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OF GODS AND MORTALS

Alexander's dalliance with Divinity



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For my Nan,
who passed almost a year ago. Forever on my mind
and in my heart.

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to argue, using modern and ancient scholarship, that Alexander the Great believed himself to be divine and was portrayed as such during his lifetime. The campaigns of Alexander have captured the imaginations of scholars throughout history, from Curtius Rufus' *Life of Alexander* in the Roman Empire, to Richard Stoneman's *Alexander the great: Life and Legend* in the modern day. Alexander is a figure that has been shrouded in mystery and controversy, for many reasons, one of the most thought-provoking is that of his questionability of his supposed divinity. The ancient sources are littered with references to the king's connection to the gods, most notably to Zeus himself. No two sources are identical, each adding something new to the argument of Alexander's divinity, making it immensely difficult to determine the full accuracy of his claims to divinity and to what lengths he went to obtain it.

During this piece we will be closely examining the works of Arrian a Greek historian and philosopher who writes with what some consider to be the most accurate of the Alexander sources, Curtius Rufus a Roman writer whose life is known little about, and Plutarch a biographer who was more interested in a character's personality rather than historical accuracy.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: The first chapter will discuss the connection between Alexander and his divine, heroic ancestry. Chapter two will focus on his trip into Egypt, his exposure to the Egyptian ways of kingship, and what it was like to be a living god. Chapter three will expand that of chapter two, focussing on Alexander's controversial journey to the oracle of Zeus Ammon in Siwa and how the ancient sources interpret and discuss these events. The final chapter will deal with the imagery of Alexander and the connection they hold to the divine world, and how they depict Alexander's divinity.

Chapter One: Divine Ancestry

During this chapter we shall be covering the ancestral connection that Alexander had with the ancient heroes Achilles and Heracles, and in connection how his emulation of them connected Alexander with the divine world. In addition to this the controversy surrounding Alexander's parentage, and the myths that were reiterated well into the Roman Empire. Discussing the divine ancestry of Alexander is exceedingly important to our argument as it is the launching pad from which he based his own divinity on.

Achilles

Since the modern study on Alexander commenced in the nineteenth century,¹ scholars have drawn connections between Alexander and the famous Greek hero Achilles. There has been much disagreement on the historical accuracy of the connection between Alexander and Achilles but nevertheless there has been an overarching agreement that this connection represents an equal mix between historical fact and literary invention² as many of the literary sources that link the two together came later.³ It was not an uncommon practice for royal houses in ancient Greek and Macedonian world to trace their lineage back to a divine or heroic figure⁴ and Alexander's family was no exception to this practice. According to our ancient sources, on the side of his mother Olympias, Alexander could trace his family line back to Achilles himself.⁵ During his lifetime the Molossian royal house (that of Olympias), had claimed descent from Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles.⁶ They had even continued to call themselves 'the Aeacids' referring to Aeacus who was the grandfather of the Greek hero. As

¹ Vorhis, 2017. 1-2

² Vorhis, 2017. 1-2

³ Heckel. 22

⁴ Boak 1916. 293; Vorhis, 2017. 3

⁵ Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.7; Curtius 4.6.29; Diodorus. 17.1.5; Justin. 11.3.1; Plutarch *Alexander.* 2.1.

⁶ Carney, 2006. 5

pointed out by Vorhis in his dissertation, it would be highly unlikely that these ancient ancestral lines were factual, however, Alexander and those who came before him would likely have believed in them without hesitation.⁷ P.A Brunt highlights this viewpoint perfectly:

...the Greek world did not distinguish legend from history and there is no reason to think that such genealogies...were not believed. Almost certainly, to Alexander, Heracles, Perseus, and Achilles were real persons and his actual ancestors.⁸

During the fourth century BC, the heroic ambition, which was best represented by the Homeric poems, was still very much the ideal way of life. From a young age one of Alexander's great passions was for Homeric poetry.⁹ It was well within the realm of the Greeks to try and imitate and compare themselves and their deeds with those of the Homeric poems. It appears that the young Alexander emulated the Trojan war hero from childhood,¹⁰ and was in competition with him throughout his life time, trying to match and surpass his great heroic deeds.

