of a plot organised by Philotas, since he always trusted and conferred great honour on him and his father Parmenio. Later, when the conspiracy is discovered, he brings the plotter in front of the Macedonians to be judged, according to the native law. Ultimately, Alexander is "compelled" to kill his old general as well, for "he deemed it not credible that Philotas should conspire against him, and Parmenio not participate in his son's plan" (οὐ πιστὸν ἔδοκει εἶναι Ἀλέξανδρος Φιλῶτα ἐπιβουλεύοντος μὴ ξυμμετασχεῖν Παρμενίωνα τῷ παιδὶ τοῦ βουλεύματος). Similarly,

⁶⁰⁹ Bingen (2007) 20-22.

Callisthenes is stretched upon the rack and hanged (F 17 = Arr. *An.* IV. 14. 3) because the Royal Pages firmly asserted that they were instigated by him (F 16 = Arr. *An.* IV. 14. 1); thus, also his execution is presented as a lawful act in response to a betrayal.

The description of the extraordinary slaughter of Persians at the Battle of Issus in F 6 (= Arr. *An.* II. 11. 8) proves Alexander's ability as great general, which in F 25 (= Arr. *An.* VI. 10. 1) is emphasised with almost heroic and superhuman traits. In fact, in the fight against the Malli, Alexander was wounded by a spear at his chest and Ptolemy bears testimony of hissing πνεῦμα coming out of his lung. The term *pneuma* may be interpreted as either air or divine spirit;⁶¹⁰ even if we opt for the scientific reading as "air coming from a pierced lung", the Lagid's representation of his king's trauma is surely overstated to glorify his stamina, courage, and leadership.⁶¹¹ Nevertheless, Ptolemy's Alexander is not only a relentless general, but also a king courteous towards foreign peoples and his subjects: e. g., in F 2 (= Str. VII. 3. 8), he treats the Celts gently, and invites them generously to drink together; in F 7 (= Arr. *An.* II. 12. 3-6), he is extremely considerate of women and respectful of the Persian royal family. In fact, after having heard the lamentation of Darius' family, Alexander sends Leonnatus to their tent in order to reassure them that Darius is still alive and that they are free to retain their royal titles. This combination of military skills and benevolence was an essential characteristic of the Hellenistic king.

Ptolemy empathised so much with his king that, in the account of the capture of Bessus (F 14), his image overlaps the portrait of protagonist-hero of his *Histories* – Alexander III – and he becomes the real protagonist:⁶¹² Ptolemy is the soldier *whom Alexander chooses* for the extremely important task of capturing Bessus and he is portrayed as always loyal to his master (*An.* III. 29. 7: Πτολεμαῖος ἦει ὡς ἐτέτακτο. III. 30. 3: προπέμψας δὲ ἤρето Ἀλέξανδρον, ὅπως χρή ἐς ὄψιν ἄγειν Ἀλεξάνδρου Βῆσσον); he demonstrates that he is a talented and experienced captain, marching a ten-days distance in four days, and that he is quick and resolute leader in taking decisions or changing his plans (III. 30. 1: τοὺς μὲν δὴ πεζοὺς κατέλιπε, προστάξας ἔπεσθαι ἐν τάξει. III. 30. 2: ἐπεκηρυκεύετο τοῖς ἐν τῇ κώμῃ βαρβάρους ἀπαθεῖς σφᾶς

⁶¹⁰ Levi (1977) 52-53.

⁶¹¹ Sisti, Zambrini (2004) 532: it is unlikely that Alexander's lung was pierced in the battle, as it would have been a lethal wound.

⁶¹² Cf. Arr. *An.* III. 29. 6 up to 30. 3.

ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι παραδόντας Βῆσσον). In the end, Ptolemy fully accomplishes his duty (III. 30. 3: καὶ Πτολεμαῖος οὕτως ἐποίησεν). After this point the narration turns back to “its usual hero” Alexander III, who is portrayed punishing Bessus harshly: in fact, as discussed above, Ptolemy’s Alexander is a severe ruler when the necessity to punish conspirators or betrayers occurs. Being the champion of justice, the Macedonian puts Bessus to death because he had betrayed his king and benefactor Darius. This good disposition and kindness of Alexander towards the Persian King is described also in F 7, when Leonnatus explains to the Achaemenid’s family that the cause of the war is not hatred, but the possession of the empire of Asia (Arr. *An.* II. 12. 3-6: ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ κατὰ ἔχθραν οἱ γενέσθαι τὸν πόλεμον πρὸς Δαρεῖον, ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς Ἀσίας διαπεπολεμῆσθαι ἐννόμως).

Considering this account in its entirety, it is clear that Ptolemy invested energies in his own identification with Alexander III. In fact, the narration of capture of Bessus shares the same sequence of episodes of the Macedonian king’s pursuit of Darius from the Caspian Gates:⁶¹³ the dispatch of a small troop (Arr. *An.* III. 21. 1: τοὺς ἐταίρους μόνους ἔχων ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς προδρόμους ἰππέας καὶ τῶν πεζῶν τοὺς εὐρωστοτάτους τε καὶ κουφοτάτους ἐπιλεξάμενος); the speed in the journey (III. 21. 2: Ἀλέξανδρος ἔτι μᾶλλον ἤγε σπουδῆ); the arrival at the final Persian camp (III. 21. 3: παρῆν εἰς τὸ στρατόπεδον, ὅθεν ἀφωρμῆκει ὀπίσω Βαγιστάνης); the betrayal and the abandonment of the Persian King by his satraps (III. 21. 4: αὐτὸν μὲν συνειλημμένον ἄγεσθαι ἐφ’ ἄρμαμάξης, Βῆσσω δὲ ἀντὶ Δαρείου εἶναι τὸ κράτος [...] καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσοι βάρβαροι ξυνέφευγον Δαρείῳ). Ptolemy (or maybe Arrian, convinced by Soter’s claims of similarity to Alexander) knew these events and modelled the account of his mission on it.

Conclusions

Ptolemy proved to be a good soldier and a sage ruler: loyal and supportive to Alexander III during the Asian campaign, after the death of the Macedonian king in Babylon he lost no time and immediately claimed his right to rule over Egypt as “spear-won land”, according to the Argead fashion.⁶¹⁴ Since the beginning he worked in two

⁶¹³ Bosworth (1980.a) 376.

⁶¹⁴ D. S. XVIII. 39. 5: τὴν Αἴγυπτον διὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἀνδρείας ἔχειν οἰονεὶ δορίκτητον.

directions: i) strengthening his power in the illustrious satrapy and ii) creating a legitimate political and moral basis for it. In order to validate his political status, Ptolemy understood that personal achievements and a strong bond to Alexander were the key to success. He certainly demonstrated his ability in designing a high-impact propaganda, including the establishment of Alexandria as political, cultural and religious capital thanks to the erection of the Museum, the Library, and the Sema; the creation of a ruler-cult of Alexander; and the composition of a historical account of the Macedonian conqueror's career. Soter's policies were progressive: although being essentially a "Greek ruler" and promoting Hellenic culture, he also strove to unify his subjects through the institution of the common cult of Serapis; he established good relationships with the Egyptian priesthood; and he called the Egyptian historian Manetho to his court. Thanks to these balanced measures he obtained stability in the country.

His *Histories* are likely to be dated to the years 321-305 BC. Surely this period was a hectic one for all the Successors but, as Alexander III wrote letters during his campaign in the east and Caesar composed his *Bellum Gallicum* during his campaigns against Gallic tribes (58-50 BC),⁶¹⁵ Ptolemy could as well have drafted his historical account in the aftermath of his king's death. In particular, in his *Histories* Soter fully endorses Alexander III's policies and warfare, by describing his leader as resourceful in battle and merciful with his subjects; in fact, Ptolemy was trying to link himself and his power to the great Macedonian and, consequently, he had to sympathise with his agenda. Moreover, his writings wanted to offer a reflection on the image and the role of an idealised king, who would govern both over Egyptians and Greco-Macedonians.

If we compare Ptolemy I with Alexander III, it becomes clear that the former genuinely followed in the latter's footsteps: i) Ptolemy's cult of Alexander parallels the Macedonian conqueror's attempts to be recognised as son of Ammon and also paved the way to his own divinity; ii) the foundation of the Greek colony of Ptolemais on the west bank of the Nile in 312 BC and the cultural and political development of Alexandria of Egypt are modelled on Alexander's city-foundations;⁶¹⁶ iii) like his king, who placed the Macedonians in the high ranks of his army and administration, Ptolemy called Greeks to man his army and populate cities; iv) Alexander's unequalled

⁶¹⁵ Radin (1918) 283-300.

⁶¹⁶ Lane Fox (2011) 8.

munificence in gifts and banquets informed the discourse on splendid luxury and benevolence in the Hellenistic period and became essential element of Ptolemaic propaganda;⁶¹⁷ v) the Museum and of the Library were built to safeguard and promote the study of Hellenic culture, an act which reminds us of the acculturation of the 30,000 epigonoι ordered by Alexander, who, as a matter of fact, envisaged his army ad court as essentially Greek.⁶¹⁸ Moreover, in these two cultural centres Soter institutionalised the patronage of scholarship, creating an intellectual community based on the Aristotelic model – a further link to the Macedonian conqueror.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Hecataeus, *BNJ / FGrH* 264, F 21. Lane Fox (2011) 7.

⁶¹⁸ Lane Fox (2011) 10.

⁶¹⁹ Erskine (1995) 40-41.

Chapter six

Julian's imitatio, aemulatio, and recusatio Alexandri

Γιὰ τὲς θρησκευτικὲς μας δοξασίαις —
ὁ κοῦφος Ἰουλιανὸς εἶπεν “Ἀνέγνων, ἔγνων,
κατέγνων”. Τάχατες μᾶς ἐκμηδένισε
μὲ τὸ “κατέγνων” του, ὁ γελοιοδέστατος.

Τέτοιαις ξυπνάδαις ὅμως πέρασι δὲν ἔχουνε σ’ ἐμᾶς
τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς. “Ἀνέγνως, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔγνως· εἰ γὰρ ἔγνως,
οὐκ ἂν κατέγνως” ἀπαντήσαμεν ἀμέσως.

C. Cavafy, Οὐκ ἔγνως, January 1928.⁶²⁰

This chapter explores the nature of the parallels between Julian and Alexander the Great drawn by the Late Antique authors, who saw in the Apostate a new (bad or good version of) Alexander, and it also aims at reconstructing Julian’s Reception of the Macedonian hero’s personality and story in his own writings.

Julian was born in 331/2 AD, the son of Basilina, a noble woman of Greek origins from Bithynia, and Julius Constantius, son of Constantius Chlorus and half-brother of Constantine I. When the latter’s son Constantius II ascended the throne in 337 AD, he massacred all the male members of the dynastic family, but decided to spare his cousins Julian and Gallus, as they were still children and deemed inoffensive.

Two facts in Julian’s childhood are extremely crucial in the shaping of his personality and beliefs: first, at the age of seven, he was entrusted to the Gothic eunuch Mardonius, whose teachings kindled in his soul a strong interest in Homer and Hellenic culture; secondly, in 342 AD, Julian was sent with his brother to the imperial estate of Macellum in Cappadocia, where, although he could take advantage of the rich library of the Arian bishop George, he experienced a dramatic feeling of desolation and abandonment. In 348/9 AD the exile was lifted and, at the age of eighteen, Julian was permitted to travel in order to continue his studies; he went to Asia Minor and to

⁶²⁰ “About our religious beliefs | mindless Julian said: ‘I read, I understood | I condemned’. As if he could annihilate us | with that ‘I condemned’ – such a fool. || But witticisms like those are not successful with us | Christians. ‘You read, but didn’t understand; for if you had understood, | you wouldn’t have condemned’, we promptly replied”. For a collection of Cavafy’s poems with their English translation, see Sachperoglou (2007); *idem* (2007) 172-173: Οὐκ ἔγνως (*You did not understand*).

Athens (355), and he became an acolyte of Neoplatonic philosophical and theurgic circles.

In 350 AD, Constantius II was compelled to appoint Gallus as Caesar to keep hold of the East, as he was too busy in quelling the uprising of the usurper Magnentius in Gaul. However, due to the harshness of his rule, Gallus was executed; the Emperor, still in need of help, summoned Julian to Mediolanum (Milan) and in 355 AD appointed him Caesar of the West, with the duty of subduing the rebellious Germanic tribes dwelling along the River Rhine. Being a literary man, Julian took over the army reluctantly, but in 357 AD he unexpectedly defeated the Alamanni in the Battle of Argentoratum (Strasbourg). In the wake of the victory, the soldiers proclaimed him Emperor, but he refused the title and apparently rebuked them; by contrast, when his troops acclaimed him for a second time in 360 AD, reacting to Constantius II's call in the East against the Sassanid Shapur II, Julian accepted the offer. As new Augustus, he immediately moved towards Constantinople to face his cousin. However, in the meantime Constantius II died, having surprisingly recognised Julian on his deathbed as the legitimate successor to the Roman throne.

In 361 AD, as sole Emperor, Julian openly rejected his Christian education and started restoring the traditional Hellenic pagan cults and practising Neo-Platonist theurgy. The Apostate also modelled his policies on Platonist teachings, granting the cities more authority and freedom, and he busied himself with the simplification of the imperial bureaucracy and the purge of the excesses of the court system. In 362 AD Julian moved the capital to Antioch to prepare duly all the details of his campaign against the Sassanid Empire, and in 363 AD he set forth against Shapur II. Against expectation, the soldier who enjoyed so much success in Gaul failed miserably in Persia, unable to deal with logistical issues or to find the correct strategy in battle.

An examination of Julian's personality and intense life reveals many traits that are likely to have encouraged historians to draw comparisons with Alexander III.⁶²¹ In their contemporaries' eyes, both the Macedonian conqueror and the Apostate stood out for their stunning military skills and, thanks to their great generalship, they were followed by an army of trustworthy and enthusiastic men; secondly, they showed a deep interest in Hellenic culture and literature, especially in Homer, and they tried to promote themselves as philosopher-kings; thirdly, just as Alexander III had inherited

⁶²¹ On Julian's personality, see Bowersock (1978) 12-20.

from his father the war against the Achaemenid Empire, Julian had to continue the Persian campaign started by his cousin against Shapur II. Lastly, their career concludes in a similar way, as from acclaimed generals they ended up alone, and died young, in their thirties, in faraway Mesopotamia.

Among contemporary authors writing about Julian, four draw a comparison between him and Alexander III: the sophist and teacher of rhetoric Libanius, the soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus, the historian Eunapius, and the Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus; in the fifth century AD, the two Church historians Socrates Scholasticus and Philostorgius. It is important to notice that in Late Antiquity Alexander is still a *pagan* conqueror and a bearer of *Hellenic* culture; it is therefore the writers' religious choices that dictate their attitude in the reception of his character, deeds, and image. Generally speaking, the pagans see Alexander III as a positive model of a warrior-king, whereas the Christians express themselves mostly in negative tones, influenced by Stoic moralist teachings which made him a drunken tyrant.⁶²² Among our set of authors, Libanius, Ammianus and Eunapius, being supporters of pagan Hellenic culture, are fervent admirers of Julian and present him as a victorious New Alexander; whereas Gregory, Socrates and Philostorgius, belonging to the Christian background, are among Julian's detractors and use the association with the Macedonian as a source of criticism: with an overturn of the early-Christian negative reception of the "pagan Alexander", Julian is presented as a failed attempt to match the great conqueror.

⁶²² See Clemens Alexandrinus, Eusebius Caesariensis, Gregorius Nazanzienus, and Johannes Chrysostom. Cary (1967) 80-83, 118-119: Alexander III is seen as a negative model by moralists, who draw on Seneca's anecdotes; furthermore, he is portrayed as a stereotyped "all-conquering tyrant" by theologians, for they use the *Prophecy of Daniel* and the second Book of the Maccabees as sources, and these represent the Macedonian as the creator of the World dominion later inherited by Antiochus over the Jews. Stoneman (2008) 200: due to the bearings of the new Christian culture of Late Antiquity, the writers of the Roman Empire left aside the legends of the great conqueror and turned to the historical Alexander III as a "tool for thinking and an example of luxury, pride, drunkenness, and tyranny". In the fourth century AD the king of Macedon became a symbol of the "pagan revival", and, therefore, he was alien to the Greek-speaking Church Fathers, who were striving to establish Christian Orthodoxy.

Libanius

Libanius (314-393 AD) was a pagan rhetorician belonging to a wealthy aristocratic family of Antioch. He was proud of his Hellenic descent and education, and he did not hold the Roman or Latin heritage in high esteem.⁶²³ Because of his religious and cultural convictions, Libanius enjoyed great fortune during the Apostate's rule and fully supported the regime, acting as an intermediary between the city of Antioch and the Emperor.⁶²⁴

As a result of the common *paideia* with, and proximity to Julian, in his extensive literary production Libanius portrayed him as a skilled statesman, a restless and energetic soldier, and a dynamic resourceful scholar. This vivid and triumphant picture of Julian often reads like panegyric, but it has to be pointed out that the rhetorician nurtured a real regard for his Emperor. Libanius was also the first among the contemporary authors to draw the parallel between Julian and Alexander III,⁶²⁵ highlighting the two heroes' common phenomenal energy, their regal generosity, the respect for Hellenic philosophy and literature, and the eagerness to punish the Persians' *hubris* through their respective Eastern campaigns. The comparison appears on eight occasions in the orations XIV, XV, XVII and XVIII.

In autumn 362 AD, Libanius delivered a speech to his Emperor,⁶²⁶ imploring him to help a friend,⁶²⁷ Aristophanes of Corinth, to get his properties back. In 360 AD the Corinthian philosopher had been unjustly accused of bribery by Constantius II, and because of that he was punished, imprisoned, and tortured.⁶²⁸ Libanius constructs Aristophanes' defence by trying to adjust it to the Apostate's *ethos*: e. g., when the rhetorician asserts that no one loves Greece more than Julian does, he makes the point that Aristophanes is not only a Greek but also a Corinthian (XIV. 27-28), being aware that Julian had previously written a letter to the Corinthians calling them "benefactors"

⁶²³ Bradbury (2004) 3-13.

⁶²⁴ Bradbury (2004) 10; 51-54 for an overview of the abundant epistolary exchange between Libanius and Julian.

⁶²⁵ Smith (2011) 53.

⁶²⁶ Lib. Or. XIV: Πρὸς Ἰουλιανὸν ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοφάνου (To Julian, on behalf of Aristophanes).

⁶²⁷ Lib. Or. XIV. 21: τούτου δ' ἰατρὸς ἄλλος μὲν οὐδεὶς, μόνος δὲ σύ· "there's no other doctor for him [to cure his pain], only you".

⁶²⁸ Lib. Or. XIV. 19-20.

(XIV. 29). Furthermore, throughout the oration there is a great insistence on Aristophanes' good qualities: at chapter 41 he is said to be an assiduous supporter of the pagan religion, since even under Constantius II's rule he used to go secretly to the ruins of the temples, bringing with him no frankincense and no fire, and offering no libations but his lamenting soul; at chapter 62, towards the end of the oration, he is described as a follower of Plato and Pythagoras, with interests in geometry, agronomy, music, and mathematics. Therefore, Hellenic descent, religion, and love for philosophy, shared by Aristophanes and Julian, are the keys used by Libanius to move his Emperor to compassion.

The parallelism between Julian and Alexander is aptly used in XIV. 34, when Libanius invites the Apostate to follow the king of Macedon as a model: in 335 BC, although he was growing angry with the Thebans during the siege of their citadel, Alexander III decided to spare the houses of Pindar's kinsmen, as a symbol of regard for his excellence in poetry. In the same way, since Julian had shown great appreciation for philosophy, he should save Aristophanes and return his confiscated properties:

It would be a shame for Alexander, despite his anger against the Thebans (Ἀλέξανδρος, καὶ ταῦτα Θεβαίοις ὀργιζόμενος), as you know, to show respect to Pindar's relatives because of Pindar's poems (διὰ τὴν Πινδάρου μουσικὴν),⁶²⁹ and yet for the philosophy of Aristophanes' uncles (μήτε τῶν θείων ἢ φιλοσοφία) and that of your own companions, whom you regard as though they were your parents (οἷς ἴσα καὶ γονεῦσι), to avail him nothing.⁶³⁰

Libanius exploits a reversed situation to draw the parallel between the two heroes: in fact, while Alexander is angered at the Thebans, Julian holds the Corinthians in great esteem; Pindar *saves* his relatives because of his poetical mastery, whereas Aristophanes *is saved* by his uncles thanks to their philosophy.

Alexander III's destruction of Thebes had already become a common topic in the accounts of the Alexander-historians, who try to exculpate their king by showing

⁶²⁹ Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 11. 12; Arr. *An.* I. 9. 10.

⁶³⁰ All the translations of Libanius' orations in this chapter are excerpted from, or based on Norman (1969).

his benevolence in various ways; for example, Aristobulus adds the story of the Macedonian's fair treatment of Timocleia, wishing to reward her integrity and dignity (BNJ / FGrH 139, F 2b = Plu. *Mulierum Virtutes* 24 = *Mor.* 259D-260D); Diodorus says that the destruction of the Cadmeia occurred in conformity with the decision of the council (XVII. 14. 4); and Plutarch highlights the fact that the king attacked only after the Thebans had refused his last offer to repent and offended him (*Alex.* 11. 7). Furthermore, the story of Pindar's house recurs also in *Oration XX. 22* addressed to Theodosius, thus constituting a trope even within Libanius' own literary production.

Oration XV, entitled Πρεσβευτικὸς πρὸς Ἰουλιανόν (*Embassy to Julian*), was written by Libanius in order to soothe the Emperor's hurt feelings after the bad treatment he received in Antioch during his sojourn there between July 362 and March 363. It was dispatched in May / June 363, when the rhetorician still believed that the Persian Campaign was proceeding successfully, as the continuous praise for Julian throughout the speech confirms. Libanius appears deeply concerned about the destiny of his own city: he had experienced the stalemate created by the Antiochenes' brusque rebuff of the Emperor's policies and he also knew well Julian's own distress, which had been openly conveyed by his extremely sarcastic satirical essay Μισοπώγων (*the Beard-hater*). As a consequence, Libanius evokes great Greek victories, such as the war of Troy, the sea-battle of Salamis, and Alexander III's Persian campaign, asserting that they all fade away in comparison with Julian's stunning deeds (XV. 2).⁶³¹ He then continues to praise the Emperor, by reminding him that he is φιλόανθρωπος (benevolent, loving mankind) and Ἑλλην (Hellene, imbued with Greek culture): a prompt to behave according to his nature (XV. 25) and forgive the Antiochenes. In this highly encomiastic atmosphere, Libanius confers a preeminent place on Alexander in two passages, in chapters 42-43 and 79.

(42) Alexander suffered much at the hands of the orators in Athens (Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ πολλὰ παρὰ τῶν Ἀθήνησι ῥητόρων ἠδικημένος). They created trouble for him, they organised the democracies against him, and they dubbed

⁶³¹ Cf. Lib. *Or.* XV. 16: ἡ πάλαι Περσῶν ὕβρις (the old *hubris* of the Persians). By using the word *hubris*, Libanius automatically places Antioch and Julian in the wake of Alexander III's Persian campaign and of his Panhellenic propaganda about a war of revenge aimed at securing freedom. Smith (1995) 168.

him “Margites”⁶³² and covered him with insults and obloquy. When absolutely supreme, he could have massacred them, had he wished; but instead he welcomed their embassy and let them be, granting this great favour to Demades son of Demeas. (43) These examples and many other more I would have cited, were it not that you had performed deeds even more famous (εἰ μὴ τούτων ἐπεποιήκεις λαμπρότερα). As it is, you have provided an example of the treatments that we now come to obtain, and so you have prevented me from collecting instances from past history. [...] Characteristic of your clemency then was your patient endurance of the errors of your subjects (νόμος ἦν τῆ τότε φιλανθρωπία φέρειν τῶν ἀρχομένων τὰς πλημμελείας). Now maintain it unimpaired, add fresh praise to that already won.

Again, Libanius works with traditional tropes, among which the motif of Alexander’s special leniency towards the Athenians⁶³³ enjoys a special position: whereas other illustrious personalities of Ancient Greek history are simply dismissed as “many other examples”, the Macedonian is openly mentioned by name and presented to the Emperor as a model of philanthropy. Julian is said to have already overshadowed all the previous Greek heroes with brighter deeds and Libanius seems to insinuate that only Alexander is left to be surpassed with a further act of mercy.

The whole of *Oration* XV is built on the insistence of three linked themes: leniency, Greek *paideia*, and Alexander the Great. Since Julian is a charitable person and imbued with Hellenic culture, in Libanius’ mind, the king of Macedon becomes a natural model for the Emperor to follow. This idea is reasserted at chapter 79, in the concluding section of the speech:

Our city makes its supplication to you, our city which claims descent from the race of Inachus (ἰκετεύει σε πόλις Ἰνάχου) who wandered far in search for Io; our city which has an Athenian element (ἰκετεύει σε πόλις μέρος Ἀθηναίων ἔχουσα); which is a city of Macedonians, of Alexander who trod the same path as yourself (πόλις Μακεδόνων, πόλις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ τὰ αὐτά σοι δραμόντος);

⁶³² According to Aeschines (III. 160), Demosthenes nicknamed Alexander “Margites”, a clumsy version of Homer’s Achilles, to ridicule the Macedonian’s imitation of the hero.

⁶³³ D. S. XVII. 62. 7.

he admired its spring and gladly drunk of its water. The city makes its supplication to you, which has given many gods to be your allies (ἵκετεύει σε πόλις πολλούς σοι θεοὺς παρασχομένη συμμάχους). You have sacrificed and made invocations to them, and you soldiered with them: Hermes, Pan, Demeter, Ares, Calliope, Apollo, Zeus of the mountains and of the city.

The repetition of the expression ἵκετεύει σε confers pathos to the narration, and Julian's attention is driven to Antioch's prestigious lineage: it was a Greek city (Inachus was the king of Argos) and had an Athenian element in it, which was particularly appealing to the Emperor, thanks to the period he spent in Athens studying philosophy. In addition, Antioch was also Macedonian city, for it had been founded in ca. 300 BC by Seleucus I, one of Alexander's generals and *diadochoi*, and, notwithstanding the Christianisation of the majority of its population, still retained a lively pagan community in the fourth century AD.

Further to the stress on the Antiochenes' Hellenicity thanks to their lineage and religion, Libanius likens Alexander to Julian by presenting the Macedonian as a forerunner: they both undertake a campaign against the Persian Empire and step on the same path in order to punish *the ancient Persian hubris* mentioned at XV. 16.⁶³⁴ In Oration XV Libanius clearly moulds Alexander III's image and deeds according to his rhetorical needs, with the aim of highlighting his Emperor's affinity to him.

Composed about two years after the Emperor's death in June 363, the *Monody*⁶³⁵ is a brief speech written to lament his demise. The parallel between Alexander and Julian is offered twice: first, in XVII. 17, the Emperor is said to be spending his nights sleepless, for such is the influence of the Macedonian king that it does not allow him to rest. Alexander's astonishing stamina and high sense of duty were well-known *topoi*,⁶³⁶ and Libanius, convinced of his superior military value, reworks them in a peculiar way: instead of an *imitatio Alexandri*, the expression οὐκ

⁶³⁴ See fn. 631.

⁶³⁵ Lib. Or. XVII: Μονωδία ἐπὶ Ἰουλιανῶ.

⁶³⁶ For the *topoi* developed in philosophical and rhetorical schools of the Hellenistic and Roman period, see Stoneman (2003) 325-345. Cf. also *Itinerarium Alexandri* 6: Alexander is said tireless in every activity and gifted with protruding muscles.

ἔῶντος καθεύδειν insinuates that it is Alexander who actively forces Julian to follow his example.⁶³⁷

Chapter 32 puts Alexander and Julian alongside one another once again:

The blow fell on Agamemnon, but he was king of Mycenae. Upon Cresphontes, but he was king of Messene. Upon Codrus, but he was acting in obedience to an oracle. Upon Ajax, but he was a weak-hearted general; and on Achilles, but he was ruled by love and by anger, a turbulent character on the whole; and on Cyrus, but he had sons to succeed him, and on Cambyses, but he was mad. Alexander died, but by no enemy's hand (Ἀλέξανδρος ἔθνησκεν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐχθροῦ χειρὶ), and, besides, he was one who might have given ground for criticism. Yet the Emperor who ruled over all from the west to the rising sun, whose soul was filled with virtue, still a young man and with no sons to follow him, he has been done away by a (some) Persian (ὑπ' Ἀχαιμενίδου τινὸς κατενήνεκται).

Libanius presents a set of mythological and historical figures of kings and heroes who were assassinated or had a bad end, reserving a place of prominence for his beloved Emperor. Agamemnon was killed by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus on his return from the Trojan war; Cresphontes, king of Messenia, was assassinated by Polyphontes, another one of the Heraclidae; Codros, king of Athens, sacrificed himself in order to protect his city, since the Delphic oracle had prophesied to the Dorians that they would conquer Athens only by sparing its king; Achilles was killed by Paris' arrow in his heel, the only weak part of his body; Cyrus fell on the battlefield fighting against the Massagetae; Ajax and Cambyses died because of their abjectness and madness. Lastly, Alexander died young in Mesopotamia, but because of illness. Libanius seems to divide this list of heroes in two groups: those whose violent end is soothed by a compensation or justified by an explanation. Agamemnon, Cresphontes and Cyrus at

⁶³⁷ For Julian's sleepless nights because of Alexander's prestige, see here below, Ammianus, XVI. 5. 4-5. Cf. also Plu. *Caes.* 11. 3: while reading the history of Alexander, Caesar laments that at the age of thirty-three the Macedonian was already the ruler of a huge empire, while he had achieved nothing (see also Suetonius, *Div. Jul.* 7, and Dio Cassius, XXXVII. 52. 2). As in Julian's case, Alexander's unequalled deeds seem to "irritate" and to impose an imitative position on Caesar.

least find a compensation in their title of king or their offspring; Codrus, Ajax, Achilles and Cambyses' death is the result of an oracle or of their bad behaviour. The rhetorician provides both an explanation (violent manners) and a compensation (at least he died in his bed, undefeated) for Alexander, whereas he adds neither for Julian, probably with the aim of stressing the unjustified fate which befell him. Thus, according to Libanius, Julian deserves more compassion and surpasses all the previous heroes: in fact, differently from Agamemnon, Cresiphontes, and Codros, he was not a king, but an Emperor whose dominion was over all the *oecumene*; unlike Cyrus, he was not lucky enough to have children to inherit his domains; in contrast with the mad Cambyses, the furious Achilles, the disgraced Ajax, and Alexander, who was much criticised because of his volatile character, Julian was blessed with great virtues. However, at the end of the passage, the Apostate is lamented for not having perished unvanquished on his deathbed, but on the battlefield and at the hand of "some Persian", which makes his leadership and death appear less heroic. The use of the name Achaemenid instead of the ethnic Persian clearly aims at encouraging a comparison between Julian and Alexander; however, in this passage the Macedonian hero is not presented as a model by Libanius, but as the hardest hurdle whom the Apostate failed to surpass due to an adverse fate.

Oration XVIII, entitled Ἐπιτάφιος ἐπὶ Ἰουλιανῶ, is a long and encomiastic epitaph composed in 365, portraying Julian as a hero unjustly killed by a Christian traitor in his army (XVIII. 274-275). The Apostate is attributed a more heroic end than the one described in the *Monody*, but still much stress is put on a hostile and envious destiny (XVIII. 2: φθονερός δαίμων): his death is conceived as a dramatic event which occurred when all mankind was hoping for the Roman army's decisive victory against the Persians (XVIII. 1). In the *Epitaph*, Julian's campaign is openly compared to Alexander's military actions against the Achaemenids at chapters 260-261:

He conceived the idea of seeing and passing through Arbela, either with or without battle, so that his victory would be celebrated along with that won by Alexander there (ἐπεθύμησε μὲν Ἄρβηλα καὶ ἰδεῖν καὶ διελθεῖν ἢ ἄνευ μάχης ἢ καὶ μαχεσάμενος, ὥστε μετὰ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου νίκης τῆς αὐτόθι καὶ ταύτην ὑμνεῖσθαι), and he also formed the plan of setting foot on all the other territories of which the Persian Empire is composed and upon the adjacent

countries too [...] (261) and he began to extend his view even to Hyrcania and the rivers of India.

Libanius' Julian appears as a follower in the footsteps of Alexander: in his march eastwards, the Apostate wants to pass through Arbela (Gaugamela), site of the Macedonian's biggest victory, in order to gain a similar glory; with the aim of rivalling his predecessor, he also plans to conquer all the Persian Empire as far as Hyrcania and the Indian River, and even the territories beyond it. The rhetorician deliberately alternates the concepts of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* and he intentionally chooses the verb ἐπιθυμέω, which not only reminds us of Alexander's unrestrained πόθος (longing), but also presents Julian as an Alexander-like figure. The Alexander-Julian likeness is reinforced towards the end of the oration (XVIII. 297), when Libanius tries to find consolation for the Emperor's demise: in fact, like other heroes – such as Leonidas, Epaminondas, Sarpedon, and Memnon – Julian had died in battle; as “Alexander, the son of Zeus”, he died young too.

Libanius' production is quite extensive; we have 64 orations, 1544 letters addressed to family members, Emperors and politicians, and erudite men;⁶³⁸ 52 *hypotheses* to the orations of Demosthenes, 51 *declamationes* about a mythological and historical topic, and 144 Προγυμνάσματα (rhetorical exercises).⁶³⁹ In the orations dedicated to Julian, Alexander the Great is presented as a symbol of tolerance, of fine knowledge, and of a skilful generalship. Libanius strives to present the Macedonian as a model to the Emperor via the reworking of traditional themes, such as the conqueror's destruction of Thebes and the sparing of Pindar's house, his prowess, and his philanthropy. However, Libanius offers not only an invitation to imitate Alexander, but also “proofs” that Julian outdoes his hero, in consonance with the rhetorical canons of the praise of the Emperor.

⁶³⁸ Bradbury (2004) 19-23.

⁶³⁹ Gibson (2008) XX-XXV.

Ammianus

Ammianus Marcellinus (ca 325-395 AD) belonged to an aristocratic family of Antioch and he took pride in his Greek descent;⁶⁴⁰ however, once established in Rome in the eighties of the fourth century, he chose the Latin language to compose his historical account, which aimed at educating the Latin-speaking ruling class in the Eastern regions of the Empire.⁶⁴¹ As a soldier, he joined Julian's expedition against the Alemanni and later against the Sassanid Empire.

Ammianus planned his *Res Gestae* as a continuation of Tacitus' *Historiae*, thus covering the period starting with Nerva's accession to the throne in 96 AD up to the Battle of Adrianople in 378 AD;⁶⁴² out of the thirty-one books we possess only the last eighteen, which nevertheless provide a vivid account of the author's time. Books XIV-XXIV can be considered as a monographic record of Julian's childhood, education, and incumbency as Caesar and Emperor; the "monograph" concludes with an epitaph in his memory.

In Ammianus' *Res Gestae*, Alexander the Great appears in sixteen passages: eleven involve comparison with a famous general or politician, and five simply refer to events or places in the Balkans and in the East,⁶⁴³ making his presence continuous throughout the work. In what follows I will discuss, first, the passages that help us understand Ammianus' general interpretation of Alexander and, secondly, the narrations in which the Macedonian is put alongside Julian, as an apology of the Apostate's deeds and of the pagan Hellenic culture.

⁶⁴⁰ At XXXI. 16. 9 Ammianus defines himself as *Graeculus et miles*.

⁶⁴¹ Ammianus, XXI. 12. 24; XXVII. 3. 3 and 9. 8. Zecchini (2007) 218.

⁶⁴² For the style and the models of Ammianus' *Res Gestae*, see Pauw (1979) 115-129.

⁶⁴³ In XIV. 8. 6 Alexander III is quoted, but the passage focuses on Seleucus, one of his successors; XXII. 8. 40 contains a digression on Thrace and the Pontus Euxinus. Close to the river Dnieper, there were two *stelae*, one erected in honour of Alexander the Great, the other of Caesar Augustus; XXII. 11. 6 is about Alexandria of Egypt; at XXIII. 6. 2-3, Alexander constitutes the chronological point of reference, but the main topic is Arsaces, the founder of the Parthian Empire. XXVI. 8. 15: Alexander quoted in reference to Issus. For the other passages, see below.

Res Gestae XIV. 11. 22: Alexander and Gallus

He [Gallus] being filled with a paleness like that of Adrastus, was only able to say that he had put most of them to death at the instigation of his wife Constantina; being certainly ignorant that, when Alexander the Great's mother urged him to put to death someone who was innocent, and in the hope of achieving thereafter what she wanted, repeated to him often that she had borne him nine months in her womb, the Macedonian had prudently replied in this way (*Alexandrum Magnum urgenti matri [...] ita respondisse prudenter*): "My excellent mother, ask for some other reward; for the life of a man cannot be put in the balance with any kind of service".⁶⁴⁴

In this passage, Alexander is presented as a philosopher king, who does not let his emotions interfere with politics and cares about being a just ruler; his image is used to blame Gallus for his inability to control his own passions and to restrain his wife Constantina's whims.

For the creation of the image of philosopher-like Alexander, Ammianus is using two tropes: the Macedonian's strong bond to his mother Olympias, highlighted by the Alexander-historians on several occasions, and the king's fairness and clemency, a picture much promoted in Ptolemy and Aristobulus' accounts.⁶⁴⁵

Res Gestae XV. 1. 4: Alexander and Constantius II

For even if he [Constantius] had under his power the infinities of worlds fancied by Democritus, as Alexander the Great, under the promptings of Anaxarchus, did fancy (*Anaxarcho incitante magnus somniabat Alexander*), yet either by reading, or by hearing others speak, he might have considered that – as mathematicians unanimously agree – the circumference of the whole earth, immense as it seems to us, is nevertheless not bigger than a pin's point as compared with the greatness of the Universe.

⁶⁴⁴ All the translations of Ammianus' *Res Gestae* included in this chapter are excerpted from, or based on Rolfe (1939-1950).

⁶⁴⁵ See above, chapter five, *Ptolemy's Alexander*.

In XV. 1. 3, Ammianus states that Constantius II had become so used to his courtiers' flattery, that he started referring to himself as the "world ruler" (*ipse dictando scribendoque propria manu orbis totius se dominum appellaret*). In XV. 1. 4 the historian blames the Emperor for his vanity and superficiality, having not considered that even if he was indeed the world ruler, the Earth is just a drop in the ocean when compared to the infinite Universe.

In the comparison between Alexander and Constantius, Ammianus plays on a reversal of images: in fact, they both desired to be recognized as world rulers, but the former is prompted by Anaxarchus, a philosopher, while the latter's desire is based on actual lack of knowledge, since he had not listened to the mathematicians of his time, already aware of the infinity of the Universe. However, the Macedonian king is not spotless: in fact, he trusts Anaxarchus, whom the Alexander-historians remembered as the epitome of the flatterer.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, in this passage the historian uses Alexander to strengthen his critique against the ruler's excessive greed and vanity.

Res Gestae XVIII. 3. 7: Alexander and the general Barbatio

[Barbatio] being surely ignorant of the wise old saying of Aristotle,⁶⁴⁷ who, when he sent his pupil and relative Callisthenes to the King Alexander, warned him to say as little as he could – and only of a pleasant kind – before a man who carried the power of life and death on the tip of his tongue.

Chapter 3 of book XVIII is characterised by gloomy tones which shed a negative light on the whole imperial environment. Barbatio, commander of the infantry in Gaul, tried to undermine Julian's authority and Ammianus leaves us a very negative portrait of him: rude and arrogant, he is said to be a treacherous man hated by all respectable people. Barbatio and his wife Assyria's imprudence and continuous intrigues lead them to their cruel end: Constantius had both of them beheaded.

⁶⁴⁶ Plu. *Alex.* 52-55; Arr. *An.* IV. 9. 9-11.

⁶⁴⁷ Callisthenes, *BNJ / FGrH* 126, T 6 (= D. L., *Lives of Philosophers*, V. 4-5).

The wicked general's insolence and execution prompt a parallel with Callisthenes, who, famous for his excessive outspokenness,⁶⁴⁸ was put to death by Alexander after the accusations of having instigated the Royal Pages to murder their king. The main target of Ammianus' critique is Barbatio; however, the Macedonian also appears as a negative model: he is Constantius' counterpart and represents the essence of monarchic rule, a system which corrupts people. Furthermore, Callisthenes' death in 328 BC was immediately perceived as the end of freedom of speech at the Macedonian court. Thus, Ammianus' Alexander is not always good: he is the greatest Greek hero and, as a military leader, a useful foil to Julian, but he does not represent perfection.

Res Gestae XXIII. 6. 8 and 22: Alexander and the Persian Kings

(8) After him, when Darius, and subsequently Xerxes, changed the use of the elements and invaded Greece, they had nearly all their forces destroyed by land and sea, and could scarcely escape in safety themselves. I say nothing of the wars of Alexander, and of his leaving the sovereignty over the whole nation by will to his successor (*ut bella praetereamus Alexandrina et testamento nationem omnem in successoris unius*).

(22) In this district of Adiabene is the city of Nineveh, named after Ninus, a very mighty sovereign of former times, and the husband of Semiramis, who was formerly queen of Persia, and also the cities of Ecbatana, Arbela, and Gaugamela, where Alexander, after several other battles, gave the crowning defeat to Darius (*et Gaugamela, ubi Dareum Alexander [...] prostravit*).

In his "Persian logos", Ammianus describes the eighteen greater provinces of the Persian Empire, explaining their strength and peculiarities, and the various customs of their different inhabitants. At paragraph 8, after making a quick mention of the deeds of Cyrus, of Darius I, and of Xerxes, the historian highlights Alexander III's superiority in leadership and in the battlefield through the use of *paraleipsis*, a pretended omission

⁶⁴⁸ Callisthenes, *BNJ / FGtH* 126, T 6: παρρησιαστικώτερον λαλοῦντα τῷ βασιλεῖ. See also T 1 (= *Suda*, Callisthenes), in which the Alexander-historian is characterised as "impulsive".

for rhetorical effects: in fact, by “refusing” to describe the Macedonian’s great actions, he gives them more importance. Furthermore, at paragraph 22, the historian remembers Alexander alongside Ninus and Semiramis, two legendary Assyrian rulers, thus adding to his continuous praise.

It is worth noticing that Ammianus genuinely believes that Seleucus was the successor chosen by the Macedonian conqueror, as he maintains also in XIV. 8. 6.

Res Gestae XXVIII. 4. 18: Alexander and the Roman senators

Some of them, if they have gone any distance to see their estates in the country, or to hunt at a meeting collected for their amusement by the labours of the others, think they have equalled the marches of Alexander the Great or of Caesar (*Alexandri Magni itinera se putant aequiperasse vel Caesaris*).

Ammianus, with the aim of blaming the corruption and the softness of people and senate in Rome, ironically puts them alongside two great personalities: Alexander, a model of generalship since the period of the late Republic, when Rome started to look eastwards,⁶⁴⁹ and Caesar, one of the strongest politicians and military leaders in Roman history. The historian is working within a set of rhetorical tropes: in fact, when orators of the imperial age wanted to praise a battle-victory, the parallel to Alexander was one of the most common;⁶⁵⁰ furthermore, after Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* the doublet Alexander-Caesar was a well-established literary one. But Ammianus exploits the trope ironically: the two glorious generals, praised for their *itinera*, i. e. the admirable marching speed and explorations in the East and the invasions of Britain (in 55 and 54 BC) respectively,⁶⁵¹ are paralleled to Roman senators, who ridiculously consider themselves as new Alexanders and Caesars, but are too soft even for their safe walks in their estates, or for watching their slaves hunting.

⁶⁴⁹ D. Spencer (2002) 189-190.

⁶⁵⁰ Caligula, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and the Severi all looked to Alexander as a model to imitate. See André (1990) 11-24; Blázquez (1990) 25-36; Nenci (1992) 183.

⁶⁵¹ See also Zecchini (2007) 207.

[...] Papirius Cursor brought to an end the long and difficult wars of his fathers and he was considered the only man capable of resisting Alexander the Great, if he had set foot on Italian soil (*solus ad resistendum aptus Alexandro Magno, si calcasset Italiam, aestimatus*).