Throughout our sources, Alexander and Achilles are compared both explicitly and implicitly. The implicit comparison is often represented through similar characteristics. For instance, when we view the character of Achilles he is described as fierce and terrible in war, unbeatable in battle, he could be forgiving or pitiless to those he conquered, and in battle he fought like fire or an avenging lion.¹¹ He was constantly seeking honour and eternal glory through song (playing his lyre).¹² In his descriptions of Alexander, Plutarch describes him as an Olympic-grade runner; the youngest, most courageous in the face of battle, and he is also

⁷ Vorhis, 2017. 3

⁸ Brunt 1976. 464

⁹ Stewart, 2007. 78.

¹⁰ Stewart, 2007. 80

¹¹ Stewart, 2007. 82; Homer, *Iliad*.

¹² Stewart, 2007. 82; Homer, *Iliad*.

skilled in the arts of music, which includes playing the lyre.¹³ Much like his Homeric Hero, Alexander was said to be invincible in battle, terrible in war; he could be forgiving, or he could be merciless to those whom he conquered.¹⁴ Still aligning with his hero, Alexander too sought honour and perpetual glory.¹⁵

We first see the direct comparison of Alexander and Achilles set in the young prince's childhood. A. Cohen has commented that Alexander's education played a decisive role in his connection to the Homeric Achilles.¹⁶ The young prince was given the nickname of young Achilles by his childhood tutor Lysimachus, who also referred to Philip II as Peleus, and called himself Phoenix.¹⁷ Furthering this connection was the philosopher Aristotle who had been invited to Macedon by Philip to teach Alexander. Plutarch tells us that Aristotle gifted the young prince with an annotated copy of the *Iliad*.¹⁸ In his writings Plutarch does not explicitly draw the connection between the gift from Aristotle and Alexander's attention to the Greek warrior, although, it is easy to believe that his interest in the Homeric hero influenced Aristotle's choice of gift.¹⁹ Throughout the ancient sources there are several episodes in which Alexander, in some form of another, assumes the role and persona of Achilles.

This role play can be seen in our first example, of Alexander's pilgrimage to Troy at the beginning of his Persia campaign, in 334 BC.²⁰ Arriving at Troy must have been exciting for Alexander, to see where his heroic ancestors would have fought and died. I. Worthington states that in his travelling to the place of his fallen ancestors, Alexander was assuming the

¹³ Plutarch *Alex*. Youngest and most courageous: 11.6; 16.3-7; 20.8; 33.4; 41.1; 58.6. lyre: 15.9.

¹⁴ Plutarch *Alex*. Invincible in battle: 15.7; 26.14; forgiving: 12-13; 21; 29.9; 30.6; 44.4-5;

¹⁵ Plutarch *Alex*. Honour and glory: 4.8; 5.5-6; 7.8; 14.9; 34.2.

¹⁶ Cohen, 1995. 485

¹⁷ Plutarch. *Alex*. 5.8; Stewart, 2007.80

¹⁸ Plutarch *Alex*. 8.2

¹⁹ Vorhis, 2017. 7

²⁰ Worthington, 2004. 66

role and had come as a young Achilles.²¹ While at Troy, Alexander sacrificed to his ancestors, with oil or by placing a wreath on the tomb of Achilles.²² Hephaestion was also said to have placed a wreath on the tomb of Patroclus.²³ It is interesting to note that while all our sources have Alexander sacrifice at Troy there are differences between the accounts which highlight how authors differ in the connections they create for Alexander. Let us compare the two accounts in Plutarch and in Arrian. Plutarch says.

Once arrived in Asia, he went up to Troy...He anointed with oil the column which marks the grave of Achilles...and crowned it with a wreath: he also remarked that Achilles was happy in having found a faithful friend while he lived and a great poet to sing his deeds after his death...²⁴

Arrian's briefer account says: Some say that Alexander placed a wreath on the tomb of Achilles, and Hephaestion is said to have placed one on Patroklos' tomb. Legend has it that Alexander accounted Achilles happy for having had Homer to preserve his fame for posterity²⁵.

Plutarch in his text does not make mention to Hephaestion paying tribute to the tomb of Patroclus while Arrian does.