Lucius Papirius Cursor was a successful Roman general who lived in the second half of the fourth century BC; he became consul five times and twice dictator, playing a decisive role in the second Samnite War (326-304 BC).⁶⁵² Papirius is remembered for his discipline and bravery in battle, for his bodily strength, and for his swiftness of foot, thence his *cognomen* "Cursor".⁶⁵³ In book IX of the *Ab Urbe Condita*, Livy claims that, had Alexander come back from the Persian campaign and had he waged war against Italy, he would have found in Papirius Cursor an equally strong adversary⁶⁵⁴ – giving testimony of an idea which was diffused in Roman culture. Ammianus is more cautious: he reports the well-known story, but he limits Papirius' chance of success by adding the participle *aestimatus*. In fact, in several passages of his historical work, the historian reshapes Alexander to build the image of an invincible general and he definitively considers him as one of the best historical paradigms with which he is able to provide Julian, "his hero".⁶⁵⁵

In the *Res Gestae*, of the thirty-two historical and mythological examples excerpted from the Hellenic, Roman, and the Near Eastern world, as many as sixteen are dedicated to Alexander, clearly marking his importance.⁶⁵⁶ Ammianus' Alexander is presented as a just ruler, who leaves aside his passions and acknowledges his subjects' rights; he is a philosopher-king who cares little about luxuries and who respects other cultures; lastly, he is the epitome of the experienced general, who defeated the powerful Persian Empire. However, the Macedonian is criticised in regards to his treatment of Callisthenes and his trust in Anaxarchus, as in these two instances he

⁶⁵² See Livy, IX. 16.

⁶⁵³ Ps. Aur. Vict., *De Viris Illustribus Urbis Romae*, III. 31. 1: *a velocitate Cursor*.

⁶⁵⁴ Livy, IX. 16. 19: *eum parem destinant animis magno Alexandro ducem*.

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. Lomas Salmonte (1990) 309-327; Smith (1999) 95-96; Zecchini (2007) 216.

⁶⁵⁶ Zecchini (2007) 202.

embodies the nature of monarchic rule, a system which both corrupts the ruler and deprives subjects of their freedom of speech. Notwithstanding his limits as absolute ruler, Alexander remains Ammianus' ideal leader, an appealing model to justify Julian's actions before his readers: in fact, in his historical account the Apostate is portrayed as a talented general in Gaul, a generous and thrifty ruler, and a lover of literature and philosophy; his only weaknesses are his anger and his excessive superstition. Alexander and Julian made a perfect match in Ammianus' mind and in the *Res Gestae* we find four parallels between the two heroes, which all deal with their stunning generalship and generosity, and all take place in a military context.

Res Gestae XVI. 5. 4-5: Julian and Alexander's sleeping habits

(4) Hereupon arose his [Julian's] custom of dividing his nights into three portions (*noctes ad officia divideret tripartita*), one of which he allotted to rest, one to the affairs of the state, and one to the study of literature; and we read that Alexander the Great had been accustomed to do the same, though he practised the rule with less self-reliance (*quod factitasse Alexandrum legimus Magnum; sed multo hic fortius*). For Alexander, having placed a brazen shell on the ground beneath him, used to hold a silver ball in his hand, which he kept stretched outside his bed, so that when sleep pervading his whole body had relaxed the rigour of his muscles, the rattling of the ball falling might banish slumber from his eyes. (5) But Julian, without any instrument, awoke whenever he pleased; and always rising when the night was but half spent, and that not from a bed of feathers, or silken cover-lets shining with varied brilliancy, but from a rough blanket or rug, he would secretly offer his supplications to Mercury, who, as the theological lessons which he had received had taught him, was the swift intelligence of the world, exciting the different emotions of the mind. And thus, removed from all external circumstances calculated to distract his attention, he gave his whole attention to the affairs of the republic.

In the first comparison drawn between the two heroes, Ammianus claims that, similarly to the Macedonian conqueror, Julian had the habit of dividing his night into three parts, so that he could have a short rest and afterwards dedicate himself to

public affairs and the study of literature. The Apostate appears as a highly committed ruler, who denies himself pleasures and luxuries, in order to serve his empire and broaden his knowledge.

As the verb *legimus* suggests, Ammianus is reworking literary tropes on Alexander's self-control⁶⁵⁷ in order to praise his beloved Emperor, for in the comparison Julian appears as a general more scrupulous and virtuous than Alexander. In fact, the Apostate did not need any device to wake up⁶⁵⁸ – having full control of his body – and he did not sleep on a rich bed, as Alexander did, but wrapped in a simple rug. As customary in panegyrics of the imperial time, an Emperor is always a better version of his model-hero.

Res Gestae XXI. 8. 3: Julian and Alexander's division of the army

To prevent this, he took prudent precautions, and distributing his army into divisions, he sent some under Jovenius and Jovius to advance with all speed by the well-trodden roads of Italy; others under the command of Nevitta, the commander of the cavalry, were to take the inland road of the Tyrol, so that his army, by being scattered over various countries, might cause a belief that its numbers were immense, and might fill all nations with fear. Alexander the Great, and many other skilful generals, had done the same thing when their affairs required it (*id enim et Alexander Magnus et deinde alii plures negotio ita poscente periti fecere ductores*).⁶⁵⁹

Ammianus narrates how Julian, afraid that the populace would oppose to his plan to march against Constantius because of his small retinue in Gaul, decided to divide his army into three groups and to spread it, so that it would appear bigger. The Apostate appears as a worthy military leader, provided with the ability to take quick decisions,

⁶⁵⁷ Cf., e. g., Plu. *Alex.* 22: Alexander refusing the pleasures arisen from sexual intercourse, sleep, and food.

⁶⁵⁸ See also Plu. *Alex.* 32. 1; Curt. IV. 13. 20-21: before the battle of Gaugamela Alexander overslept and was woken up by Parmenio or, according to Diodorus (XVII. 56. 3), by some close friends.

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. AR (β) II. 23: Alexander tricks the Persian army at Issus, having tied torches to some goats' horns so that the Macedonian army would appear much bigger from afar.

and in line with the deeds and thoughts of many other famous generals. These numerous examples of valorous leaders are withheld, and the historian contents himself with the simple expression *alii plures*, whereas all the light is cast on Alexander, who, as a result, represents the epitome of the *peritus dux*.

Res Gestae XXIV. 4. 26-27:

(26) But Nabdates, the captain of the [Parthian] garrison, was taken alive with eighty of his guards; and when he was brought before the Emperor, that magnanimous and merciful prince ordered him to be kept in safety. The booty was divided according to a fair estimate of the merits and labours of the troops. The Emperor, who was contented with very little, took for his own share of the victory he had thus gained three pieces of gold and a dumb child who was brought to him, and who by elegant signs and gesticulations explained all he knew, and considered that an acceptable and sufficient prize. (27) But of the virgins who were taken prisoners, and who, as was likely in Persia, where female beauty is remarkable, were exceedingly beautiful, he would neither touch nor even see one (*ex virginibus autem, quae speciosae sunt captae ut in Perside, ubi feminarum pulcritudo excellit, nec contrectare aliquam voluit nec videre*); imitating Alexander and Scipio (*Alexandrum imitatus et Africanum*), who refused similar opportunities, in order, after having proved themselves unconquered by toil, not to show themselves the victims of desire.

After the capture of the important stronghold of Maiozamalcha in Mesopotamia, Julian is described in a highly encomiastic fashion: he is the clement king who not only spares his enemies, but he also treats them justly; he is the righteous commander who divides the booty according to the soldiers' merits, and who takes only a little share in it, providing everyone with an example of virtue. Ammianus ends the praise with another historiographical *topos*: Persian women's exceptional beauty, which gives him the opportunity to bring forth a parallel with Alexander, famous for having treated with utmost tact Darius III's mother and sister, allowing them to keep their regal status.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁶⁰ For Alexander's treatment of Persian women, see also chapter seven, the *Herodotean Alexander*. The Macedonian's gentleness and self-restraint towards female captives is praised by all the Alexander-

In this extract, for the first time Julian is not simply put alongside Alexander, but he is also said to be voluntarily imitating the Macedonian together with Scipio, also famous for his chastity in the cultural background of the Roman Empire. It is in fact likely that Julian, having to face the Persians, is looking himself for inspiring models taken from both Greek and Roman history to create his desired public image.

Res Gestae XXV. 4. 15:

Of [Julian's] liberality there are many and undoubted proofs. Among which are his light exactions of tribute, his remission of the tribute of crowns, and of debts long due, [...] and also the fact that he was never covetous of money, which he thought was better kept by its owners, often quoting the saying that Alexander the Great, when he was asked where he kept his treasures, kindly answered "Among my friends" (*praedicans Alexandrum Magnum, ubi haberet thesauros interrogatum, "apud amicos" benivole respondisse*).⁶⁶¹

On many occasions Ammianus presents Julian as the epitome of the liberal and the righteous king, who treats his subjects lawfully and is not interested in gathering immense riches for himself; for example, as seen above, he is said to be sleeping wrapped in a rug or to be taking a little share in the booty after a victory.⁶⁶² This paragraph is excerpted from the historian's *Obituary of Julian*, in which is offered an emotional – and overall positive – description of the Emperor's merits and defects, and of his bodily features. His frugality and generosity are here highlighted once more by Ammianus, who states that the Emperor himself was following in the footsteps of Alexander III, the epitome of liberality.⁶⁶³

It is impossible to tell whether Julian indeed imitated Alexander in his parsimony and repeated the sentence "apud amicos"; it is however striking that there

historians: cf. D. S. XVII. 37. 3-4; Plu. *Alex.* 21. 1-6; Arr. *An.* II. 12. 3-6; Curt. III. 12. 2-12; Justin, XI. 9. 12-16. Cf. also Plu. *Alex.* 21. 7-9: Alexander did not touch any woman – except for Barsine – before his marriage.

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 15. 4.

⁶⁶² Cf. Smith (2011) 69, fn. 85.

⁶⁶³ The *topos* of Alexander the Great looking at his friends as his treasures recurs in Libanius as well; see Lib., Προγυμνάσματα, χρεῖται α'. 1-4 and *Or.* VIII. 8-9.

is no evidence of this saying in the Apostate's own writings, an absence which points at Ammianus' deliberate exploitation of the literary trope to improve Julian's image of wise king.

To conclude this section, of the four passages which offer a comparison between Alexander and Julian, in the first two Ammianus reworks freely the historiographical tropes of Alexander's restlessness and military skills to present the Apostate as the perfect leader of the state and in the battlefield. In the last two, the historian suggests that the parallels were drawn because of Julian's eagerness to imitate Alexander, although it is more likely that these comparisons were the fruit of Ammianus' own adoption of story-telling patterns, since the Macedonian's liberality and respect for Persian women were literary *topoi* already exploited by the Alexander-historians and there is no supporting evidence of the Apostate's desire to imitate Alexander's frugality or clemency in his own writings.

Eunapius

Born in Sardis in 349 AD, Eunapius was a sophist and worked as a teacher of rhetoric in his hometown until his death after 404 AD. Influenced by his philosophical studies in Athens during his youth, Eunapius wrote the *Lives of the Sophists* in 395 AD, and he also undertook the composition of an extensive historical account, entitled *Universal History*, in order to continue the *Chronicle* of the Greek historian Dexippus (210-273 AD). Unfortunately, his two works survived only in fragments, but we can still reconstruct safely the structure of his historical account, which did not consist of pure chronology, but provided the reader with a didactic narrative of the qualities and the actions of influential men. Christian authors such as Socrates, Philostorgius and Sozomen became interested in Eunapius' writings and quoted him several times, and Zosimus relied especially on him for his *New History*. Of the planned thirteen books of the *Universal History*, four were dedicated to Julian, three to the period from the elevation of Valentinian I to the defeat of Adrianopole (378), and six to the years 379-404.⁶⁶⁴

As a classicizing historian and a fervent admirer of the pagan culture, Eunapius leaves us a panegyric and supportive representation of Julian's rule. The historian

⁶⁶⁴ For Eunapius' life and works, see Blockley (1981) 1-26; Treadgold (2010) 81-89.

portrays the Apostate as the perfect king or, as he states in fr. 10, “the true king”.⁶⁶⁵ Eunapius’ Julian embraces all the qualities of a skilled general, such as bravery, strength, speed of action, and foresight; and of a just ruler: he is an emblem of fairness, clemency, and affability. In his praise, the historian goes as far as stating that Julian did not accept acceding to the throne because he aspired to become Emperor, but because he had understood that mankind needed him.⁶⁶⁶

It is said that in his letters Julian calls the god Helios his own father, not as Alexander talks misleadingly (Ὅτι ὁ Ἰουλιανὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς ἴδιον [πατέρα addit Mai.] ἀνακαλεῖ τὸν ἥλιον, οὐχ ὡσπερ Ἀλέξανδρος διαβάλλεται) towards Hera saying that Olympias, having conceived him with Zeus, did not conceal it; but he (Julian), raised on the evidence of the god (ἐπὶ ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ μαρτυρίαις), is brought to Plato, as his Socrates says: “We are with Zeus, the others with another of the gods” (ὡσπερ ὁ ἐκείνου Σωκράτης φησί, “Μετὰ μὲν Διὸς ἡμεῖς, ἄλλοι δὲ μετ’ ἄλλου του θεῶν”).

In this passage (*FHG* IV, F 24), Alexander III and Julian are placed alongside each other for their similar claim to divine ancestry. However, from Eunapius’ perspective, Julian is not only better than Alexander, but also *different*, as the two claims do not have to be confused: the Macedonian’s descent from Zeus sounds ridiculous and hubristic even to his mother Olympias, while the Emperor’s divine lineage is backed by Plato and Socrates and philosophically proved.

Eunapius’ praise of Julian deviates from the ostentatious flattery typical of the panegyrics of the Imperial age: in his mind the Apostate genuinely represents the “true king who will save mankind”, who is more worthy than everyone else. In fact, the rhetorician was just a child during Julian’s rule and he started his historical account at a later stage, only driven by sincere sympathy and because he was convinced that the Apostate’s actions should not be forgotten.

⁶⁶⁵ Eunapius, *FHG* IV, F 10: τὸν ὄντως βασιλέα.

⁶⁶⁶ Eunapius, *FHG* IV, F 23.

We possess very scanty information on Socrates' life and personality but, from his writings, we can presume that he was born in Constantinople around 380 AD and that he died after 439 AD, the last year treated in his work. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (a church history in seven books), Socrates intends to continue Eusebius of Caesarea's work, and he focuses particularly on the religious and secular conflicts which characterised the fourth and fifth centuries.⁶⁶⁷

In book III, Socrates busies himself with the account of Julian's life, character, and religious and philosophical development, framing it with the descriptions of the heresies and problems that the Church had to face at that time. Therefore, the Apostate is portrayed as a bad and gullible person instead of a kind philosopher-Emperor, and the historian's negative judgement on Julian's actions finds its utmost expression in the description of his alleged blind emulation of Alexander the Great:⁶⁶⁸

(4) Having invested the great city of Ctesiphon, he (Julian) reduced the king of the Persians to such straits that the latter sent repeated embassies to the Emperor, offering to surrender a portion of his dominions, on condition of his quitting the country, and putting an end to the war. (5) But Julian was unaffected by these submissions and showed no compassion to a suppliant foe, nor did he think of the old saying: "To conquer is honourable, but to be more than conqueror gives occasion for envy". (6) Giving credit to the divinations of the philosopher Maximus, with whom he was in continuous intercourse, he was deluded into the belief that his exploits would not only equal, but exceed those of Alexander of Macedon (ὄνειροπολήσας τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνοϋ δόξαν λαβεῖν ἢ καὶ μᾶλλον ὑπερβαίνειν); so that he spurned with contempt the entreaties of the Persian monarch. (7) He even supposed in accordance with the teachings of Pythagoras and Plato on the transmission of souls, that he was possessed of Alexander's soul, or rather that he himself was Alexander in another body (Καὶ <γὰρ> ἐνόμιζε κατὰ τὴν Πυθαγόρου καὶ

⁶⁶⁷ Rohrbacher (2002) 108-116.

⁶⁶⁸ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III. 21. 4-7. See Dodgeon, Lieu (1991) 267.

Πλάτωνος δόξαν ἐκ μετενσωματώσεως τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔχειν ψυχὴν, μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτὸς εἶναι Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν ἑτέρῳ σώματι).

In this passage, Julian emerges as an extremely ambitious and impious conqueror, with no compassion for the suppliant Persian King. The historian seems to suggest that Julian rejects the Persian King's offers as he wishes to imitate Alexander's refusal of Darius' gifts and *philia* after the battle of Issus.⁶⁶⁹ Interestingly, Socrates' Julian is the exact reverse of the fourth-century theologian Gregory Nazianzus' Alexander, as described in his first oration written against Julian:⁶⁷⁰ not only did the Macedonian spare Porus' life, but he also bestowed on him the Indian kingdom. This may be a cross reference: according to the two Christian authors, Julian is a harsh ruler whose mind has been obfuscated by a too naïve approach to the pagan philosophy of Maximus, Pythagoras, and Plato. Thus, Julian's alleged *imitatio Alexandri* and belief that he was a New Alexander are to be understood as the product of hostile Christian propaganda which aims at ridiculing him for his lack of wisdom and morally disapproving of his paganism.⁶⁷¹

Philostorgius

Philostorgius (368-433 AD) was a Byzantine historian from Berissus in Cappadocia; as a representative of Arianism – a Christian heresy flourished at the beginning of the fourth century – he was particularly interested in the theological controversies of the early Church, which he vividly described in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Philostorgius' history was intended to continue Eusebius of Caesarea's work but, in reality, it constitutes an apology for Arianism. It survived only in fragments, which we find mostly in Photius' *Bibliotheca*, a ninth-century digest of Greek prose literature, and in a small book, entitled *The Passio Sancti Artemii (Passion of Saint Artemius)*, credited to John, a monk of Rhodes who lived during the eighth or ninth century. *The Passion of St*

⁶⁶⁹ Arr. An. II. 25.

⁶⁷⁰ Gregorius Nazianzus, *Contra Julianum Imperatorem* I. 21: ἢ μοι δοκεῖ καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος θαρρήσας ὁ πάνυ δοῦναι μὴ μόνον τὸ ζῆν ἠττημένῳ Πύρῳ [...], ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐθις Ἰνδῶν.

⁶⁷¹ Julian surely admired Alexander, but his model was Trajan, as he wished to obtain the name *Parthicus* with his Eastern campaign: see Ammianus, XXII. 12. 2; Tougher (2007) 64.

Artemius deals with the martyrdom that Julian inflicted to the Saint and includes two of Philostorgius' comparisons between the Apostate and Alexander III:

Philostorgius, *E. H.* VII. 4c = *AP* 24

As for the Emperor Julian, he stayed in Constantinople for some time longer, strengthening in it what he thought would most benefit the realm and planning and labouring to make Hellenism (paganism) rise to greater heights (ὅπως ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸ μεγαλειότερον ἐξαρθῆ σκοπῶν). He then left Constantinople and with the whole army took the road to Syria. [...] Passing over Taurus, as it is called, he came to the cities of Cilicia, and drawing near to the way station in Issus, he camped there, following the example of Alexander of Macedonia (ἐν Ἰσσοῦ, αὐτοῦ κατασκηνοῦ, τὸν ἐκ Μακεδονίας Ἀλέξανδρον μμησάμενος). For he too had waged war there in Issus with the Persian King Darius and had made the place famous by defeating him.⁶⁷²

Philostorgius, *E. H.* VII. 15a = *AP* 69

Julian departed from Antioch with his entire army and made his way to the land of Persia. And having captured the city of Ctesiphon, he decided to proceed from that one great deed to others greater still. But the utterly abominable man did not realise how deluded he was. For he had conceived a diabolical passion for idolatry and hoped that through his godless gods he would have a long reign and become a new Alexander (ἔλαθεν δὲ ἑαυτὸν ἐξαπατηθεὶς ὁ παμμίαρος· ἔρωτα γὰρ διαβολικὸν τῆς εἰδωλομανίας ἐγκτησάμενος καὶ ἐλπίσας διὰ μὲν τῶν ἀθέων θεῶν αὐτοῦ πολυχρόνιον τὴν βασιλείαν ἔξειν καὶ νέον γενέσθαι Ἀλέξανδρον); he also hoped to be superior to the Persians and to wipe out the race and name of Christians for good, but he failed of his overweening purpose.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷² Cf. *Lib. Or.* XVIII. 260-261: Julian passing through Arbela in order to imitate Alexander (see above).

⁶⁷³ Cf. Philostorgius' attack against Julian's paganism with Cavafy's poem at the beginning of this chapter: the Apostate is accused of stupidity for his revival of the Ancient Greek gods and for his plan to annihilate Christianity.

Since the time of Pompey the Great, the comparison with Alexander had become a standard literary trope for glorifying every Roman campaigning in the East against the *Persians* – be they the Parthians and the Sassanids.⁶⁷⁴ However, in consonance with Socrates Scholasticus, Philostorgius compares Julian to the Macedonian conqueror in order to ridicule his military and political leadership. The real target of his lampoon is Julian's religious policy against the Christians, and an easy way to dismiss bluntly the Emperor was to represent him as a mindless person, who follows blindly in Alexander's footsteps without understanding that he lacks the Macedonian's military skills, and that his vain gods are not enough to make of him a New Alexander.

Julian's Alexander

Panegyric reasons, story-telling patterns or Christian religious attacks led the fourth-century writers and the fifth-century Church historians to create an Alexander-like Julian. Since the Hellenistic period the king of Macedon had been a fruitful treasure-trove of examples for philosophical discussion of political systems, of the perfect monarch's virtues, and of the relationships between Greeks and barbarians. In this debate, Alexander became the epitome of the philosopher-king, but also of the ruthless tyrant: philosophical schools focused on different aspects of the Macedonian's personality and generalship, and, for this reason, Alexander was considered at the same time an extremely good and an utterly negative paradigm to follow, a double-edged sword. During the Republican period the Romans had already understood the powerful but risky potential of being likened to Alexander; however, his glamour as an invincible conqueror was too strong, and various Roman generals and Emperors going on a campaign against the Parthians in the East were likened to, or strove to be deemed as worthy as, the Macedonian. Julian, encompassing the Helleno-Roman tradition and preparing a campaign in the East, could not escape the comparison with Alexander; certainly he felt compelled to compete with the model – and probably he also tried to find inspiring values and teachings in the Macedonian campaign against Darius III – but undoubtedly he was far from believing himself to be a reincarnation of

⁶⁷⁴ See above, fn. 649 and 650.

Alexander or from worshipping him.⁶⁷⁵ In fact, although it is impossible to construct a coherent image of Alexander by reading Julian's own writings, on many occasions he emerges as a negative ruler.

At chapter 41C of the first panegyric to Constantius II,⁶⁷⁶ written by the Apostate in 355 before his departure to Gaul, Alexander III is portrayed as a *μειράκιον*, an immature stripling, who is disrespectful and jealous of his father Philip II's exploits,⁶⁷⁷ whereas Constantius is praised for his filial love towards his parents. The passage is rhetorical: parental love was held in particularly high esteem in the Roman world – where the *Pater Familias* had an indisputable leading role in the household – and it served Julian's pretence of appreciation for the cruel Emperor who had exterminated his family. Furthermore, Alexander's characterisation as *meirakion* reminds us of Demosthes' lampoon when the young Macedonian succeeded his father to the throne in 336 BC at the age of twenty and moved towards Thebes the year after;⁶⁷⁸ the Macedonian's childish behaviour is also hinted in 17C, when the *arche* of Persia is reduced to a toy (*παίγνιον*) for satisfying his generalship.

In the passage 45D-46A of the same oration, the Apostate uses Alexander for a second time in order to stress Constantius' temperance and paternal love:

It is said that Alexander, son of Philip, after having overthrown the Persian empire, not only adopted a more ostentatious mode of life and an insolence of manners obnoxious to all (*λίαν ἐπαχθῆ τοῖς πᾶσιν ὑπεροψίαν*), but went so far as to despise the father who begat him (*τοῦ φύσαντος ὑπερορᾶν*), and indeed the whole human nature. For he claimed to be regarded as the son of Ammon instead of the son of Philip, and when some of his comrades wished to be neither flattering nor his slaves, he punished them more harshly than the prisoners of war.

⁶⁷⁵ *Contra*, Athanassiadi-Fowden (2001) 273-274 speaks of Julian's voluntary imitation of Alexander (*μίμησις Ἀλεξάνδρου*) and of Alexandrolatry (*λατρεία του Μακεδόνα*).

⁶⁷⁶ Wright (1913) I. *Or.* I: Ἰουλιανοῦ Καίσαρος ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν Ἀυτοκράτορα Κωνσταντῖον. All the translations of Julian's works included in this chapter are excerpted from, or based on Wright.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 5. 4.

⁶⁷⁸ Plu. *Alex.* 11. 3: Δημοσθένης παῖδα μὲν αὐτὸν, ἕως ἦν ἐν Ἰλλυριοῖς καὶ Τριβαλλοῖς, ἀποκαλοῦντι, μειράκιον δὲ περὶ Θετταλίαν γενόμενον.

Not only is Alexander blamed for his lack of respect towards his father and his ridiculous claims of divinity, but he is also portrayed as a cruel tyrant who deprived his soldiers of free will and freedom of speech. Constantius is presented as the Macedonian's exact reverse, as he duly shows respect and reverence to his father. Alexander's negative portrayal aims at offering a kind prompt to Constantius II – renown for his excesses and cruelty – to be moderate.

In the second panegyric dedicated to Constantius,⁶⁷⁹ the Emperor is even said to have surpassed Alexander in military skills (73AD): the triumph over the general Vetrico for power is paralleled to the Macedonian's siege of the Sogdian Rock, a military action that cost him many men.

In the *Letter to the philosopher Themistius*⁶⁸⁰ Julian tries to explain his distress regarding the call to the role of Caesar, as he knows that big empires are an ephemeral and dangerous political system. He claims that this appointment is a burden to him: he feels in fact more a Socrates-like figure than a New Alexander, and he prefers contemplative life amongst his books rather than active political life.

(264CD) For me, I say that the son of Sophroniscus (Socrates) has done more than Alexander (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν Ἀλεξάνδρου φημὶ μείζονα τὸν Σωφρονίσκου κατεργάσασθαι). It is to him that we owe the wisdom of Plato, Xenophon's strategic talent [...] and ten thousand others not to mention all the offshoots from the same school, the Lyceum, the Stoa, and the Academies. Who, I ask, has ever found salvation in the conquests of Alexander? What city is better governed because of them? What individual became a better man? You will find [the Persian campaign] has enriched many people, but it has made no one or more temperate, or wiser, not even himself (Alexander); it actually only increased his insolence and pride (σωφρονέστερον [οὐδὲ] αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ καὶ μᾶλλον ἀλαζόνα καὶ ὑπερόπτην). All those, however, who found salvation in philosophy, they owe their salvation to Socrates.

⁶⁷⁹ Wright (1913) I. *Or.* II: Ἰουλιανοῦ Καίσαρος περὶ τοῦ Ἄυτοκράτορος πράξεων ἢ περὶ βασιλείας.

⁶⁸⁰ Wright (1913) vol. II. Cf. Negri (1954) 392-393: Apparently Themistius sent a dry reply to Julian, reminding him of his duties as a Caesar. Julian responded to this letter stating that he feared that he was not a good match for Alexander's courage and Marcus Aurelius' virtue.

In this passage, not only does Julian express harsh comments on Alexander, highlighting his pride and insolence, but he also distances himself, saying that he is following in Socrates' footsteps, feeling more adapted to a philosophical contemplative life than to a public, politically active one. Such harsh remarks on the Macedonian's conduct were probably the fruit of Julian's genuine concerns about monarchic rule, as the passage is excerpted from an epistolary exchange that he had with Themistius, a philosopher whom he held in high esteem, and it is therefore a reflection of his personal thoughts.⁶⁸¹

Julian's oration VI, entitled *Against the uneducated Cynics*,⁶⁸² was written to rebuke those people who claimed to be acolytes of the new Cynic philosophy and dared to blame Diogenes of Sinope without having understood the principles of his philosophy of nature. In 203AB, while praising Diogenes for his simple and frugal life, he reminds his addressees – called ironically φιλοσοφώτατε, using the vocative singular as a personal warning to each one of them – of Alexander III, who appreciated much the philosopher's magnanimity:

The man [Diogenes] used to sleep in his jar on a bed of leaves more soundly than the Great King on his soft couch under a gilded roof; he used to eat his crust with a better appetite than you now eat your Sicilian courses; he used to bathe his body in cold water and dry himself in the open air instead of with the linen towel with which you rub yourself down, my most philosophic friend! It becomes you well to ridicule him because, I suppose, like Themistocles you conquered Xerxes, or Darius like Alexander of Macedon. But if you had the least habit of reading books as I do, though I am a statesman and engrossed in public affairs, you would know how much Alexander is said to have admired Diogenes' greatness of soul (ἔγνωσ ἄν ὅπως Ἀλέξανδρος ἀγασθῆναι λέγεται τὴν Διογένους μεγαλοψυχίαν). But you care little, I suppose, of any of these things.

⁶⁸¹ For Themistius' use of Alexander as a means to think about and highlight the virtues of the Roman Emperor, see Desideri (1993) 169-178. Overall, Themistius' Alexander is a positive hero, but he is often surpassed by Constantius II; similarly, Julian's Alexander can be outmatched by Greek philosophers or Roman rulers.

⁶⁸² Wright (1913) II. *Or.* VI: Ἰουλιανοῦ Ἀυτοκράτορος εἰς τοὺς ἀπαιδεύτους κύνας.

The Macedonian's image is positive for once: he is in fact proposed to the ignorant Cynics as a good paradigm of wisdom to follow; furthermore, together with Themistocles, he represents the epitome of the valorous general who fights against the Persians. Julian refers to Alexander the Great to add strength to his blame of the deceptive Neo-Cynics.

The Letter to Nilus, surnamed *Dionysus*,⁶⁸³ was written by the Apostate in Antioch during winter 362-363 AD, with the aim of rebuking this otherwise unknown person for his bad conduct. In this letter, the king of Macedon is remembered as an evil person, an appropriate hero for Nilus. Julian goes further in his lampoon and claims that Alexander's "greatness" is based on the harshness of his unscrupulous murders:

(446A) Perhaps the reason why Alexander seemed in your eyes a great man was that he cruelly murdered Callisthenes (Ἀλλ' ἴσως ἐκεῖθεν Ἀλέξανδρος ὠφθη σοι μέγας, ὅτι Καλλισθένη μὲν ἀπέκτεινε πικρῶς [...]), that Clitus fell a victim of his drunken fury, and Philotas and Parmenio too.

Alexander III appears also in the *Symposium*,⁶⁸⁴ a satirical representation of the banquet of the Olympian gods held during the festival of the *Kronia* (*Saturnalia*), to which he is invited along with the Roman Emperors.⁶⁸⁵ With this work Julian is taking the chance to judge all his predecessors and to reflect on the Roman Empire, by showing all its corruption and excesses. Very few Emperors are worthy of a good comment, among them Nerva,⁶⁸⁶ despite his old age and his short reign, and Marcus Aurelius,⁶⁸⁷ who emerges as the Apostate's model, since he is the true Philosopher-Emperor.

⁶⁸³ Julian, Letter n. 50 (= Wright, 1923, vol. III).

⁶⁸⁴ Ἰουλιανοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος Συμπόσιον ἢ Κρόνια. This work is also known under the title *the Caesars* or *Kronia*. Wright (1913) II.

⁶⁸⁵ Julian, *Caes.* 307B; 316BD.

⁶⁸⁶ Julian, *Caes.* 311AB

⁶⁸⁷ Julian, *Caes.* 317CD: "Marcus was summoned and came in looking excessively dignified and showing the effect of his studies in the expression of his eyes and his lined brows. His aspect was unutterably beautiful from the very fact that he was careless of his appearance and unadorned by art". 328: "Marcus [...] was wise also beyond the rest, because he knew when it is time to speak and when to be silent".

Among the Hellenic heroes, Alexander is singled out by Julian and he has the honour to be invited to participate in a banquet conceived exclusively for Roman Emperors; however, his representation is not entirely positive. In fact, throughout the satirical work the Macedonian is rebuked for his childish and egoistic manners,⁶⁸⁸ his stubbornness,⁶⁸⁹ his lack of patience,⁶⁹⁰ and his fondness for wine;⁶⁹¹ clearly, he does not represent a model to follow. Julian does not offer a coherent image of Alexander; instead, he fits into his satirical work some of the unsolved questions on the Macedonian's personality and career which have been topic of discussion since antiquity in rhetorical schools and are still debated by modern scholars today. Specifically, in the speech he gives in front of the gods to prove that he should be awarded the title of best hero, Caesar enumerates all the negative aspects of Alexander's personality and Persian campaign, which, curiously, are the same issues raised by his ancient and modern detractors: at 320C Alexander is in fact accused of presumptuousness and his military skills are discredited, since i) his enemy was the unworthy Darius (320C: "And pray, who was the more skilful general, Darius or Pompey?"); ii) among the Celts, he had to face the "easy to defeat" Getae (320D: "And since I have mentioned the Celts, shall we compare the exploits of Alexander against the Getae with my conquest of Gaul?"); iii) his bravado was not genuine but fruit of his flatterers (321B: "the boasts of those who embellish his exploits"). Moreover, Alexander is chastised for his tyrannical policies: he is depicted as a ruthless conqueror who showed no interest for the culture and religion of the vanquished populations, and who destroyed Thebes, burnt cities down, and murdered even his companions Philotas and Clitus, and the historian Callisthenes (321C: "Alexander only visited Egypt as a sight-seer [...] I (Caesar) forgave even my enemies, [...] But Alexander did not even spare his friends, much less his enemies; 321D: you (Alexander) treated the Thebans

⁶⁸⁸ Julian, *Caes.* 319D: Alexander almost withdrew from the contest organized by the gods at the banquet because he had to speak after Caesar and he could not accept to be second.

⁶⁸⁹ Julian, *Caes.* 330D-331A: Alexander's sophisms to prove his greatness.

⁶⁹⁰ Julian, *Caes.* 331BC: "But Dionysus interrupted him saying 'Stop, little father [Silenus], say no more, or he will treat you as he treated Clitus'".

⁶⁹¹ Julian, *Caes.* 318C: "Silenus said sardonically 'Take care, or Trajanus and Alexander will think it is nectar and drink up all the water and leave none for the others'. 'It was not my water but your vines that these two were fond of' responded Poseidon".

cruelly. You burned their cities to the ground, but I restored the cities that had been burned by their own inhabitants”).

Yet, in his speech Caesar appears as an Alexander-like figure: the description of his leap ashore from his ship before the others at 321A and of his eagerness to subdue “the invincible” at 321B remind us of Diodorus’ narration of Alexander’s crossing of the Hellespont and his declaration of Asia as spear-won land (XVII. 17), and of Plutarch’s assertion of his readiness to overcome nature.⁶⁹²

Alexander’s answer presents some of the motifs used by his supporters: i) he waged a war against the Persians for the sake of Greek freedom and Panhellenism (323D “it was on behalf of the Greeks that I took vengeance on the Persians, and when I made war on the Greeks it was not because I wished to injure Greece, but only to chastise those who tried to prevent me from marching through and from calling the Persians to account”); ii) he possessed unmatched military skills (324C-324D: “And if you think the conquest of Persia such a trifle and disparage an achievement so glorious, tell me why, after a war of more than three hundred years, you Romans have never conquered a small province beyond the Tigris which is still governed by the Parthians? [...] I, on the other hand, in less than ten years conquered not only Persia but India too”); iii) the untalented writers at his court harmed his fame more than they added glory to his actions (324D: “After that do you dare to dispute the prize with me, who from childhood have commanded armies, whose exploits have been so glorious that the memory of them – though they have not been worthily recounted by historians – will nevertheless live for ever”); iv) he followed in the footsteps of Achilles and Heracles, whom he genuinely thought of as his ancestors, and v) he died unvanquished (325A: “[my actions] will nevertheless live for ever like those of the Invincible Hero, my king, whose follower I was, on whom I modelled myself? Achilles my ancestor I strove to rival, but Heracles I ever admired and followed, so far as a mere man may follow in the footsteps of a god”).

The *Caesars* is an extremely modern piece of work and its importance lies especially in the Apostate’s demonstration that by his time Alexander was already a historiographical mirage, a treasure-trove which could lead in every direction. If we compare the ideas expressed in the *Caesars* with Julian’s military campaign in Persia, it becomes clear that, from a cultural perspective, Julian takes on board Alexander’s

⁶⁹² Plu. *Alex.* 26. 7. See also below, chapter seven, the *Herodotean Alexander*.

Hellenism and Panhellenic propaganda; however, his military actions and conduct show that he follows in the footsteps of Trajan *Parthicus*⁶⁹³ or of the philosopher Marcus Aurelius. Therefore, the Alexander-Julian doublet, which is still present and fertile in Modern Greece, should be considered as the fruit of the Byzantine Reception of both Alexander III and Julian, and not a creation of Julian himself. Their comparison was drawn to prompt the Apostate to excel, or to blame him, by showing his foolish belief of being a New Alexander.

The *Caesars* reveals that Julian considered Alexander as an ambiguous example; yet, contemporary Greeks link them together in a positive way. Alexander III is an invincible achiever and a national hero, while the Apostate, known in Modern Greece as Ιουλιανός ο Μέγας or ο Παραβάτης (Julian the Great or the Parabatēs, from the verb παραβαίνω, “to go beyond”, “to transgress”), became a national symbol not for his great deeds in battle but for his most transgressive traits against the political and religious system of the fourth century AD. As a result of his “transgressions”, people consider him another champion of Hellenicity after the Macedonian.

⁶⁹³ Murdoch (2003) 171: After Ctesiphon, Julian follows Trajan’s route: he goes toward the Tigris and then down to the Euphrates to confuse the enemy.

Chapter seven
Alexander before Alexander: moulding the Macedonian
as a Herodotean Persian King⁶⁹⁴

ὄντα φιλόκυρον
“[Alexander,] being fond of Cyrus”
Str. XI. 11. 4.

The aim of this chapter is to point out the similarities between the *Histories* of Herodotus and the account of Alexander the Great’s life as preserved in the Alexander-historians.⁶⁹⁵ These resemblances help us understand to what extent different factors, such as i) similarities among Macedonian and Persian cultures and their histories, ii) Alexander III’s genuine desire to emulate and challenge the Achaemenids or his propaganda in order to appear as a worthy heir to the Persian throne,⁶⁹⁶ iii) and myth-making and historiographical *agenda* of the Alexander-historians, contributed in the literary tradition to the Reception of Alexander not only as the *invincible* conqueror of Asia, but also as a *Herodotean* Persian King. Through the examination of a set of passages it will be argued that the *Herodotean* Alexander is the literary result of aspects of the Achaemenid royal etiquette which, after Herodotus, persisted through the centuries in the common Greek imagination,⁶⁹⁷ but also the product of the Macedonian court artists’ use of patterns of the historical narrative, which were required by the need to present the Asian campaign in a way familiar to the Greek and Roman audience.⁶⁹⁸ Ultimately, these story-telling patterns led to the creation of

⁶⁹⁴ This chapter is a development of the paper “Alexander the Great as a Herodotean Persian King” I read at the international conference “Alexander the Great and the East: History, Art, Tradition” (Wroclaw 12-14 September 2013); see Taietti (2016) 159-178.

⁶⁹⁵ My main focus are the Greek-speaking Alexander-historians, the authors contemporary with Alexander III and those belonging to the “second generation” (Diodorus, Plutarch, Arrian). For a general introduction to the Alexander-historians, see Zambrini (2007) 210-217; for Herodotus’ reception in antiquity, see Hornblower (2006) 306-318.

⁶⁹⁶ Olbrycht (2014) 39-57.

⁶⁹⁷ For Persian décor in Greek tradition, see Tuplin (1990) 19-29; cf. also Briant (1987) 1-10.

⁶⁹⁸ Flower (2006) 312; Hornblower (2006) 312-313.

“Alexander before Alexander”, of a historiographical mirage with some Herodotean traits.

The *Histories* offer a vivid portrait of the first four Persian Kings: Cyrus II the Great (ca. 550-530 BC), Cambyses II (530-522 BC), Darius I (522-486 BC), and Xerxes I (486-465 BC), covering the period from the foundation of the Achaemenid Empire to the Persian wars with Greece. Although Herodotus does not show sympathy for tyrannical governments,⁶⁹⁹ the emerging general judgment on the King of Kings and his people is quite positive.⁷⁰⁰ For example, in the Persian *logos*,⁷⁰¹ while describing their customs and “oddities” – always keeping in mind the Greek world as his reference system⁷⁰² – the historian expresses his admiration for two Persian νόμοι (customs, laws). The first concerns the upbringing of a child, which is grounded on three basic teachings: to be a good rider, an able bowman, and to tell the truth;⁷⁰³ the second regards the prohibition against administering justice arbitrarily and harming a fellow countryman for a single offence.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, Herodotus’ evaluation of the Achaemenids is not focused exclusively on bad actions, but leaves room for the good ones.⁷⁰⁵ In fact, they all make remarkable efforts to enlarge the boundaries of the empire, they demonstrate cunning, and they are πολύδωροι (generous) to their peoples. Herodotus’ general view is thus summarised in III. 89. 3: Δαρεΐος μὲν ἦν κάπηλος, Καμβύσης δὲ δεσπότης, Κῦρος δὲ πατήρ (“Darius was a shop-keeper, Cambyses a despot, Cyrus a father”). Consequently, rather than evil tyrants, the Persian Kings are portrayed as tragic figures:⁷⁰⁶ although provided with good qualities, they all fall “in the trap of ἀνάγκη, necessity”. Their excessive ambitions and the φθόνος τῶν θεῶν (the envy of the gods) are the cause of their failure;⁷⁰⁷ with their unhappy ends, they represent a model of unsuccessful expansionism.⁷⁰⁸ At the end of

⁶⁹⁹ Hdt. V. 92(α). 1. Andrewes (1956) 27, 45.

⁷⁰⁰ For Herodotus’ general judgment on the Persian Empire, see Flower (2006) 274-289.

⁷⁰¹ Hdt. I. 131 - 140.

⁷⁰² Gould (1989) 98-99; Redfield (2002) 24.

⁷⁰³ Hdt. I. 136. 2.

⁷⁰⁴ Hdt. I. 137. 1.

⁷⁰⁵ Waters (1971) 47.

⁷⁰⁶ Bichler, Rollinger (2000) 86.

⁷⁰⁷ Versnel (2011) 179-187.

⁷⁰⁸ Asheri *et al.* (2007) 36.

book I, Cyrus, the great founder of the Persian Empire, finds a gruesome and miserable death during the campaign against the Massagetae,⁷⁰⁹ for he was guilty of having crossed the river Araxes, the boundary of Asia. His son Cambyses, after having achieved the important conquest of Egypt, is not able to refrain his desires and goes mad (ἐμάνη).⁷¹⁰ The third of the Persian Kings, Darius I, is the organiser of the Empire, and prefigures with his behaviour the Machiavellian *Prince*, displaying acumen and an ability to exploit situations. Nevertheless, at last he is defeated by his immoderate power-hunger and he leads an unsuccessful campaign against the Scythians,⁷¹¹ peoples dwelling beyond the river Istros (Danube). Darius' son Xerxes is the most ambiguous of the Kings: from the beginning, he is openly presented as a tragic figure doomed to fail, fearful and unable to decide whether to carry on the Greek campaign.⁷¹² On one side, he is the utmost symbol of *hubris*,⁷¹³ capable of evil actions such as the abuse of the corpse of Leonidas⁷¹⁴ and the devastation of the acropolis of Athens;⁷¹⁵ on the other, the reader is prompted to pity him, for he is forced into a war he does not choose but inherits from his father. Furthermore, Xerxes is characterised by wisdom and good feelings as well, when at Abydus, after having looked at all his troops, he weeps sharing with Artabanus his thoughts on the brevity and the troubles of human life.⁷¹⁶ Finally, he is deemed by Herodotus worthy of his immense power because of his superior beauty and stature.⁷¹⁷

⁷⁰⁹ Hdt. I. 204-2014.

⁷¹⁰ Hdt. III. 30.

⁷¹¹ Hdt. IV. 122-142.

⁷¹² Wiesehöfer (2001) 51-54.

⁷¹³ Waters (1971) 47; Asheri *et al.* (2007) 38.

⁷¹⁴ Hdt. VII. 238.

⁷¹⁵ Hdt. VIII. 53. 2-54.

⁷¹⁶ Hdt. VII. 44-50. Flower (2006) 283.