Arrian does not claim these events to be factual, simply stating that the events were said to have taken place. There is also the addition of Patroclus' comparison, which is omitted from Plutarch. It is likely that Arrian's purpose for writing this passage was to emphasise his own role in the Alexander narrative. Modern scholars much like Arrian have often been sceptical of Hephaestion placing a wreath upon the tomb of Patroclus²⁶; it was most likely a literary invention to draw comparison between Alexander and Achilles. It is more commonly accepted that Alexander did sacrifice or lay a wreath on the tomb of Achilles.

²¹ Worthington, 2004. 72

²² Worthington, 2004. 72; Plutarch. *Alex.* 15.8; Arrian. *Anab.* 1.12.1.

²³ Arrian. *Anab.* 1.12.1

²⁴ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983. 267

²⁵ Arrian and Romn, 2005. 24

²⁶ Perrin, 1895: 58; Bosworth, 1980: 103-104.

Our second example comes in the form of Hephaestion's death in 324 BC. The sources tell us that Hephaestion fell ill one night whilst at a drinking party and was put to bed with a high fever.²⁷ Seven days later he was overcome by his illness and died. After his death Alexander acted in a manner that can be only be described in an Achillean fashion, playing the part of Achilles mourning for his friend Patroclus.²⁸ It is said that Alexander wept over the body of his friend for a day and a night and refused to eat or drink.²⁹ What is most striking is that it is said Alexander like that of Achilles cut his hair and placed it over the body, as Arrian recounts:

A variety of accounts have been written about Alexander; s grief. All writers agree that it was profound...That Alexander cut his hair over the corpse I do not consider improbable, especially given his emulation of Achilles, whom from boyhood he had sought to emulate.³⁰

Arrian, the most cautious of the ancient sources, was not reluctant to make the connection between Alexander and Achilles in this section. Seemingly this emulation is just accepted. Arrian's endorsement gives the events credence, making it likely that Ptolemy I and Aristobulus accounts (Arrian two main sources) match. The comparison goes even further than this; Alexander had an expensive funeral pyre built for his boyhood friend³¹ and was reported to say 'The companion whom I considered equal to my own life.'³² Once more the reader prompted to think of Achilles and the death of Patroclus, when the hero is credited in saying 'The companion...whom I honoured above all my companions, equal to my own life.'³³

²⁷ Green, 2005. 253

²⁸ Heckel, 2015. 30

²⁹ Arrian *Anab.* 7.14.3-4.

³⁰ Arrian and Romn, 2005. 293

³¹ Green, 2005. 254. The funeral for Hephaestion reportedly did not take place until the following year of 323 BC.

³² Arrian. *Anb.* 7.14.6

³³ Homer. *Iliad.* 18.80.82

With reason there has been some scepticism from scholars; Alexander's imitation of Achilles' own grief following the death of his companion could be nothing more than a literary invention.³⁴ However, it has been argued by certain scholars that there may be some historical basis given the complexity of his emulation in this Achillean episode.³⁵ It seems that Alexander emulated Achilles even in his darkest of hours, making it apparent that he was indeed trying to be seen as the second Achilles.³⁶ Alexander's continued emulation of his heroic ancestors becomes significantly more important when you take into account Achilles was semi-divine.

Heracles

Achilles was not the only Greek hero to whom Alexander could claim familiar ties to. Through the Macedonian royal family (the Argead dynasty), Alexander could trace his bloodline to the Greek Hero Heracles³⁷ an association which Alexander would have been proud of.³⁸ Heracles was known as the son of the king of the gods, Zeus, but perhaps most importantly he is renowned for his twelve labours. As the heroic ancestor of the Macedonian royal family it would not be surprising that Alexander would emulate the hero in some form or another. During this section we will be covering the image of Heracles on Macedonian coinage and Alexander's possible emulation of him. Arrian makes mention of an occasion where Heracles was set alongside the other gods to whom Alexander customarily made sacrifice to. It is also interesting to consider that Alexander's illegitimate first-born child and son by his mistress, Barsine, was supposedly named Heracles.³⁹

³⁴ Vorhis, 2017: 9; Bosworth 2015: 30; Heckel 1988a: 64.

³⁵ Vorhis 2017: 9; Ameling 1988: 687-689; Cohen 1995: 485

³⁶ Vorhis 2017: 10

³⁷ Arrian: 3.3.2; Plutarch *Alex*: 2.1.