⁷¹⁷ Hdt. VII. 187. 2: κάλλεός τε εἶνεκα καὶ μέγαθεος οὐδεις αὐτῶν ἀξιονικότερος ἦν αὐτοῦ Ξέρξω ἔχειν τοῦτο τὸ κράτος. This feeling of describing the deeds of unmatched personalities is shared by Arrian (*An.* VII. 30) in his *encomium* of Alexander III, in which he states that no other man is similar to the Macedonian conqueror, who seems to be guided in his actions by a divine force (οὐκουν οὐδὲ ἐμοὶ ἔξω τοῦ θεοῦ φῦναι ἂν δοκεῖ ἀνὴρ οὐδενὶ ἄλλω ἀνθρώπων εἰκίως). For Herodotus' general view of Xerxes, see Bridges (2015) 45-69; for Xerxes' image, see Stoneman (2015) 69-87; 109-138.

Like Herodotus' Achaemenids, Alexander is liable to be accused of despotic acts; nonetheless, he displays human traits such as generosity and kindness.⁷¹⁸ The historical production of the first generation of Alexander-historians is mostly lost, but from the fragments we still possess and from Diodorus, Plutarch, and Arrian's works we can still reconstruct the interpretations of the Macedonian campaign in the East which were already circulating at Alexander's time and the literary tropes used to express them.⁷¹⁹ The opinions of the Alexander-historians vary greatly: e. g., Alexander is pictured as an ideal virtuous king in the two Plutarchean orations *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute*; but by some contemporary authors he is also perceived as a hot-tempered conqueror, who behaves tyrannically⁷²⁰ and overindulges in drinking.⁷²¹ Callisthenes disagrees with Alexander's "Persianising", despotic policy,⁷²² and Ehippus of Olynthus gives an account of his golden throne and his blasphemous habit of dressing up like the Olympians at his drinking parties.⁷²³ In the Alexander-historians' tradition, Alexander shares deep similarities with the first four Persian Kings: in the *Histories* these authors could find narrations of the Achaemenids' customs and behaviours, which, sagaciously reworked and ascribed to the Macedonian, would have helped them praise or blame him for his conduct.

Broadly speaking, both Cyrus and Alexander are infatuated with their prodigious birth, a proof of their divine descent, and are very sure of their invincibility in battle.⁷²⁴ Just as Cyrus is a *father* for his subjects, Alexander is characterised in terms of "parental authority" when, according to Arrian (*An.* I. 16. 5), after the battle at the Granicus River he buries the fallen Macedonian soldiers with their weapons and other due honours (καὶ τούτους τῆ ὑστεραία ἔθαψεν Ἀλέξανδρος ξὺν τοῖς ὅπλοις τε καὶ

⁷¹⁸ Montgomery (1993) 96.

⁷¹⁹ The Alexander-historians of "second generation" adopted ideas and historical patterns already present in the authors contemporary with the Macedonian, and simply adjusted to their Graeco-Roman cultural environment.

⁷²⁰ Ehippus, *BNJ / FG rH* IIB 126, F 5: he was a very violent man, intolerable and murderous (ἀφόρητος γὰρ ἦν καὶ φονικός).

⁷²¹ *Royal Ephemerides*, *FG rH* 117, F 2.a (= Ael. *HV* III.23; F2.b = Ath. X. 44, 434B).

⁷²² Callisthenes, *BNJ / FG rH* 124, T 8 (= Arr. *An.* IV. 10).

⁷²³ Ehippus, *BNJ / FG rH* 126, FF 4-5 (= Ath. XII. 53, 537D-537E).

⁷²⁴ For Cyrus' divine birth and military prowess, see Hdt. I. 204; for the wonders on Alexander's birthday and his invincibility, see fn. 98.

ἄλλω κόσμῳ), and he gives immunity from local taxes and different contributions to their parents and children (γονεῦσι δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ παισὶ τῶν τε κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἀτέλειαν ἔδωκε). Alexander also takes care of the injured (καὶ τῶν τετρωμένων δὲ πολλὴν πρόνοιαν ἔσχευ) and visits in person each of them. But the similarities between Cyrus and Alexander go beyond common attitudes and shared values: in fact, the Macedonian aimed to appear the restorer of the Persian glorious era, the new king in line with Cyrus' policies. Alexander's pilgrimage to Pasargadae to pay homage to the Persian King's tomb, his eagerness to spare Cyropolis from destruction during the suppression of the seditions in Sogdiana (329 BC), and his desire to pass through Gedrosia (325 BC)⁷²⁵ are clear examples of Macedonian propaganda after the Iranian subjects.⁷²⁶

Darius I and Alexander seem to share the same impelling necessity to reconnect themselves to the Persian Royal family: at his ascent to the throne, Darius marries two daughters of Cyrus, Atossa and Artystone; Parmys, daughter of Smerdis, Cambyses' brother; and Otanes' daughter, since he had discovered the truth about the "Magus affair".⁷²⁷ Similarly, Alexander takes to wife Stateira, Darius III's eldest daughter, and Parysatis, Artaxerxes III Ochus' youngest daughter, thus linking himself with both the branches of the Achaemenid family.⁷²⁸

Alexander displays also Darius I's enterprise and curiosity⁷²⁹ for unexplored new places on many occasions during his campaign: the foundation of Alexandria of Egypt⁷³⁰ and his *last plans*⁷³¹ are two remarkable steps which contribute to the

⁷²⁵ Arr. *An.* VI. 24. 3: "[Alexander betook himself] to rival Cyrus and Semiramis (ἔριν ἐμβαλεῖν πρὸς Κῦρον καὶ Σεμίραμιν)".

⁷²⁶ Briant (1982) 66-69.

⁷²⁷ Hdt. III. 88. 2-3.

⁷²⁸ Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 52 (= Arr. *An.* VII. 4. 4); Plu. *Alex.* 70. 2.

⁷²⁹ See, e. g., Hdt. III. 89. 1 for Darius' division of the Persian Empire in twenty satrapies and IV. 44 for Darius' interest in geographical discoveries and Scylax of Caryanda's explorations.

⁷³⁰ Arr. *An.* III. 1. 5 - 2. 2. Cf. Plu. *Alex.* 26. 3-10: this is a more fictional version, in which Alexander is led to the foundation of the city by Homer's words, who had appeared to him in a dream. See Bosworth (1980.a) 264-266.

⁷³¹ D. S. XVIII. 4. 3-4: "the following were the greatest and the most remarkable items of his *memoranda* (τῶν ὑπομνημάτων τὰ μέγιστα καὶ μνήμης ἄξια τάδε)". Similarly, Arrian (*An.* VII. 1. 1-4) speaks of Ἀλεξάνδρου τὰ ἐνθυμήματα (thoughts, desires), admitting that their authenticity has not been proven.

creation of the myth of the Macedonian as a great builder and untiring explorer. Alexandria of Egypt is the most glorious of the Alexander's numerous city-foundations;⁷³² the ancient sources do not agree whether he started its setting up before or after his journey to the oracle of Zeus-Ammon,⁷³³ but they all make it clear that it was a huge undertaking and that he put considerable effort into it. According to Arrian (*An.* III. 1. 5 - 2. 2), Alexander, having reached the Canopic Gulf, deems it the best place to found a city (καὶ ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ ὁ χῶρος κάλλιστος κτίσαι ἐν αὐτῷ πόλιν) which would prosper (εὐδαίμονα τὴν πόλιν). In that moment a longing for this undertaking takes him (πόθος οὖν λαμβάνει αὐτὸν τοῦ ἔργου) and he himself sets the boundaries of the city. This foundation-story projects the image of a highly skilled ruler, who can also act as an architect, showing where to erect the main buildings and the wall of the city, and who is provided with foresight and considerable instinct for affairs and trades, given that Alexandria will become a big and wealthy cultural centre of the Hellenistic period. Furthermore, in the *last plans* Alexander is presented not only as a builder with majestic projects, such as warships, roads, and temples, but also as a curious explorer, desiring to reach the Pillars of Hercules (ὁδοποιῆσαι δὲ τὴν παραθαλάττιον τῆς Λιβύης μέχρι στηλῶν Ἡρακλείων). Lastly, he is also a civiliser, since he wishes to found new cities by synoecism and to transplant populations from Asia to Europe and vice versa (πόλεων συνοικισμοὺς καὶ σωμάτων μεταγωγὰς ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας εἰς τὴν Εὐρώπην καὶ κατὰ τούναντίον ἐκ τῆς Εὐρώπης εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν).

Yet, the historian deems these plans possible, considering the Macedonian's curiosity and strenuousness.

⁷³² Plu. *De Alex.* I. 5 (= *Mor.* 328E): "Alexander, having founded more than 70 cities among the barbaric tribes". For a complete list of references to Alexander III's foundations in ancient authors, see Hammond (1998) 243-269; Heckel, Yardley (2004) 303-306. In *Cities of Alexander the Great*, Fraser (1996) maintains that the Macedonian's real foundations were only six, whereas Lane Fox (2011) 8, suggests sixteen.

⁷³³ Plutarch (*Alex.* 26.6) and Arrian (*An.* III 3.3) set the foundation before the visit to Siwah; Diodorus (XVII. 51. 4-52. 2), Curtius (IV. 8. 1-6), Justin (XI. 11. 13), and *AR* (α) I. 30-32 afterwards. For the scholarly discussion about the chronology of the foundation, see Welles (1962) 275-284, who, on the basis of Pseudo-Callisthenes' account, defends the veracity of the Vulgate chronology; *contra* Fraser (1972) I. 3-7, n. 6; II. 2-3, endorses Arrian's reliability and sequence of the facts. Bosworth (1976) 137-139 suggests that Alexander planned to build up Alexandria on his outward journey to the shrine of Ammon and implemented it upon his return – a hypothesis which solves the conundrum of the different chronologies offered by the sources.

However, as Herodotus often quotes different points of view and versions of the same story, without trying to harmonise them,⁷³⁴ so too in the Alexander-historians – even leaving aside the tradition hostile to Alexander III – we find narrations of some deeds which shed a negative light on the Macedonian. These episodes liken Alexander’s behaviour to Cambyses’ whimsical attitude, or to Xerxes’ ἀτασθαλίη (conceit, hubristic behaviour)⁷³⁵ and the value of the great campaign of conquest of the Persian Empire is reduced to be the mere fruit of the Macedonian’s own stubbornness and megalomania. A clear example of Alexander’s whims is provided by the events at Tyre: in fact, all the sources state clearly that the protracted siege of the Phoenician city was undertaken just because Alexander was refused to sacrifice to the god Melqart in the main temple on the acropolis as he wished.⁷³⁶

Both Cambyses and Alexander have been harshly accused of being despotic and too fond of wine;⁷³⁷ similarly, they push their armies to the edges: in his march against the Ethiopians, the former completely disregards the heavy losses caused by hardships and lack of provisions and he stops his advance only when acts of cannibalism start among his soldiers;⁷³⁸ in the Gedrosian desert, the latter notices that his men are in extreme danger and that the casualties for exhaustion and malnutrition are numerous, but he pretends to be ignorant of their misdeeds and of the slaughter of the pack animals, in order to proceed.⁷³⁹ Furthermore, both Cambyses and Alexander often present different views from their fathers’ right-hand men. In Arrian’s historical account, Parmenio counterbalances the young king’s hot-blooded temper on more than one occasion;⁷⁴⁰ similarly, in the *Histories* Cambyses is advised by Croesus not to take every decision out of rage and inexperience (μὴ πάντα ἡλικίῃ καὶ θυμῷ ἐπίτραπε), for sooner or later the Persians would revolt against him. Nevertheless, the Achaemenid does not accept his councillor’s advice, reproaching him for daring to talk after having lost his own reign and destroyed Cyrus’ one.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁴ Waters (1971) 58.

⁷³⁵ Hdt. VII. 35. 2.

⁷³⁶ D. S. XVII. 40. 2-46; Plu. *Alex.* 24. 2 - 25. 2; Arr. *An.* II. 16. 7-24. Cf. Curt. IV. 2. 1-4. 18.

⁷³⁷ Hdt. III. 34. 2.

⁷³⁸ Hdt. III. 25. 5-7.

⁷³⁹ Arr. *An.* VI. 25. 1-2.

⁷⁴⁰ See below, A.5 “The figure of the *Tragic Warner / Practical Adviser*”.

⁷⁴¹ Hdt. III. 36. 1-3.

Interestingly, the Egyptian tradition, which can be still traced in the second book of Herodotus' *Histories* and in the *Alexander Romance*, claimed an Egyptian descent for both Cambyses⁷⁴² and Alexander.⁷⁴³ In fact, Egyptians did not wish to mingle with other peoples and they could not accept foreigners as pharaohs.

In the accounts of the Alexander-historians the great conqueror is implicitly or explicitly compared with Xerxes on various occasions, and these parallels go beyond the motif of the revenge-expedition in the East developed by Macedonian propaganda. The two rulers share a set of common experiences, either because Alexander is portrayed by his historians making the same evil mistakes as Xerxes; or because he is genuinely trying to rival the Persian.⁷⁴⁴ In fact, both Xerxes and Alexander nourish a strong fascination with Troy, and feel the need to sacrifice there;⁷⁴⁵ while the Achaemenid permits to his satrap Artayctes to pillage the tomb of Protesilaus, the Macedonian duly pays homage to him, wishing to secure a more favourable campaign into Asia than the one of the Greek hero, who died immediately after his crossing of the Hellespont at the time of the Trojan war.⁷⁴⁶ Moreover, Xerxes is indecisive when urged to take over his father Darius' war against Greece; by contrast, Alexander develops Philip II's plans and is impatient to campaign against Persia. Their further aim is to unify Asia and Europe, but Xerxes is heavily criticised for this hubristic plan, while Alexander is praised for having achieved this union.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴² Hdt. III. 2. 1: "the Egyptians make Cambyses one of them, saying that he was born from this daughter of the pharaoh Apries (Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ οἰκηιοῦνται Καμβύσεα, φάμενοί μιν ἐκ ταύτης δὴ τῆς Ἀπρίεω θυγατρὸς γενέσθαι)".

⁷⁴³ AR (α) I. 5: Alexander the son of Nectanebo, the last pharaoh of Egypt.

⁷⁴⁴ For example, when Arrian (*An.* VI. 19. 5) describes Alexander's sacrifice at the banks of the river Indus in order to propitiate the expedition of the fleet guided by Nearchus, he says that the Macedonian avails himself of a golden *phiale* and *krateres*. This offer remind us of Xerxes' sacrifice at the Hellespont before his second attempt to cross it: see Hdt. VII. 54. 2.

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. Hdt. VII. 43 and Arr. *An.* I. 11. 7.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Hdt IX. 116. 2 and Arr. *An.* I. 11. 5.

⁷⁴⁷ Cf. Hdt. VIII. 109. 3: "but gods and heroes, who begrudged the man [Xerxes] reigning jointly on Asia and Europe (ἄνδρα ἓνα τῆς τε Ἀσίας καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης βασιλεῦσαι)" and Arr. *An.* VII. 30. 1: "[Alexander] king of both the continents (βασιλέα τε ἀμφοῖν τοῖν ἡπείροιον)".

This general persistence of Herodotean motifs in the Alexander-historians, such as the father-king, the builder-king, or the wicked tyrant,⁷⁴⁸ strongly suggests that in the fourth century BC the *Histories* were still a frame of reference, both for Alexander III, who had to prepare himself for an unprecedented task, and for the authors who had to describe and explain it to the Greek-speaking audience. Now, by pairing stories excerpted from Herodotus and the Alexander-historians' narratives, the following survey aims at drawing attention to the aspects that project Alexander III as a *Herodotean* Persian King or as an exact reverse of it.

A. Alexander III: similarities with the *Herodotean* Persian King

1. The King and nature. Alexander the Great is often described as an indefatigable conqueror, always eager to discover new places, to occupy himself in challenging tasks, and overcome every physical obstacle in his way.⁷⁴⁹ For example, Plutarch says that when still a child, Alexander did not rejoice at his father's victories, because he was afraid that nothing would have been left for him to conquer;⁷⁵⁰ afterwards, due to his untamable ambition, it was difficult to turn him aside from whatever he had undertaken.⁷⁵¹ Similarly, the Persian Kings are masters and protectors of their land, and enlarging the boundaries of the empire is considered one of their duties.⁷⁵² The

⁷⁴⁸ For the image that the Persian King wanted to display of himself among his people, see Briant (2002.a) 165-203.

⁷⁴⁹ Arr. An. VII. 1. 4: "he sought for the unknown, and if not someone else, he was rivaling himself (ζητεῖν τι τῶν ἠγνωσμένων, εἰ καὶ μὴ ἄλλω τῷ, ἀλλὰ αὐτόν γε αὐτῷ ἐρίζοντα)".

⁷⁵⁰ Plu. Alex. 5. 2.

⁷⁵¹ Plu. Alex. 26. 7 pictures a tireless and obstinate (τὴν γνώμην ἰσχυράν) Alexander subduing enemies, times and places (οὐ μόνον πολεμίους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τόπους καὶ καιρούς). The passage draws upon the Herodotean account of the Achaemenid ideas of steady expansionism and triumph over obstacles; see Hdt. IV. 118. 5: "as soon as [Darius I] crossed over to this continent, he has always been taming all those being in his way (τοὺς αἰεὶ ἐμποδῶν γινομένους ἡμεροῦται πάντας)".

⁷⁵² Hdt. VII. 8(α). 1-2: "as it is, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius my father subdued and added nations [...]. Since I received this throne, I considered how I might not be inferior of my predecessors in this honour, and not gain less power to the Persians (μὴ λείψομαι τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ἐν τιμῇ τῆδε μηδὲ ἐλάσσω προσκῆσομαι δύναμιν Πέρσῃσι)".

Achaemenids are frequently linked to rivers, which they respect profoundly;⁷⁵³ exactly this reverence towards water adds more gravity to Xerxes' hubristic whipping of the Hellespont,⁷⁵⁴ but also more solemnity to his subsequent libation before crossing it.⁷⁵⁵ Alexander himself displays lack of respect when derogating the river Granicus and calling it μικρὸν ῥεῦμα (little stream)⁷⁵⁶ but, during his campaign, the importance of the river-crossing and of the libations to propitiate water are related on many occasions by Arrian. For example, Alexander sacrifices to Zeus, Heracles, and Istros (the river god) on the banks of the Danube (*An.* I. 4. 5); he sets altars to Zeus, Athena, and Heracles after the crossing of the Hellespont (*An.* I. 11. 7); finally, at the Hyphasis River, denying the real cause of the end of the campaign (the mutiny of his soldiers), he asserts that the omens are not favourable for a further march (*An.* V. 28. 4-5).

Alexander's efforts in mastering nature remind us of the engineering projects of the Persian Kings:⁷⁵⁷ e. g., Cyrus' painstaking division of the river Gyndes into three hundred and sixty channels before the conquest of Babylon,⁷⁵⁸ Darius I's construction of the Suez Canal,⁷⁵⁹ and Xerxes' three-year-plan to carve the channel across the Athos peninsula.⁷⁶⁰ These undertakings offer a suitable parallel to Macedonian conqueror's insistence in the difficult and time-consuming construction of the mole during the

⁷⁵³ Hdt. I. 138. 2: "they do not urinate in rivers, nor spit; they do not wash their hands in them, nor allow someone else; but they revere rivers most of all (σέβονται ποταμούς μάλιστα)".

⁷⁵⁴ Hdt. VII. 35: Xerxes spits (ἐπύθετο) into the Hellespont, whips it three hundred times (τριηκοσίας ἐπικέσθαι μάστιγι πληγὰς), and addresses the water with insolence (λέγειν βάρβαρά τε καὶ ἀτάσθαλα). Cf. Plu. *De Alex.* II. 12 (= *Mor.* 342E): the historian draws a parallel between Xerxes, who uses fetters to cross the Hellespont, and Alexander, who relies on his small but virtuous army. Mikalson (2003) 44-45: Xerxes' chastising of the sea became a symbol of impiety in the later Greek tradition.

⁷⁵⁵ Hdt. VII. 54.

⁷⁵⁶ Arr. *An.* I. 13. 6. Alexander's derogatory statement aims at thwarting Parmenio's tactical concerns, which were not unfounded. In fact, although the Granicus River might have been shallow and easily fordable at the time when the Macedonian army reached it in late May, its steep banks were three-four meters high, with muddy and slippery flanks which made the crossing challenging; cf. D. S. XVII. 19.2; Plu. *Alex.* 16. 3; Arr. *An.* I. 13.4. For a discussion on the topography of the Granicus River and on Alexander's tactical choices, see Nikolitsis (1974) 10-12; Badian (1977) 271-293; Foss (1977) 495-502; Bosworth (1988.a) 42.

⁷⁵⁷ Harrison (2004) 28-29; *Idem* (2010) 228-229.

⁷⁵⁸ Hdt. I. 189 - 190. 1.

⁷⁵⁹ Hdt. II. 158.

⁷⁶⁰ Hdt. VII. 22. 1-2.

siege of Tyre or Deinocrates' proposal to carve Mount Athos in Alexander's shape.⁷⁶¹ Certainly, strenuousness was a real characteristic of Alexander III – as the events at the Phoenician city prove – but it was exaggerated by the historians, who wanted either to stress the antagonism and the contrast between the Macedonian and the Achaemenids, or to explain some of his hardly justifiable actions, or to suggest a veiled critique of his obstinacy and recklessness through similarities with the “tyrannical figures” of the *Histories*.⁷⁶²

2. Τὸ πολλῶν ἐπιθυμέειν (the “excessive craving”) of the King of Kings for the expansion of his power⁷⁶³ is echoed by Alexander's *pothos*, which appears ten times in Arrian and five in Curtius (lat: *ingens cupido*).⁷⁶⁴ Certainly big empires are always built by power-thirsty rulers and pretentious deeds, but the expression πόθος ἔλαβεν αὐτόν used by the Alexander–historians to describe the Macedonian's tenacity and ambition in bringing off his campaign deserves attention. Ehrenberg argues that the Alexander-historians inherited the formula directly from Alexander III, who forged it to express his own peculiar longing for the unknown,⁷⁶⁵ presumably influenced by the frequent recurrence of the words ἕμερος and πόθος in Homer.⁷⁶⁶ Bosworth criticises Ehrenberg's opinion, since the formula appears in Herodotus as well,⁷⁶⁷ and the excessive longing of the tyrant was already a *topos* in the Greek world by the second-half of the fourth century BC. In any event, either hypotheses show how the Hellenic literary tradition informed the image which Alexander and his entourage endeavour to hand down. In fact, according to Ehrenberg's interpretation, the ancient sources represent Alexander III's longing historically, suggesting that he had reworked the

⁷⁶¹ D. S. XVII. 40. 2-46; Plu. *Alex.* 24. 3-25. 2; Arr. *An.* II. 18–24.