³⁸ Heckel, 2015: 22

³⁹ Heckel, 2015: 25

The image of Heracles first appears on Macedonian coinage from the fifth century, and these come to further prominence on Alexander's coinage.⁴⁰ Between 330 and 320 BC the conclusion can be drawn that the head of Heracles began to acquire features of Alexander.⁴¹ In his coinage Alexander is represented wearing the lion headdress traditionally worn by Heracles⁴² (shown in fig...). Heckel writes that the viewer of these coins was supposed to recognise the image of Alexander in the guise of Heracles, as it would be highly unlikely that the Greek hero would be depicted as beardless and youthful after the completion of his labours.⁴³ In the opinion of Edmunds, the change in the coinage is likely to have been caused in response to a change to Alexander himself, after the siege of Tyre from the emulating of Achilles to the imitation of Heracles.⁴⁴

Throughout his campaign Alexander is mentioned several times sacrificing to Heracles alongside the other gods. Before Alexander could venture further into Persia he needed to capture all of Phoenician cities that had belonged to Persia, amongst which were Sidon, Aradus, Byblos and Tyre. Byblos and Sidon surrendered to Alexander as he passed by.⁴⁵ En route to Tyre Alexander requested that he be allowed to sacrifice to Heracles⁴⁶ (or perhaps more accurately Phoenician Melqart who the Greek considered the equivalent of Heracles), an honour which was only afforded to the King, so they refused him entrance into the city. Alexander in turn was furious and proceeded to lay siege to the city. Tyre was an island 730 meters off the coast, and was surrounded by seemingly impregnable fortified walls, which were more than 45 meters high.⁴⁷ The siege was long and proved to be one of the most

⁴⁰ Edmunds, 1971: 375

⁴¹ Edmunds, 1971: 375

⁴² Heckel, 2015: 25

⁴³ Heckel, 2015: 25

⁴⁴ Edmunds, 1971: 375

⁴⁵ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983.

⁴⁶ Edmunds, 1971: 374; Arrian 2.15.7

⁴⁷ Fildes and Fletcher. 2001: 50-51

gruelling parts of Alexander's campaigns, as it lasted up to six months. Arrian recalls the speech that Alexander was said to have delivered to his officers, in which he explained the strategic importance of the city.⁴⁸ The strategic value of Tyre clearly could not be underestimated, in that the taking of the city was demonstrably of great personal importance to Alexander. The sources inform us that Alexander dreamt that Heracles came to him and led him to the walls of Tyre:

...Alexander dreamed that when he was approaching the walls of Tyre, Herakles grasped his right hand and brought him into the city. Aristophanes interpreted this to mean that with hard toil Tyre would be captured, since Herakles' feats had also been the fruit of hard toil.⁴⁹

After six months the Macedonian forces finally took the city. Alexander unleashed his men upon the city and allowed them the slaughter of its inhabitants.⁵⁰ Alexander was ruthless, as illustrated by Curtius' claims that two thousand men of military age were crucified on the beach of the mainland⁵¹, whilst the rest of its inhabitants were sold into slavery; he only spared those who had taken refuge at the temple of Heracles.⁵² Finally, he sacrificed to Heracles in the city and held a parade and a naval review in honour of his heroic ancestor.⁵³ Upon Alexander's return from Egypt he once again sacrificed to Heracles at Tyre⁵⁴, also setting up altars to the twelve gods at the limit of his eastern campaign⁵⁵. In doing so he was deliberately imitating Heracles.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that upon his death Heracles was taken to live amongst the gods on Mount Olympus.

⁴⁸ Arrian *Anab*: 2.17

⁴⁹ Arrian *Anab*: 2.18.1

⁵⁰ O'Brien, 1992: 82-84

⁵¹ O'Brien, 1992: 82-84

⁵² Edmunds, 1971: 374

⁵³ Edmunds, 1971: 374

⁵⁴ Arrian *Anab*: 2.24.5-6; Edmunds, 1971: 374

⁵⁵ Edmunds, 1971: 374

⁵⁶ Edmunds, 1971: 374

Using Arrian, Edmunds has come to the conclusion that Alexander believed himself to be divine.⁵⁷ His emulation of Heracles and Achilles connects him to divinity and is a sign of his belief in his own divinity. This seems feasible as heroes through their deeds attained a certain divinity of their own.⁵⁸ It seems feasible that Alexander's emulation of his divine ancestors and his need want to surpass them was a part of his way to attain divinity.

Divine father:

In addition to his accepted heroic ancestors, it was rumoured throughout his life and after his death that Alexander may have been the son of Zeus. Plutarch is our main source for Alexander's childhood. For this reason, his works give us the fullest account of the mythology surrounding Alexander's birth and parentage⁵⁹ - he gives three mythical retellings, all of which in some form or another associate Alexander's birth with Zeus.⁶⁰

The first of these retelling is told on the wedding night of Philip II and Olympias:

On the night that the marriage was consummated, the bride dreamed that there was a crash of thunder, that her womb was struck by a thunderbolt, and that there followed a blinding flash...⁶¹

What immediately stands out to the reader in this instance is the thunderbolt, which is associated with Zeus. In addition to this it is interesting to note that in Macedon, Zeus was worshipped with epithet of *Keraunos* meaning 'Thunderbolt'⁶² it is more than likely that Plutarch would be aware of this fact. It should be assumed that the thunderbolt is supposed to represent either Zeus entering the womb of Olympias, or to be the physical manifestation of his seed impregnating her.⁶³ We cannot know for sure when this mythical telling of

⁵⁷ Edmunds, 1971: 378

⁵⁸ Edmunds, 1971: 369

⁵⁹ Ogden, 2011: 7

⁶⁰ Ogden, 2011: 7

⁶¹ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983: 253

⁶² Ogden, 2011: 12-13

⁶³ Ogden, 2011: 12-13

Alexander's birth was first told, prior to that of Plutarch⁶⁴ or whether it was circulating during Alexander's lifetime. It is also worth mentioning that there is mention to the king being called 'thunderbolt-bearer' by his travelling historian Callisthenes.⁶⁵ Archaeology also seems to support this connection to Alexander being a bearer of the symbol of Zeus. Nearing the end of his reign his 'Porus' decadrachms (326-3 BC) portrayed him in armour wielding a thunderbolt.⁶⁶

The second conception myth Plutarch presents scholars with involved yet another dream, this time a dream of Philip:

...some time after their marriage, Philip saw himself in a dream in the act of sealing up his wife's womb, and upon the seal he had used there was engraved, so it seemed to him, the figure of a lion.⁶⁷

Once again Plutarch greets his readers with Macedonian symbolism, it was well known the lion was the symbol of Heracles son of Zeus, who of course was associated with the Macedonian royal house. As mentioned previously Macedonian kings were known for issuing coinage featuring their heroic ancestor.⁶⁸ Ogden makes the compelling argument that while this version of events seems to try and disassociate Philip from the patternicity of Alexander, it is in fact doing the opposite.⁶⁹ It is Philip who sees himself making a thrusting motion to his wife's womb, furthermore as Ogden points out Plutarch could be trying to connect Philip to Zeus.⁷⁰ Alexander in this interpretation is Heracles, so in turn Philip being his father, is representing Zeus who in turn is the father of Heracles.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Ogden, 2011: 12-13

⁶⁵ IBID

⁶⁶ IBID

⁶⁷ Plutarch 2.4, Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983: 253

⁶⁸ Ogden, 2011: 11

⁶⁹ Ogden, 2011: 11

⁷⁰ Ogden, 2011: 11

⁷¹ IBID

Furthermore, during the siring of Heracles, Zeus took the form of his mortal father Amphytrion (find ancient source as well).⁷² It is entirely possible that Plutarch is trying to mirror this: the mortal father has taken on the role of the god during the act of siring, it is possible that Philip and Zeus both had active roles in Alexander's conception.⁷³

The notion of having two biological fathers was not a new concept in the ancient world and was accepted in mythology.⁷⁴ Therefore, the idea that Philip and Zeus shared equal parts in Alexander's siring makes sense.⁷⁵ As Ogden points out this notion makes historical sense as Philip strongly identified himself with Zeus, he was the first of the Argeads to use the image of Zeus on his coinage, opposed to simply using attributes of the god⁷⁶ (figure).