⁷⁶² Harrison (2004) 31-32.

⁷⁶³ Hdt. VII. 18. 2: the King in question is Xerxes, but *longing* is a general characteristic of the Achaemenids and of their generals; see I. 201. 1: “when also this population was subdued by Cyrus, he *desired* (ἐπεθύμησε) to subject the Massagetae”; IV. 1. 1: “Darius *desired* (ἐπεθύμησε) to punish the Scythians, because they had invaded first Media”, also connected to the theme of revenge; VII. 43: “[Xerxes] ascended to the citadel of Priam, having the desire (ἕμερον ἔχων) to see it”; IX. 3: “[Mardonius] was taken by a mighty desire (δεινὸς ἐνέστακτο ἕμερος) to take Athens for a second time”.

⁷⁶⁴ For an overview on Alexander's πόθος, see Stewart (1993) 84, fn. 47.

⁷⁶⁵ Ehrenberg (1938) 52-61.

⁷⁶⁶ Ehrenberg (1938) 61.

⁷⁶⁷ Bosworth (1980.a) 62. I agree with Bosworth's interpretation: in fact, Arrian's expression *elabe pothos* is attested in the same wording in Herodotus (I. 165. 3).

literary tradition extant at his time to give the representation *he* wanted of himself. According to Bosworth's interpretation, the Macedonian's infinite desire for the unknown is the result of his entourage's historiographical reception.

3. *Hubris*. Xerxes' ἀτασθαλίη is matched by Alexander's megalomania:⁷⁶⁸ they both want to surpass their predecessors, but they only end up exceeding their acts and thoughts. The first desires to expand his empire until the heaven of Zeus;⁷⁶⁹ the latter nourishes plans to reach the Pillars of Hercules.⁷⁷⁰ With the description of Alexander's whims, the sources reflect and highlight his genuine rivalry and need to outdo the Persians with majestic deeds.⁷⁷¹

4. *Luxury*. As Herodotus states in the *Persian logos*, Persians practise εὐπαθείας τε παντοδαπὰς ("all kind of luxuries"),⁷⁷² and their τρυφή (softness, delicacy) is a common stereotype in Greek authors.⁷⁷³ The Alexander-historians are divided in their representation of Alexander: either he adopts Persian excessive luxury,⁷⁷⁴ thereby being corrupted by it,⁷⁷⁵ or he refuses it.⁷⁷⁶ Plutarch's Alexander, representing the virtuous king, addresses his companions to convince them not to indulge excessively: in fact, the Macedonians are people accustomed to toils and it is servile to be luxurious as the vanquished Persians.⁷⁷⁷ Similarly, according to Arrian, before the battle of Issus Alexander reminds his fellow countrymen that they do not have to fear the Persians, as they have already overcome many hardships and are fighting for the Panhellenic cause; by contrast, the Persians have been enfeebled by their sumptuous lifestyle and

⁷⁶⁸ Arr. *An.* VII. 6: the Indian sophists deem Alexander ἀτάσθαλος (presumptuous).

⁷⁶⁹ Hdt. VII. 8(γ). 1.

⁷⁷⁰ D. S. XVIII. 4. 4.

⁷⁷¹ Goukowsky (1978) I. 67; Bosworth (2007) 447-450.

⁷⁷² Hdt. I. 135.

⁷⁷³ Briant (2002.b) 193-210; Lenfant (2001) 407-411.

⁷⁷⁴ D. S. XVII. 77. 4: "[Alexander] started to emulate the Persian *tryphe* and the extravagance of the Asiatic kings (Περσικὴν τρυφήν καὶ τὴν πολυτέλειαν)".

⁷⁷⁵ According to Ephippus, *BNJ / FGrH* 126, F 2 (= Ath. IV. 27, 146CD), in proportion Alexander III used to spend for his dinners with his friends as much as the Persian King. Polycleitus, *FGrH* 128, F 1 (= Ath. XII. 55, 539A): "Polycleitus of Larissa in the eighth book of the Histories says that Alexander used to sleep on a golden couch (ἐπὶ χρυσοῦς κλίνης κοιμᾶσθαι), female and male flute-players always followed him to the camp, and he used to drink until dawn (πίνειν ἄχρι τῆς ἕως)".

⁷⁷⁶ Polyæn. IV. 3. 32; Plu. *Alex.* 40. 3-41. 1.

⁷⁷⁷ Plu. *Alex.* 40. 1-3.

battle with mercenary troops.⁷⁷⁸ The description of Alexander the Great as a wise monarch and charismatic leader is a literary and philosophical motif that has its archetype in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*,⁷⁷⁹ but the two speeches in Plutarch and Arrian, while underlining the Macedonian's virtues, also display well-known Herodotean *topoi*: the contrast between soft and hard people, and the conflict between East and West, slaves and freemen.⁷⁸⁰ The fact that Plutarch and Arrian, and the Alexander-historians in general, have a big variety of literary examples at their disposal for the redaction of the speeches does not exclude that Alexander the Great himself drew from Herodotus or the Xenophontean Cyrus. The Macedonian surely strove to emulate heroes and valorous personalities described in Greek literature, of which the Alexander-historians imitated tropes and style, making the parallels more powerful and layered.

Further to the praise of Alexander, Arrian also presents Darius III as an unworthy weak king, the origin and cause of the Achaemenid Empire's decay: τοῦτο τὸ τέλος Δαρείῳ ἐγένετο, [...] ἀνδρὶ τὰ μὲν πολέμια, εἴπερ τινὶ ἄλλῳ, μαλθακῶ τε καὶ οὐ φρενήρει ("such was the end that happened to Darius, [...] besides, a man feeble in warfare and not sound of mind").⁷⁸¹ Arrian's description of Darius' lack of value seems to duplicate the Herodotean trope of the Persians' lack of military judgment: in the *Histories* the Athenian victory is presented more as a consequence of Persian inability than of the Greeks' ability.⁷⁸² However, it is worth noticing that Darius III did not have the time to prove his worth, for he had become king just a short time before Alexander III's accession to the throne of Macedon, and his μαλθακότης – his cowardice and inefficiency in battles – is eventually not flattering for the evaluation of Alexander's leadership. As Dominique Lenfant has pointed out, in the fifth century BC, as a result of Hellenic propaganda during the Persian Wars, the decadence, lasciviousness, and tyrannical political system are considered intrinsic features of Eastern culture. In the fourth century BC, the main cause of degeneration and decay of the whole Persian

⁷⁷⁸ Arr. An. II. 7. 4.

⁷⁷⁹ B. Due (1993) 55-58.

⁷⁸⁰ A discussion of the "soft and hard people theme" can be found in Redfield (2002) 41-45.

⁷⁸¹ Arr. An. III. 22. 2-3. Cf. Chares, *FGrH* 125, F 6 (= Plu. *De Alex.* II. 9): Alexander III and Darius III battle in a duel at Issus and the first is wounded in his thigh by the latter's sword. For a reevaluation of Darius III's leadership, see Badian (2000.b) 241-267. For the Persian army, see Stoneman (2010) 364-365.

⁷⁸² See Harrison (2002) 5.

Empire is considered the unworthiness of the ruling king, and the *topos* is widely exploited by Greek authors.⁷⁸³

5. The figure of the *Tragic Warner / Practical Adviser* appears constantly in the *Histories*: he wants to help the king take the right decision, by providing a new point of view, or putting him on guard about looming dangers.⁷⁸⁴ For example, Cyrus elects the Lydian Croesus as his personal councillor. At first Croesus' advice not to wage war against the Massagetae is ignored but, eventually, the Persian army follows his plan of attack beyond the Araxes River.⁷⁸⁵ Herodotus' *tragic warner* par-excellence is surely Artabanus: he advises Darius I not to undertake his campaign against Scythia,⁷⁸⁶ he readily alerts Xerxes of the perils of a war against Greece,⁷⁸⁷ and later at Abydos he prompts him to leave the Ionians behind, deeming it unlikely that they would harm their motherland.⁷⁸⁸ However, none of his warnings is taken by the two Achaemenids.

In the Alexander-historians, the role of the unheeded warner is played by Parmenio:⁷⁸⁹ at Granicus, he proposes to Alexander to wait until daybreak to cross the river, so that the Persians would go away and the Macedonians would pass easily before they returned;⁷⁹⁰ when the great conqueror falls ill in Cilicia, Parmenio sends a letter to inform his king not to take Philippus' medicine, because he suspects the physician of having been bribed by Darius III in order to kill him.⁷⁹¹ During the siege of Tyre, Darius sends his second letter to Alexander, offering a great sum of money, the lands until the Euphrates River, and his daughter in marriage as a promise of φιλία and συμμαχία (friendship and alliance).⁷⁹² The general exhorts his king to accept the truce, but the latter refuses, saying that *he would accept too, were he Parmenio*.⁷⁹³ At

⁷⁸³ Lenfant (2001) 435.

⁷⁸⁴ See Lattimore (1939) 24-35.

⁷⁸⁵ Hdt. I. 207-208.

⁷⁸⁶ Hdt. IV. 83.

⁷⁸⁷ Hdt. VII. 10-10(α).

⁷⁸⁸ Hdt. VII. 51.

⁷⁸⁹ Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1993) 178; Carney (2000) 263-285; Chaplin (2011) 615-633.

⁷⁹⁰ Arr. An. I. 13. 3.

⁷⁹¹ Plu. Alex. 19. 3; Arr. An. II. 4. 9.

⁷⁹² Arr. An. II. 25. 1; Curt. IV. 5. 1-6; Justin XI. 12. 3. For the epistolary exchange between Darius III and Alexander III, see Mikrogiannakis (1969).

⁷⁹³ Plu. Alex. 29. 4 ; Arr. An. II. 25. 2.

Gaugamela, the old companion suggests an attack by night, but the young conqueror proudly replies that he does not steal his victories;⁷⁹⁴ finally, at Persepolis, before the burning of the palace, he reminds Alexander not to behave like a brutish vanquisher, but as a king.⁷⁹⁵ Historicity and narrative patterns interplay in the creation of the figure of Parmenio. Certainly, his relations to Alexander III were sometimes tense: the old general represented the conservative Macedonian nobility, and many soldiers admired him and were bound to him because of the glorious victories he gained under Philip II. This could have caused pressure on, and jealousy of, the young king. Moreover, Parmenio's daughter married Attalus, the uncle of Cleopatra Eurydice, thus linking all the family to the faction opposing Olympias.⁷⁹⁶ The sources exploit this hostility at a literary level and reshape it according to the well-known examples of Croesus and Artabanus presented in the *Histories*. Through these dialogues, the historians could create the image of a daring and resourceful Alexander in contrast with a too conservative and fearful Parmenio,⁷⁹⁷ or of a hard-headed despotic leader who does not listen to anyone but his desire for glory. In the latter case, Parmenio becomes a reversal of the Herodotean trope: although representing the logical point of view, he is constantly proven wrong by Alexander's (apparently reckless) actions.

6. The King's horse. The Alexander-historians well attest Alexander the Great's affection for his steed Bucephalus,⁷⁹⁸ and the foundation of the city of Bucephala on the banks of the Hydaspes River in memory of the horse's value.⁷⁹⁹ A Herodotean parallel is offered by Darius I, who sets up a statue to honour greatly the "virtue" of his horse.⁸⁰⁰ In fact, in the contest for the Persian kingship, only with the help of a

⁷⁹⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 31. 6; Arr. *An.* III. 10. 2.

⁷⁹⁵ Arr. *An.* III. 18. 11.

⁷⁹⁶ Goukowsky (1978) 27-28.

⁷⁹⁷ Callisthenes, *BNJ / FGrH* 124, F 37 (= Plu. *Alex.* 33. 6): "in that battle [Issus] Parmenio was sluggish and inefficient, either because of the old age (νωθρὸν γενέσθαι καὶ δύσεργον, εἴτε τοῦ γήρωος) or because oppressed by, and jealous of (προσφθονοῦντα), Alexander's power".

⁷⁹⁸ Plu. *Alex.* 6. 4: Alexander III gently strokes (καταψήσας) Bucephalus with his hand in order to calm him from the fear of his shadow. Cf. Arr. *An.* V. 19. 5.

⁷⁹⁹ D. S. XVII. 95. 3; Arr. *An.* V. 19. 4-6. For the tradition on Bucephalus, see A. Anderson (1930) 1-21.

⁸⁰⁰ Hdt. III. 85-88. Compare also Cyrus' decision to drain the river Gyndes with 360 channels after his favourite Nysan horse drowned in it (Hdt. I. 189. 1-2) and Alexander's reaction when Bucephalus was kidnapped. The Macedonian immediately blackmailed to devastate a village in Hycarnia, if the inhabitants were not going to return it immediately (Plu. *Alex.* 44. 2-3).

“manipulated sunrise hippomancy”⁸⁰¹ Darius defeats the other six conspirators who together with him overthrew the magus Gaumata. This story was surely known to Alexander III’s entourage, since it is reported also in the *Persika* of the “anti-Herodotean Ctesias”, an author widely read – and despised for his taste for marvels – in the fourth century BC.⁸⁰²

It is not a coincidence that the bravest and most sagacious of the Achaemenids has a canny horse: in historical and literary narratives, heroes are always accompanied by clever steeds in their battles, and strong horses characterised by astonishing traits, such as a huge size or a rare colour of eyes and coat, were considered symbols of power. Furthermore, the importance of the horse breeding in the Achaemenid culture is highlighted by Herodotus in the Persian *logos*, and finds parallels in Macedonian culture.⁸⁰³

7. The Great Kings’ policy of transplanting populations in remote territories of their domain can be compared to Alexander III’s city-foundations in the Eastern regions of the empire, where he needed to locate Macedonian garrisons and veterans in order to control the area and till the soil.⁸⁰⁴ The revolts that broke out among soldiers settled in these faraway regions suggest that they felt “punished” as much as the populations transplanted by the Achaemenid.⁸⁰⁵ These foundations are to be considered military settlements which only later, in the Seleucid era, evolved into cities bearers of Hellenic culture.⁸⁰⁶

8. The mourning. In various chapters of the *Histories*, Herodotus dwells upon the flamboyant rituals and burial customs of the Asians. What strikes the historian most is the ostentation of their grief and their lamentations: they cry desperately, shout, tear their clothes, cut their own hair and the mane of their horses, pierce and mutilate themselves.⁸⁰⁷ When Hephaestion dies in 324 BC at Ecbatana, Alexander falls

⁸⁰¹ Tuplin (2010) 143.

⁸⁰² Lenfant (2007) 202-205. See Ctesias, *FGrH* 688, F 13 (17).

⁸⁰³ For the importance of the horse in the Iranian plateau, see Shahbazi S. (1987), “ABS (Horse) in pre-Islamic Iran”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica online*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/asb-horse-equus-cabullus-av#pt1> [accessed on 02-06-2014].

⁸⁰⁴ Bosworth (1988.a) 245-250.

⁸⁰⁵ Cf. Holt (2012) 196-202.

⁸⁰⁶ Tarn (1948) II. 232-249.

⁸⁰⁷ Hdt. II. 61; 85; III. 66; IV. 71; VIII. 99; IX. 24.

into a deep and inconsolable grief for this loss. According to Diodorus, he entrusts Perdicas with the task of carrying the corpse to Babylon, where a magnificent funeral in honour of his best friend would take place.⁸⁰⁸ During the celebration of the burial ceremonies, the Macedonian indulges in exaggerated expression of his sorrow, and orders all the cities of Asia to quench the “sacred fire” (πᾶσι δὲ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν οἰκοῦσι προσέταξεν τὸ παρὰ τοῖς Πέρσiais ἱερὸν πῦρ καλούμενον ἐπιμελῶς σβέσαι), completely disregarding Persian religious customs, which allowed its extinction only in the case of the King’s death.⁸⁰⁹ Yet, Diodorus’ account of Alexander’s grief is quite sober in comparison with Plutarch’s narration, which reports extreme and ostentatious reactions similar to those found in Herodotus, such as the incessant lamentations made by Alexander due to his inconceivable pain (τοῦτο οὐδενὶ λογισμῶ τὸ πάθος), the cutting of the horses’ hair (ἵππους τε κεῖραι πάντα ἐπὶ πένθει), the cruel crucifixion of the physician Glaucus, for failing to cure his beloved friend (τὸν δὲ ἄθλιον ἰατρὸν ἀνεσταύρωσεν), the prohibition of music in the camp until an oracle of Ammon recognised heroic honours to Hephaestion (αὐλοὺς δὲ κατέπαυσε καὶ μουσικὴν πᾶσαν ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ πολὺν χρόνον, ἕως ἔξ Ἄμμωνος ἦλθε μαντεία τιμᾶν Ἡφαιστίωνα καὶ θύειν ὡς ἥρωϊ παρακελεύουσα), the out-of-anger slaughter of the Cosseans in order to find consolation (τοῦ δὲ πένθους παρηγορία τῷ πολέμῳ χρώμενος ... καὶ τὸ Κοσσαίων ἔθνος κατεστρέφετο), and the construction of a majestic tomb (τύμβον ... ἀπὸ μυρίων ταλάντων ἐπιτελέσαι διανοούμενος).⁸¹⁰

Arrian’s description of Alexander III’s sorrow (*An.* VII. 14. 2-9) develops the Herodotean themes already present in Plutarch – such as the shaving of the hair, the execution of the doctor, and the plan to build an expensive tomb to Hephaestion – and gives more room to the description of the ostentatiously deep grief of Alexander, who neglects his bodily necessities for three days after his friend’s death (ἕς τρίτην ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Ἡφαιστίνου ἡμέραν μήτε σίτου γεύσασθαι Ἀλέξανδρον μήτε τινὰ θεραπείαν ἄλλην θεραπεῦσαι τὸ σῶμα) and lays upon his corpse until he is taken away by force by the other companions (ἐρριμμένον ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ἐταίρου ὀδύρεσθαι οὐδ’ ἐθέλειν ἀπαλλαγῆναι, πρὶν γε δὴ πρὸς βίαν ἀπηνέχθη πρὸς τῶν ἐταίρων). Arrian also recalls the Herodotean story of Xerxes’ whipping of the

⁸⁰⁸ D. S. XVII. 110. 8.

⁸⁰⁹ D. S. XVII. 114. 4.

⁸¹⁰ Plu. *Alex.* 72. 2-3.

Hellespont (Ξέρξην, τιμωρούμενον δῆθεν τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον), and in the passage he repeats two words which are recurrent in Herodotus: φθόνος, the vengeance of the gods, and ἀτασθαλία, the arrogance of the human beings.

In addition to the accentuated Herodotean style, Arrian's description of Hephaestion's death also gives us an idea of the different opinions that circulated among the "historians of the first generation" and of the way they manipulated the literary tradition to praise or blame Alexander:

(3) Of the writers who describe his presumptuous deeds (τὰ ἀτάσθαλα ἀναγράψαντες), some (it seems to me) thought that everything Alexander did or said in excessive grief (ὑπεραλγήσας) for the dearest of men brought him credit, while others thought his behaviour more a source of shame, since it was appropriate neither to a king nor to Alexander.

The historians' selection of the material to include in their accounts depended on their favour or malice towards Hephaestion and / or Alexander (ὡς ἕκαστος ἢ εὐνοίας πρὸς Ἡφαιστίωνα ἢ φθόνου εἶχεν ἢ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἀλέξανδρον) and Arrian points to some of their less credible exaggerations, such the destruction of the temple of Asclepius at Ecbatana ordered by Alexander to soothe his pain (τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ τὸ ἔδος ἐν Ἐκβατάνοις κατασκάψαι ἐκέλευσε), which he deems more suitable to a barbaric despot like Xerxes (βαρβαρικὸν τοῦτό γε καὶ οὐδαμῇ Ἀλεξάνδρω πρόσφορον, ἀλλὰ τῇ Ξέρξου μᾶλλον τι ἀτασθαλίᾳ), a further reference to the Herodotean narrative.

9. Punishments. The Achaemenid royal family and its satraps were renowned for the harsh punishments they inflicted to their subjects, such as cruel mutilations of noses and ears, and the entombment of children while still alive. Various examples of this extreme ferocity can be found depicted in the *Histories*, which, on the other hand, do not conceal the atrocious deeds committed by the Greeks: Artayctes, satrap of the Chersonese, is crucified by the Athenians after having witnessed the stoning of his own son.⁸¹¹ Nevertheless, it seems that Greeks consider impalement and stoning two extreme capital sentences, to be used only in cases of utmost offence and betrayal. Alexander's flogging of Bessus, together with and the mutilation of his nose and

⁸¹¹ Hdt. IX. 120.

ears,⁸¹² reminds us of the beheading and impalement of Leonidas' corpse ordered by Xerxes, and of the disfigurement of Masistes' wife brought about by Amestris' jealousy.⁸¹³ On the other hand, the Macedonian's cruel treatment of Bessus is downplayed by Ptolemy and Arrian, who present it as the legal punishment deserved by a traitor.

B. Alexander the Great as a reversal of the *Herodotean* Persian King

1. The Great King's role.⁸¹⁴ Herodotus' Persian King is a traveller within the satrapies of the Empire; he is concerned about his subjects and understands the differences among populations and among their customs. Well known is the account in which Darius I seems familiar with the various traditions of his peoples and is at ease with acknowledging them: e. g., he accepts both the Greeks' cremation and the Callatians' eating of their dead without frowning upon their funerary rituals.⁸¹⁵

Plutarch's description of Alexander's behaviour towards the Eastern populations is the exact reverse of Darius I's relativism.⁸¹⁶ The Macedonian looks at them as barbarians whom he has to civilise, that is, *Hellenise*: he teaches them to respect the marriage bond and their parents, to bury and not to eat their dead, to till the soil, to read Homer, and to worship Greek gods.⁸¹⁷ Here the historian is again following the Herodotean *topos* of the contrast between the well-educated Greeks and the uncivilised barbarians. In reality, although Alexander III's aim was to be accepted by the Iranians as their new leader,⁸¹⁸ he differed from the Achaemenids not because he behaved as a "Plutarchean civiliser-king", but as a conqueror:⁸¹⁹ in his campaign he appeared more interested in constantly adding new territories rather than in settling

⁸¹² Arr. *An.* III. 30. 3-5.

⁸¹³ Hdt. IX. 108-110.

⁸¹⁴ For the role and the function of the Achaemenid King, see Wiesehöfer (2001) 29-33; Briant (2002.a) 167-202.

⁸¹⁵ Hdt. III. 38. 3-4: νόμον πάντων βασιλέα.

⁸¹⁶ Redfield (2002) 27; Rood (2006) 296-300.

⁸¹⁷ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 5 (= *Mor.* 328B-329A).

⁸¹⁸ Brosius (2003) 172-173.

⁸¹⁹ Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1993) 185; Grainger (2007) 81-82 suggests an extremist interpretation of Alexander III's conquests, calling it "escapism".

down, consolidating his power, and acquainting himself with the Iranians and their different traditions. A degree of Hellenisation of the locals did, no doubt, occur in Alexander III's Eastern foundations, but it must have been a by-product of the Hellenic presence there, rather than the principal goal of the settlements.⁸²⁰ For this reason, especially in the East, territories revolted soon after his departure.⁸²¹

The historical Alexander himself does not seem fully to understand the role of the Persian King either: in fact, he was not able to appreciate and make use of institutions such as "migrating kingship" or gift-giving, which were fundamental for the recognition of someone as King in the Achaemenid culture.⁸²² Moreover, in the first years of his campaign in Asia Minor, Egypt and Babylon (334-330 BC) Alexander III presented himself as an alternative to oppressive Persian rule, and only after Darius III's death did he promote himself as the avenger of the usurper and assassin Bessus.⁸²³ In regards to his religious policies, Alexander's did not embrace the royal cult of Ahura Mazda; when he sacrificed to foreign gods, these were always presented in their *interpretatio graeca*: e. g., the Tyrian Melqart is paired with Heracles, the Egyptian Ammon and the Babylonian Marduk with Zeus.⁸²⁴

2. The Great King and Egypt. In the third book of the *Histories*, Cambyses is portrayed as a maniac and an oppressor of the Egyptians. As time passes, he commits sacrilegious acts, among them, the mistreatment of the mummy of Amasis (ch. 16), the killing of the sacred bull Apis (ch. 27-29), and the mockery of the temples in Memphis (ch. 37). When he sends an army against the Ammonians (ch. 26), his soldiers die in the desert because of the drought and the lack of provisions; ultimately, they are covered by heaps of sand. By contrast, Alexander is welcomed in Egypt, which he conquers

⁸²⁰ Fuller (1958) 273; Borza (2012²) 314-317.

⁸²¹ Worthington (1999) 39-55.

⁸²² Brosius (2003) 173. *Contra*, Bosworth (1988.a) 229-240 states that Alexander does not act as a conqueror but, from the very start of the Asian campaign, as an heir of the Achaemenids, following their administration system and changing it only when requested by the situation. See also Briant (1982) 357-368 and Wiesehöfer (2001) 105-106: Alexander develops his ideological strategy as long as he goes eastwards, but since the beginning of the campaign in 334 BC he aims to be recognised as an Achaemenid King.

⁸²³ See Lane Fox (2007) 271-275.

⁸²⁴ Fredricksmeyer (2003) 258-260.

without meeting any resistance.⁸²⁵ During his expedition to the temple of Ammon, he is helped in his march in the desert by rain and by two ravens;⁸²⁶ once arrived at the sanctuary, he is acclaimed as the son of Zeus-Ammon.⁸²⁷ The Alexander-historians draw on patterns of the story-telling in order to give shape to the account of the journey towards the oasis of Siwah. Plutarch even suggests openly to his readers the parallel between the glorious expedition of the Macedonian conqueror, which ends with his recognition as son of the god, and that of Cambyses, which had led to the utter destruction of his army.⁸²⁸

3. The revenge-theme. Darius I's expedition against Greece is caused by the desire to retaliate against the Athenians for having helped the Ionians burn Sardis down during their revolt against the Persian power.⁸²⁹ With an inversion of roles, Alexander III's Persian campaign is justified by the Panhellenic idea of vengeance for Xerxes' destruction of the temples of the acropolis in Athens.⁸³⁰ In his letter of answer to Darius III, the Macedonian makes it clear that, *as commander-in-chief of the Greeks* (τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡγεμῶν), *he moved towards Asia in order to punish the Persians* (τιμωρήσασθαι βουλόμενος), *since their ancestors* (ὑμέτεροι πρόγονοι) *had invaded "Macedon and the rest of Greece"* (Μακεδονίαν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἄλλην Ἑλλάδα) *and did much harm to the Greeks, even though they had done no wrong before* (οὐδὲν προηδικημένοι).⁸³¹ The Panhellenic revenge-theme was long exploited by Alexander III's propaganda, and it is likely that he took some motives from the *Histories*

⁸²⁵ Arr. An. III. 3; Curt. IV. 7. 4.

⁸²⁶ Callisthenes, *BNJ / FGrH* I124, F 14 a (= Str. XVII. 1. 43). Cf. fn. 605; D. S. XVII. 49. 2-51. 4; Plu. *Alex.* 26. 6-27. 3; Arr. An. III. 3.

⁸²⁷ D. S. XVII. 51. 1-2; Plu. *Alex.* 27. 3-5.

⁸²⁸ Plu. *Alex.* 26. 6: "[Alexander] himself set out for the oracle of Ammon, for a long path having many toils and hardships, [...] as it is said about the army of Cambyses a long time ago (ὥς που καὶ πάλαι λέγεται περὶ τὸν Καμβύσου στρατὸν); [the wind], having raised the big billows of sand and having covered the plain with waves, buried and utterly destroyed five thousands men (μυριάδας ἀνθρώπων πέντε καταχῶσαι καὶ διαφθεῖραι)".

⁸²⁹ Hdt. V. 105. 2. Xerxes inherited from his father Darius I a strong desire of vengeance; see also Hdt. VII. 11. 2.

⁸³⁰ Plu. *Alex.* 38; Arr. An. III. 18. 12; Str. XV. 6. For Alexander III's Panhellenism, see Flower (2000) 97-99.

⁸³¹ Arr. An. II. 14. 4.

himself,⁸³² since they were the basic narrative on the Persian wars, the “premise” to the Macedonian campaign against the Achaemenid empire.

4. The importance of telling the truth. In the Persian *logos*, Herodotus admires the Persians for the great value they ascribe to the truth. The insistence of the contrast between truth (*arta*) and lie (*drauga*) is also attested in many royal inscriptions,⁸³³ and it is therefore striking to find the image of a mendacious Darius I in the *Histories* at III. 72, where he explains to the other conspirators that, when necessary, it is permitted to lie.

Among the Alexander-historians, Arrian is the author who insists most on the importance of truth: in his proemium, he says that he follows the account of the general Ptolemy because, “having become himself a king, it was very disgraceful for him to lie”.⁸³⁴ The firm belief that a king cannot be mendacious is also put forward in the description of Alexander’s reproach of his soldiers at Susa.⁸³⁵ In that instance, after the celebrations of the mass wedding, the Macedonian king wishes to cancel the debts of his men and asks them to sign a list reporting the amount they owe. The soldiers fear that he wants to control them and refuse to write their names. Alexander, offended by their hostile reaction to his act of genuine altruism, reproaches their distrust (τὴν μὲν ἀπιστίαν τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐκάκισεν) and states that *a king should not be saying anything else but the truth to his subjects* (οὐ γὰρ χρῆναι οὔτ’ οὔν τὸν βασιλέα ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀληθεύειν πρὸς τοὺς ὑπηκόους), and that *they should believe that a king always says the truth* (οὔτε τῶν ἀρχομένων τινὰ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀληθεύειν δοκεῖν τὸν βασιλέα).

Jamzadeh has interestingly compared Darius I’s ideology of fighting the evil *drauga* – as handed down in his royal inscriptions – and Arrian’s assertions of Alexander’s exceptional veracity.⁸³⁶ Although the Achaemenid inscriptions certainly served as a source of information on Persian thought and politics, I am more inclined

⁸³² For example, wishing to appear as the avenger of the Achaemenids’ misdeeds, Alexander orders the reconstruction of the temple of Belus in Babylon, which had been razed to the ground by Xerxes; see Aristobulus, *BNJ / FGrH* 139, F 54 (= Str. VII. 17).

⁸³³ Wiesehöfer (2001) 33.

⁸³⁴ Arr. *An.* I. pr. 2. The monarch’s truthfulness is a commonplace in Hellenistic and Roman texts too: see Bosworth (1980.a) 43.

⁸³⁵ Arr. *An.* VII. 5. 3.

⁸³⁶ Jamzadeh (2012) 114-117.

to think that Arrian inherited these notions directly from Herodotus' account, and that he reworked them to highlight Alexander's virtues in contrast with Darius III's weaknesses. Moreover, it is also worth noticing that, by contrast, Diodorus portrays his Alexander as a trickster: e. g., after the victory of the battle at Issus, the Macedonian conceals Darius' letter of truce and forges a new one, more in accord with his interests, in order to bend his companions to his will;⁸³⁷ later on, in his march towards India, Alexander stipulates a treaty of peace with the Assaceniens (in modern Swat) but, as soon as he received many gifts from their queen, he orders his soldiers to slaughter them. Diodorus' Alexander appears extremely deceitful when he replies to the Assaceniens' complaints, as he claims that "he had granted them the right to leave the city, but not to be forever friends with the Macedonians" (συνεχώρησεν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀπελθεῖν, οὐ φίλους εἶναι διὰ παντός Μακεδόνων).⁸³⁸ Probably Diodorus has at his disposal for this incident a source hostile to Alexander III, which makes him look similar to the treacherous figures of Herodotus' *Histories*.

C. Alexander III as a *new type* of Persian King

Alexander's adoption of the Persian attire was in line with the orientalisation that he initiated in 330 BC after Darius' death. In the ancient sources it is described as a social and political act: he wants to appear as a common leader to all his peoples⁸³⁹ and, therefore, to maintain his reign without strife.⁸⁴⁰ Alexander borrows the Great King's diadem (διάδημα),⁸⁴¹ the partly white tunic (διάλευκος χιτών),⁸⁴² and the belt (ζώνη),

⁸³⁷ D. S. XVII. 39. 2.

⁸³⁸ D. S. XVII. 84. 2.

⁸³⁹ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 8 (= *Mor.* 330A): ὡς δ' ἡγεμῶν κοινὸς καὶ βασιλεὺς φιλόανθρωπος. See also Plu. *Alex.* 45. 1; Arr. *An.* VII. 29. 4.

⁸⁴⁰ D. S. XVII. 77. 4: βασιλείαν ἀδήριτον.

⁸⁴¹ Fredricksmeier (1997) 97-109 suggests that the diadem was adopted by Alexander III in association with the hero-god Dionysus. Cf. Collins (2012.b) 377-385: the diadem was a symbol of the Persian kingship but, since it was similar to the Hellenic headband, it was not considered offensive by the Greeks.

⁸⁴² The tunic was red and white, and the sources define this dichromatism with the terms διάλευκος or μεσόλευκος. Ephippus, *BNJ / FGrH* 126, F 5 (= Ath. XII. 53, 537E-538B): "[Alexander used to wear] every day a purple *chlamys* (χλαμύδα τε πορφυρᾶν), a red and white tunic (χιτῶνα μεσόλευκον), and the *kausia* bearing the royal diadem (τὴν καυσίαν ἔχουσιν τὸ διάδημα τὸ βασιλικόν)".

symbol of the bond between the Achaemenids and the Iranian society;⁸⁴³ however, he denies himself the tiara (τιάρρα), the trousers (ἀναξυρίδες) and the long-sleeved coat (κάνδυς).⁸⁴⁴ The appropriation of Persian clothing means that he had understood the powerful symbolism of the royal *insignia*; it was intended to enhance his attempt to be recognised as a rightful successor to the Achaemenids and not to be perceived as a brutish conqueror.⁸⁴⁵ In fact, Alexander needed an ideologically strong counterattack to Bessus' pretensions to the throne after Darius' death; presenting himself to the Iranians with the royal dress, he could avail himself of the claim to be the avenger of the assassinated king.⁸⁴⁶

It is worth noticing that in two instances Plutarch stresses that Alexander opts for a "middle way", saying that he mixes elements of the Persian and Median clothing in the *Vita Alexandri*,⁸⁴⁷ and of the Macedonian and Persian fashions in *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute*.⁸⁴⁸ In my opinion, these two statements are not in contradiction with one another:⁸⁴⁹ in fact, Arrian (*An.* IV. 9. 9) too acknowledges Alexander's admiration for both the Persian and the Median clothing style. Moreover, the Achaemenid royal dress was composed of different clothes coming from the multifaceted Iranian background, Persian, Median, and Elamite;⁸⁵⁰ Alexander simply left aside its most extravagant items⁸⁵¹ and integrated some of his own cultural milieu, the Macedonian.⁸⁵² The "middle way" had a double aim: first, the conqueror did not wish to hurt the feelings of his own fellow countrymen with an excessively ostentatious attire; secondly, he wanted to connect himself with Cyrus the Great, the

⁸⁴³ Collins (2012.b) 385-386.

⁸⁴⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 45. 1-2. Cf. D. S. XVII. 77. 5.

⁸⁴⁵ Mossé (2004) 67-72; Jamzadeh (2012) 99-104.

⁸⁴⁶ Bosworth (1980.b) 5-6.

⁸⁴⁷ Plu. *Alex.* 45. 2.

⁸⁴⁸ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 8 (= *Mor.* 330A).

⁸⁴⁹ For a discussion on possible contradictions in the Plutarchean description of Alexander's "middle way", see Collins (2012.b) 389-392.

⁸⁵⁰ For the Achaemenid clothing, see Shahbazi S. (1992), "Clothing ii. In the Median and Achaemenid Periods", *Encyclopaedia Iranica online*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-ii> [accessed on 09-03-2014].

⁸⁵¹ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 8 (= *Mor.* 330A): τὰ γὰρ ἕξαλλα καὶ τραγικὰ τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ κόσμου παραιτησάμενος.

⁸⁵² Collins (2012.b) 372: "Alexander's royal sartorial style was a consciously constructed costume in which he selected elements of Macedonian and Achaemenid dress".

father of the Empire, who used to wear the red and white tunic as a distinctive sign of his royalty.⁸⁵³

Alexander III was not only a tireless general, but also a strenuous reader: his love for Homer is well attested in the sources,⁸⁵⁴ and probably he inherited his admiration for Cyrus from Herodotus and Xenophon.⁸⁵⁵ It is likely that the Macedonian had read those authors before crossing the Hellespont and during his stay in the East he continued to use them as a source of geographical and ethnographic information; from this literary baggage he (and his entourage) also gleaned stories of gods, heroes, kings, and political ideas which belonged to the Greek and the Persian tradition (the latter in the way it was perceived by the Greeks). In consequence of different historical factors, such as the kingdom of Macedon's submission to the Achaemenid Empire during the Persian wars (492-479 BC) and Philip II's plans for a campaign in Asia, during the fourth century BC the court of Macedon showed a particular interest in works related to Persia, such as Herodotus' *Histories*, Xenophon's *Anabasis* and *Cyropaedia*, and Ctesias' *Persica*.⁸⁵⁶ Within this cultural background Alexander developed his plan and aims of conquest, and he gradually adjusted his propaganda according to the situations which presented themselves throughout the campaign. Every variation in Macedonian propaganda, every new role Alexander played, reflected a change of mind in the initial plan and aims of the Asiatic expedition; he was free to adapt and test different bureaucratic schemes in different regions of the vast Empire. Due to his flexible political and bureaucratic programme, modern scholars have valued and labelled Alexander III's personality and statesmanship in contrasting ways. But is it necessary to label him rigidly? Instead of thinking in terms of *aut-aut*, supporting the idea of either continuity⁸⁵⁷ or rupture⁸⁵⁸ between the Achaemenid and Alexander's

⁸⁵³ Xen. *Cyr.* VIII. 3. 13. Cf. Mossé (2004) 67-68.

⁸⁵⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 8. 1: "he was by nature a lover of learning and reading (ἦν δὲ καὶ φύσει φιλόλογος καὶ φιλαναγνώστης)".

⁸⁵⁵ Str. XI. 11. 4. See Tuplin (1990) 22-28; B. Due (1993) 54-58; Vasunia (2001) 257; Burliga (2014) 134-142; Olbrycht (2014) 52-54.

⁸⁵⁶ Murray (1972) 204-206; Müller (2015) 464-466.

⁸⁵⁷ Briant (1979) 1402-1414.

⁸⁵⁸ Droysen (1880) 1; 360-361.

empire, we should recognise that he *created* a new figure of king,⁸⁵⁹ which blended together the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Greek tradition in accordance with his personal needs in different circumstances.

After this general outlook of the Herodotean images that persist in the Alexander-historians, I will now proceed with the analysis of two banquet-scenes related by Arrian: the first, on the occasion of the mass wedding at Susa (March 324 BC); the second, following the mutiny at Opis (August 324 BC). These two *symposia* are compared with Herodotus' description of the δεῖπνον at Amyntas I's court (512 BC) and at Attaginus' home respectively (480/479 BC).

First case study: the Persian *symposium* with women

1. Hdt. V. 18-20: banquet with the Persian envoys at Amyntas' court

(V. 18) When the Persians who had been sent as envoys arrived at Amyntas I's court, they came at his sight to demand earth and water for the King Darius I. Amyntas readily accepted and invited the envoys to be his guests; having prepared a magnificent dinner (δεῖπνον μεγαλοπρεπές), he received them hospitably. (2) After dinner, while drinking together (διαπίνοντες), the Persians said: "Macedonian, our host, it is a custom for us Persians (ἡμῖν νόμος ἐστὶ τοῖσι Πέρσησι), whenever we have a big dinner, to bring in to sit by the men also the concubines and wedded wives (τὰς παλλακὰς καὶ τὰς κουριδίας γυναῖκας ἐσάγεσθαι παρέδρους). Now, since you have received us eagerly and you are entertaining us greatly, and you have agreed to give earth and water to the King Darius I, follow yourself our custom (ἔπεο νόμῳ τῷ ἡμετέρῳ)". (3) To this Amyntas replied: "O Persians, we do not have such custom (ὧ Πέρσαι, νόμος μὲν ἡμῖν γε ἐστὶ οὐκ οὕτως); instead, men and women sit apart (κεχωρισθαι ἄνδρας γυναικῶν). But since you, being our masters, make this

⁸⁵⁹ For the "revisionist interpretation", see Hammond (1986) 73-85; Fredricksmeyer (2000) 136-166; Lane Fox (2007) 286-288; Weber (2009) 97-98.

request, this will be offered too". Having talked as much, Amyntas sent for the women. Once being called, they entered and sat down in a row opposite the Persians (ἐπεξῆς ἀντίαι ἴζοντο τοῖσι Πέρσησι). (4) Then the Persians, seeing beautiful women, said to Amyntas that what happened was not wise at all. For it would be better if from the beginning the women had never come, than that they should come and not sit beside the men, but sit opposite them being a source of pain for their eyes (μὴ παριζομένας ἀντίας ἴζεσθαι ἀλγηδόνας σφίσι ὀφθαλμῶν). (5) Amyntas, being compelled to, bade the women sit beside them. When the women were persuaded to do so, straightaway the Persians laid hands on their breasts, so much were they intoxicated with excess of wine (πλεόνως οἰνωμένοι), and some also tried to kiss them.

[V. 19: Amyntas' son Alexander I, finding it unbearable to see Macedonian women harassed by the Persians, bids his father rest. Amyntas leaves the banquet, but before departing he begs his son not to take imprudent decisions.]

(V. 20) After Amyntas asked for these things and went his way, Alexander said to the Persians: "Oh guests, you have full freedom to have these women, even if you want to have an intercourse with all or any of them. (2) In this regard, you decide. But now, for the hour of your rest is approaching already, and I see that you are all completely drunk (καλῶς ἔχοντας ὑμέας ὀρῶ μέθης), allow these women to go to wash, if this pleases you. Once they are washed, you will receive them back". (3) Having said this, he sent the women who had come out into their apartments, for the Persians gave their consent. Alexander then brought inside as many beardless men as were the women, after having dressed them in female clothes and having given them daggers [...] (5) Alexander seated one Macedonian next to each Persian (παρίζει Πέρση ἀνδρὶ ἄνδρα Μακεδόνα), as though they were women, and when the Persians began to lay hands on them, the Macedonians killed them.

2. Arr. An. VII. 4. 6-8: Susa mass-wedding.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁶⁰ Cf. Chares, *FGrH* 125, F 4 (= Ath. XII. 54, 348B-359A); D. S. XVII. 107. 6; Plu. *Alex.* 70. 2; *De Alex.* I. 7 (= *Mor.* 329EF); Ael. *VH.* VIII. 7.

(6) The weddings were celebrated according to Persian custom (νόμῳ τῷ Περσικῷ). (7) Chairs were placed for the bridegrooms in a row (θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν τοῖς νυμφίοις ἐφεξῆς) and, after the drinking (πότον), the brides came in and each one sat by the side of her groom (παρεκαθέζοντο ἑκάστη τῷ ἑαυτῆς). They took them by the hand and kissed them; the king began the ceremony, for the weddings of all took place together. If anything else, this seemed that made Alexander popular and comradely. (8) The bridegrooms, after having received their brides, led them away each to his own home, and to all Alexander gave dowry.

The staging and the sequence of the actions show that the δεῖπνον⁸⁶¹ at Amyntas' court belongs to the tradition that served as a model for the account of the wedding-feast at Susa. In both of them there is a clear assertion that the banquet is celebrated according to the Persian custom (Hdt. V. 18. 2 and Arr. *An.* VII. 4. 6), and much stress is put on the act of drinking (Hdt. V. 18. 2; V. 18. 5; Arr. *An.* VII. 4. 7) and on the women's presence.⁸⁶²

At Aegae, a Macedonian woman is placed next to each Persian man; at Susa, with a nice reversal in the narrative, it is a Persian (or generally, a noble Iranian) woman seated close to a Macedonian man. The act of *sitting* is given emphasis by the persistent use of the verb ἵζομαι / ἔζομαι and its compound forms (παρίζω, παρακαθίζομαι). It is worth remarking that the women's participation in *symposia* was considered a Persian practice, while in Greece "commensality was essentially an all-male activity".⁸⁶³ This explains why Amyntas and his son Alexander feel very uncomfortable with the request of Darius' envoys.

⁸⁶¹ For the distinction between δεῖπνον, πότος, and συμπόσιον, see Borza (1983) 45-46: the *deipnon* is a dinner party; the *potos* is a drinking social event; the *symposion* is a feast which includes drinks, food, and various entertainments.

⁸⁶² Fearn (2007) 101-102 asserts that all the dialogue among Amyntas and the Persians is based on the contrast between their opposing *nomoi*. Interesting is the view that Alexander I's rejection of the women's rape stands symbolically for his refusal to hand over Macedon to the Great King; see also Hobden (2013) 175. For the motif of men masqueraded in women's clothing at symposia, see Hobden (2013) 172-173.

⁸⁶³ Murray (1990) 6.

Interestingly, the Herodotean expression ἀλγηδόνας σφίσι ὀφθαλμῶν is reused by Plutarch in the description of Alexander's self-control and kindness towards Persian ladies.⁸⁶⁴ Again, this is a reverse image of the Persian envoys abusing Macedonian women at the *deipnon*.

The similarities between these two accounts appear more evidently if we compare Arrian's narration with those of the other Alexander-historians: Plutarch (*Alex.* 70. 2) and Diodorus (XVII. 107. 6) just mention the weddings at Susa without providing too many details about the ceremony; like Arrian, the historian Chares of Mytilene and the rhetorician Aelian dwell on the exceeding pomp of the event, for which a hundred silver-footed couches for the grooms and brides and a golden one for Alexander III were prepared and adorned with wedding paraphernalia; the guests invited to banquet were seated separately; artists from different parts of the empire were summoned. In these two very similar descriptions, the Susa mass wedding appears to have been held in fully (Herodotean) Persian royal fashion.⁸⁶⁵

Second case study: sharing the table with the Great King

1. Hdt. IX. 16: Theban banquet

(1) Attaginus son of Phrynon, a Theban, having made great preparations, invited Mardonius with fifty of the most notable Persians to be his guests at a banquet. So, having been invited, they went; the dinner (δεῖπνον) was held at Thebes. I have heard what follows from Thersander of Orchomenus, one of the most notable men in that city. Thersander said that he was also invited to this dinner by Attaginus, as other fifty Thebans. And they sat down, not each man by himself, but on each couch a Persian and a Theban together (ἀλλὰ Πέρσῃν τε καὶ Θηβαῖον ἐν κλίνῃ ἐκάστη). (2) After dinner, while they were drinking (διαπινόντων), the Persian who was sharing the same couch with Thersander asked him in Greek tongue where he was from. Thersander answered that he was from Orchomenus. Then the Persian said: "Since you have eaten at the

⁸⁶⁴ Plu. *Alex.* 21. 5: ἔλεγε παίζων ὡς εἰσὶν ἀλγηδόνας ὀμμάτων αἱ Περσίδες. See Nenci (1994) 177.

⁸⁶⁵ Chares, *FGrH* 125, F 4 (= Ath. XII. 54, 348B-359A); cf. Ael. *VH.* VIII. 7.

same board with me (ὄμοτράπεζός τέ μοι) and you have shared the same cup with me (καὶ ὄμόσπονδος), I would like to leave a memorial of my belief [...]”.

2. Arr. *An.* VII. 11. 8-9: the Opis banquet after the mutiny of the army and Alexander’s highly evocative speech to the Macedonians (*An.* VII. 8-10)

On the occasion, Alexander made sacrifices to the gods he usually sacrificed to according to his custom, and offered a public feast (θοῖνην δημοτελή). After he had sat down (καθήμενος), also all the others sat down – the Macedonians around him (ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν μὲν Μακεδόνων), the Persians next to them (ἐν δὲ τῷ ἐφεξῆς τούτων Περσῶν), and then the other peoples (ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις τῶν ἄλλων ἔθνῶν), as many were enjoying precedence for their reputation or some other virtue. Then Alexander and those around him, drawing wine from the same vessel, poured the same libations (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κρατήρος αὐτός τε καὶ οἱ ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ἀρυόμενοι ἔσπενδον); the Greek seers and the Magi leading the ceremony. (9) He prayed for other blessings, and for the concord and the *community of power* between Macedonians and Persians. It is said that there were nine thousand guests at the banquet; they all poured the same libation (μίαν τε σπονδήν) and on that occasion sang the song of victory.

The Theban δεῖπνον offers a closer insight of what a Persian banquet was like – or was supposed to be like – in Greek reception. The verb διαπίνοντες reinforces Herodotus’ statement that Persians were heavy drinkers (I. 133), and the adjectives ὀμόκλιος (seat-sharer), ὄμοτράπεζος (table-sharer), ὄμόσπονδος (libation-sharer) are to be considered technical terms of royal court etiquette. In fact, the Achaemenid King invited many guests to his banquets, displaying all his πολυδωρία (generosity), but he used to dine alone in a separate hall. After the meal, few were summoned to drink together with him; the *homospondos* and *homotrapezos* of the King enjoyed his favour and a pre-eminent place at court.⁸⁶⁶ I suggest that Arrian had in mind the “Herodotean royal court etiquette” for the description of the banquet at Opis, in which nine thousand guests sit together with Alexander III and those close to him – the

⁸⁶⁶ Briant (2002.a) 308.

Macedonians – participate with him in one same libation, being thus *homotrapezoi* and *homospondoi*.

Furthermore, the passage reminds us of another Herodotean image: the Persian “concentric belief” that the importance of the various peoples of the empire is correlated to their position, to their propinquity to the Great King (Hdt. I. 134. 2).⁸⁶⁷ In the banquet, Alexander represents the centre of power; around him are the Macedonians, then the Persians, and finally all the other folks according to their merits.

A comparison between Arrian’s description of the Opis banquet and the Plutarchean mass wedding at Susa reveals that Herodotean motifs were merged with second-century traditions in the creation of these two accounts. In *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute*, Alexander is portrayed while unifying in marriage Macedonian and Greek men with Persian women, so to become *one same community, one family*,⁸⁶⁸ and the idea of table-sharing is emphasized, as all the hundred mixed couples are sitting at *one common table*.⁸⁶⁹ Moreover, at the end of the chapter Plutarch compares Xerxes with Alexander and evaluates their attempt to bring together Asia and Europe: the Achaemenid failed, because he tried with the construction of a bridge, while the Macedonian succeeded, for he united the empire’s people with love and the bond of wedlock.⁸⁷⁰ Interestingly, the chastising of the Hellespont offers to the historian the prompt to compare Alexander and Xerxes on two occasions, which always serve as a reproach for the latter.

The word *κοινωνία* (communion, community) has a preeminent role in both Arrian and Plutarch’s passages; the term has divided Modern scholarship whether it

⁸⁶⁷ See also Badian (1958) 429; Briant (2002.a) 311; Harrison (2010) 227.

⁸⁶⁸ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 7 (= *Mor.* 329EF): “being joint together the two greatest and most powerful races: the Macedonian-Greeks and the Persians (εἰς κοινωνίαν συνιοῦσι τοῖς μεγίστοις καὶ δυνατωτάτοις γένεσι)”.

⁸⁶⁹ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 7 (= *Mor.* 329EF): “[Alexander brought together] at the same common table one hundred Persian brides and one hundred Macedonian and Greek bridegrooms (ἐφ’ ἑστίας κοινῆς καὶ τραπέζης, ἑκατὸν Περσίδας νύμφας, ἑκατὸν νυμφίους Μακεδόνας καὶ Ἕλληνας)”.

⁸⁷⁰ Plu. *De Alex.* I. 7 (= *Mor.* 329EF): “Oh barbarian Xerxes, oh fool, in vain you have labored so much for the bridging of the Hellespont (ὧ βάρβαρε Ξέρξη καὶ ἀνόητε καὶ μάτην πολλὰ περὶ τὴν Ἑλλησποντίαν πονηθεὶς γέφυραν). In this way sensible kings join together Asia and Europe: neither with wood, nor with rafts, nor with lifeless and incapable of feelings bonds, but with lawful love and chaste nuptials (ἀλλ’ ἔρωτι νομίμῳ καὶ γάμοις σώφροσι)”.

should be interpreted as a sign of the influence that the stoic idea of the world brotherhood had in the second-century authors⁸⁷¹ or Alexander III indeed believed in the *Unity of Mankind*⁸⁷² and aimed at a policy of fusion of people (*Verschmelzungspolitik*).⁸⁷³ In my opinion, it is likely that Alexander thought of his empire as a place where Macedonian-Greeks and Iranians would share power, but the Macedonians were destined to hold the most prominent political positions⁸⁷⁴ and Greek culture to be the official one. Moreover, Plutarch specifically mentions a *communion* between *only two peoples*, the Macedonian-Greeks and the Persians, and he does not take Iranians into consideration; Arrian's narration instead reveals a more political-centered thought, as his *koinōnia* is restricted to *arche*, the government and the management of the empire.

Conclusions

The Alexander-historians' representations of the Macedonian as a "Herodotean Persian King" (or as a reverse of him) can ultimately be thought as the result of ancient storytelling patterns or of Alexander's own *agenda* or sometimes of both together. According to their dependence on the *Histories*, the passages we have analysed can be grouped in three categories. The first comprises the descriptions which rely heavily on Herodotus, such as Alexander's unquenchable longing and the Macedonians' excessive luxury; they derive from Herodotean tropes which, being already common in the Hellenic mindset of the fourth century BC, merged into the Alexander-historians' narratives. Plutarch's Alexander, although often representing the reversal of the Persian Kings, belongs to this category as well, for he is openly paralleled to them: unlike Cambyses, he is warmly welcomed in Egypt; in contrast to Xerxes, he unifies Asia and Europe with love and not with fetters. Furthermore, Plutarch's Alexander

⁸⁷¹ Cf. Bosworth (1996) 1-5.

⁸⁷² Tarn (1948) I. 79, 116; II. 434-439; De Mauriac (1949) 107-114; Robinson (1949) 304. For the detractors of the theory of Alexander's *Unity of Mankind*, see Badian (1958) 425-444; Bosworth (1980.b) 1-21; Nagle (1996) 165; Hammond (1997) 187-190; Brunt (2003) 50; Worthington (1999) 51-52.

⁸⁷³ Schachermeyr (1949) 398: fusion for the constitution a new ruling class; Thomas (1968) 258-260; Bengtson (1985) 9; 182.

⁸⁷⁴ Badian (1965) 160-161; Bosworth (1980.b) 11-12; Brosius (2003) 175; Brunt (2003) 50.

strives to civilise the different populations of the Asiatic plateau, reversing Darius' *relativism*.

The second category includes narrations in which the Alexander-historians draw from Herodotus in order to exaggerate or explain Alexander's actual characteristics and his deeds during the Asiatic campaign: e. g., the Macedonian's strenuous efforts to master nature, and his hubristic desire to overcome every boundary. These two incidents reflect Alexander III's majestic projects and his genuine plans to compete against the Achaemenids, but they were overstated in their descriptions through references to Herodotean images. A further example of the historians' reshaping of Alexander according to Herodotean tropes is the staging of the relationship between Parmenio and Alexander: on many occasions, the old general is presented as Alexander's unheeded adviser, reminding us of the Herodotean Artabanus. The well-known literary device is used to express the historical contrast between the two.

Into the third category fall all the descriptions of Alexander and of the events occurred during the Persian campaign which present Herodotean motifs due to a shared Macedonian and Persian system of values, such as the primary role of the king's horse and of the cavalry, and the transplantation of populations into distant regions.

The Alexander-historians seem to find in Herodotus a valuable source of inspiration, and a frame of reference into which they could place, explain and describe the Macedonian conquest: the *Histories* offered narrative-themes on Persia and Greece, geographical details⁸⁷⁵ of the Achaemenid Empire, and inspired a sense of uniqueness⁸⁷⁶ of the narrated deeds. Therefore, the unprecedented deeds of Alexander became more intelligible and, at the same time, subject to praise or veiled criticism, by being set alongside the Persians' monumental achievements or their misbehaviour.

⁸⁷⁵ By way of example, see Callisthenes, *BNJ / FGrH* 1124, F 38 (= Str. XI. 14. 13): "The discourse of Herodotus [on the Araxes does not convince] at all (ὁ δὲ Ἡροδότειος οὐ πάνυ): for he says that flowing from the land of the Matieni, it splits into forty rivers, and it separates the Scythians from the Bactrians; and Callisthenes follows Herodotus (Καλλισθένης δὲ ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῷ)". The fact that Callisthenes – Alexander's official historian until his death in 327 BC – based his geographical descriptions on the *Histories* highlights Herodotus' pre-eminence as a geographical and historical source for the Macedonian campaign against Persia.

⁸⁷⁶ Cf. Hdt. I. 1 and Arr. *An.* I. 12. 4-5.

Presumably, Alexander III himself read the *Histories*: they represented a guide-book for his expedition to the East⁸⁷⁷ and offered him Persian models to imitate, such as Cyrus, the father of the Persians described with very positive tones, and Darius I, with his curiosity and his naval reconnaissance mission from India to the Suez Canal. Alexander's appropriation of some traits of the two brightest examples of Great Kings helped him be accepted by the Iranian population, and convince his fellow countrymen of the rightness of his choices. In other words, Alexander exploited the similarities between the Macedonians and the Persians in order to reach his goals.

As in their *agenda* both Alexander and his entourage blended elements of Macedonian and Greek cultures together with preexisting Herodotean motifs, the protagonist of the Alexander-historians' narratives is not the historical Alexander III, but a historiographical and mythical mirage which, as discussed in the previous chapters, has thrived until modern times.

⁸⁷⁷ Vasunia (2001) 256. See also Romm (2010) 399-403.

Conclusions

This thesis aimed at researching the Greek Reception of Alexander the Great, understood as a continuous reshaping of, and the creation of myths about, the historical king of Macedon who lived in the fourth century BC. In particular, it explored three distinctive aspects of the Greek Alexander-Reception: its continuity, variety, and cohesiveness. The case-studies I have chosen, taken from both the Ancient and the Modern era, show that Alexander has accompanied the Greeks since antiquity, has been reborn with them after every socio-historical change, and from an Ancient Macedonian king imbued with Hellenic culture has been transformed into an Orthodox Hellene (*Rhomios*) and a fully-fledged Modern Greek hero, supporter and guardian of the Greek *genos*. In fact, over the centuries Greeks have ascribed to him new deeds and characteristics according to their historical, political, religious and cultural needs: blended with the previous characterisations of Alexander, these gave life to a hero who is in continuous evolution⁸⁷⁸ and whose fame never dies.⁸⁷⁹

The continuity of the process of adaptation and appropriation of Alexander by the Greeks has created a variety of Receptions, which cross not only different historical periods, but also cultural and social strata; therefore, there are many Alexanders, one (or more) for every different historical era in Greek history. Within the wide range of Greek Alexander-Receptions, this thesis focuses i) on the political use of Alexander, which started in antiquity and which is represented here by the disparate cases of Ptolemy and Julian, a Hellenistic king and a Roman Emperor, and ii) on the two diametrically opposed aspects of Modern myth-making, namely the popular and the intellectual adaptations of the Macedonian hero, exemplified respectively by the “Folk Alexander” and the film *Megalexandros*. Although these receptions are the product of different historical periods and are addressed to different social communities, they all reveal the intrinsic cohesiveness of every metamorphosis of Alexander. In fact, this set of case-studies supports the idea that, viewed as a whole, the Greek Reception of

⁸⁷⁸ Nisbet (2008²) 133: “[Alexander] remains a name to conjure with, a name that is all the more powerful because we cannot pin it down to a single, agreed meaning”.

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. Nisbet (2008²) 88: “Alexander has been dead for nearly two and a half millennia, but he refuses to stay buried”.

Alexander can be explained as an uninterrupted path towards his glorification: with the passage of time, the Macedonian grows greater; he is a diachronic Panhellenic *Übermensch* rather than a king of Macedon.

Alexander's Hellenicity and Hellenic upbringing are particularly important to the Greek-speaking authors of the Late Antique period, who see in Alexander a means of safeguarding their cultural and religious (pagan) values against the Christian and the Persian threats. Libanius, Ammianus, Eunapius – and partly Julian – exploit the potential of the great conqueror's Hellenic cultural and political heritage; Gregorius of Nazianzen, Socrates and Philostorgius use Alexander not for his importance as a Hellene but as a foil to the Apostate's inability to rule the Roman Empire and command the army. In Modern times, Alexander's Hellenicity is at the centre of public attention in many contexts, notably the political debate between Greece and FYROM over the right to use the name *Macedonia*. Ancient symbols, such as the Sun (or Star) of Vergina and the Argeads' golden wreaths of oak leaves, together with the claim to direct descent from Alexander III, are widely exploited in the political propaganda of both countries. In need of a proof of their own Greekness, today's Greeks invoke Alexander as their *Greek* ancestor, considering him a "tangible proof" of the continuity of their *genos*.

Alexander's metamorphosis into a *Rhomios*, which took place in the sixth-seventh century AD, is also portrayed in Angelopoulos' film *Megalexandros*. Upon becoming Orthodox, Alexander maintains his Greekness, but he is deprived of the most pagan elements and assimilated to Jesus Christ. For example, in the film, Alexander's *Rhomiosyne* is fully displayed in his role as saviour of his fellow countrymen: like Christ, he baptises them and re-enacts the *Last Supper*; like a Greek-freedom fighter, he fights against the evil dragon, which symbolises the foreign powers that in the first half of the twentieth century meddled in Greek politics and sought to rule over Greece.

Alexander's heroic features are especially exploited in his Modern folk representations, be they tales, traditions, songs, or spells; they constitute an amplification of the Ancient myth-making that started with his court historians and artists and was prompted by the Macedonian himself. In the eyes of contemporaries, Alexander is a victorious ruler, a fair judge, and also a *Herodotean* Persian king, i. e. a ruler charged with symbols and elements excerpted from Ancient Greek stories and

adaptations of the Achaemenid world. The *Herodotean* Alexander promotes a myth rationalised by historiographical patterns; his mythification finds its highest expression in Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Romance*, which, with its fantastic elements, served as a basis to Modern Greek folklore.

In this programme of glorification, there is little room for criticism: it seems that, already in the Hellenistic period, Greeks tried to justify Alexander's most tyrannical traits; similarly, when the Macedonian's despotic actions are brought in in the conversation, Modern Greeks promptly downplay them. Two case-studies, the Alexanders of Julian and Angelopoulos, offer an insight into the Greeks' negative reaction to the "refusal" of Alexander by other Greeks.

As seen above, the likeness of a ruler to Alexander is important both in the Diadochic and in the Late Antique eras, when Greek-speaking authors and people interpreted Alexander as the epitome of the legendary conqueror and victorious Hellene. Because of his unique military skills, several generals and Emperors wanted to appear as a worthy match to Alexander or even claimed to be a New Alexander. Among these attempts at imitation of Alexander, Ptolemy is a *sui generis* case because he is the only political ruler who engages extensively in creating a particular discourse about the Macedonian hero. In fact, he wanted his regime to bask in the reflected glory of Alexander.

Julian the Apostate also constitutes a distinctive example of *imitatio Alexandri*, as it represents an "imposed Alexandrisation": although in his works he acknowledges the value of the Macedonian's generalship, Julian does not strive to be considered an Alexander-like leader, and he sees himself closer to Marcus Aurelius' personality for his philosophical interests, or to Trajanus for his management of the war against Persia. Julian becomes part of Late Antique myth-making about the Macedonian not inasmuch as he fully agrees with it, but because he is cast in Alexander's mould by his contemporary authors who wished to praise him, or by the fifth century Christian writers who wanted to discredit his paganism. In any event, the Apostate's "refusal" of the Macedonian king as his own model was rejected by the Greeks, who nowadays still speak highly of his likeness to Alexander.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁸⁰ The study of when and how the Greeks' rejection of Julian's "refusal" of Alexander developed will be one of the aims of a future paper on the Hellenic Reception of the Apostate in the Byzantine period.

Negative reshapings and adaptations of Alexander are so uncommon in Modern myth-making that when Theodore Angelopoulos' film *Megalexandros* was released in Greece in 1980 it received a poor reception from both the critics and the wider audience. Although Angelopoulos creates an Alexander with many common traits with the Macedonian hero of the *Romance* or of the Karaghiozis shadow-theatre, the open representation of his moral degeneration due to absolute power and his association with bandits caused the Greek audience's severe reactions. Alexander cannot be object of open and harsh criticism anymore: as the folkloristic production has showed us, he is a legendary freedom-fighter, a chivalrous slayer of monsters, a mythical conqueror of marvellous places populated by gorgons and witches, a gigantic hero. Alexander has been transformed into a pan-national hero and he appears everywhere in Greece: in souvenir-shops, paintings, movies, comics, songs, traditions, and of course in books and museums. If he is criticised, all the Greeks are criticised, and they feel deprived of one of the sources of Hellenic pride.

Julian and Angelopoulos prove that Greeks tend to reshape Alexander's image in a positive way. Negative interpretations have a short life and are not permitted to call into question Alexander's supposed contribution to Hellenicity: not only did he conquer Persia (the Achaemenids in the past, the Ottomans in the period of Turkokratia) but he also spread Greek *paideia* and paved the way to Orthodoxy.

Alexander has become part of the history, the literature and the lore of many countries, but only in Greece has he reached the status of diachronic, pan-national (Greek), ethnic (Graeco-Macedonian) myth: he is both the recipient and the bearer of the Greeks' cultural identity, and moves over from one era to the next charged with all the previous meanings, which he will deliver to his new audience. In fact, no matter how many different roles he has covered; in their reshaping of Alexander, Greeks express their ownership of the Macedonian hero, and the belief that, thanks to their common bloodline, it is only they who can fully understand the Classical period and, therefore, the Macedonian's personality and conquests.

Concluding, the case-studies presented here argue that Alexander is a template constantly reshaped by the Greeks. The last chapter, on the *Herodotean* Alexander, adds an extra twist: the fact that Alexander-historians incorporated some pre-existent elements – in particular Herodotean tropes – into their narratives about Alexander reveals that already in his own time he was a historiographical mirage ready for the

Greeks to use and consume. In Greece Alexander is never “out-of-date”, as he constitutes a *vademecum* of examples and mottoes for every Greek; although we will never know the historical Alexander, his Hellenic mythical persona will never die.