This myth seems to have been present during Alexander's lifetime and was known abroad, claiming the paternity of both Philip and Zeus.⁷⁷ The paternity would have been a necessary in order for Alexander to claim divine parentage whilst still being able to retain his claim to the Macedonian throne.⁷⁸

Finally, we have an entirely different kind of myth:

And once a serpent was seen stretched out beside Olympias' body as she slept. And they say that this most of all blundered Philip's desire for and fond feelings towards his wife...he avoided her company out of religious scruple since she was having congress with a higher power...⁷⁹

During this section Plutarch suggests that the serpent Philip sees lying with his wife was a manifestation of Ammon, and a manifestation of Zeus with whom Libyan Ammon was

⁷² Stewart, 2007: 97

⁷³ IBID

⁷⁴ Stewart, 2007: 97; secondary example of divine parentage, according to Justin, Seleucid (one of Alexander's successors) was the son of Apollo, Engles, 2010: 154.

⁷⁵ Stewart, 2007: 97

⁷⁶ Stewart, 2007: 97

⁷⁷ Stewart, 2007: 97

⁷⁸ IBID

⁷⁹ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983; Ogden, 2011: 7

heavily associated with.⁸⁰ Zeus was well known throughout mythology for taking the form of animals in order to consort with mortals, (add something about Dionysus and Olympias worship of him- snake worship...Dionysus is also son of Zeus).

Conclusion:

From a young age Alexander would have been told to stories of his famous semi-divine ancestors, on top of this his mother is said to have told him of his supposed divine parentage. Throughout his life Alexander used these connections as a source of propaganda, but also sought to emulate and outdo the great deeds of those who had come before him. It is evident through coinage that Alexander claimed some sort of connection to Zeus, whether or not this his claim to his own divinity is yet to be seen. It is apparent that Zeus played a large part in the Macedonian's beliefs, and had been used on coinage by Alexander's father before him. Alexanders association with his heroic and semi-divine ancestors sets him apart from other ancient figures and gave him opportunity and incentive to surpass their deeds. Imagery will be discussed in greater detail at a later point.

⁸⁰ Ogden, 2011: 8; Worthington, 2004: 31

Chapter Two: Alexander in Egypt

After his victory in the battle of Issus in 333BC Alexander continued on south to conquer the island city of Tyre and proceeded to march southwards until he reached Egypt.⁸¹ Virtually all that the Greeks knew about Egypt came from the works of Herodotus, who, a century beforehand, had written about the things he saw on his travels down the Nile.⁸² It would have been likely that Alexander was well versed in these works before he made the journey into the ancient land. It can be argued that Alexander's time in Egypt provides us with some of the most important and compelling evidence for the king presenting himself as a divine figure.

Alexander invaded Egypt in November of 332BC, managing to conquer the ancient land with little resistance. In six months he had conquered Egypt.⁸³ Edward Gibbon expressed his belief that Alexander was able to conquer the country in such a short period of time because "...the natives; they abhorred their Persian oppressors...".⁸⁴ This is highly likely a contributing factor to Alexander's quick success, with no resistance from the native Egyptians; this left a reduced number of Persian officials for him to contend with. The Persian satrap, Mezakes had no hope of reinforcements so upon Alexander's approach to Memphis, Mezakes surrendered the citadel along with the garrison and treasury of eight hundred talents.⁸⁵ Alexander was welcomed as the saviour and liberator of Egypt and most believe he was hailed pharaoh.

Pharaonic Divinity:

Being an Egyptian pharaoh was worlds away from being a Macedonian king. Before we proceed any further I believe it necessary to briefly discuss the divine aspect of the Egyptian rulers. Since the earliest stages of Egyptian society their rulers had been interwoven with the

⁸¹ Holbl, 2001: 9

⁸² Freeman, 1973: 143

⁸³ Vasunia, 2001:266; Cassell, 1980: 90

⁸⁴ Vasunia, 2001:266.

⁸⁵ Wilken, 1996: 113; Fox, 1973: 195

gods.⁸⁶ Pharaohs themselves were thought to be of divine origin; their divine nature was a fundamental attribute of the ideology of kingship.⁸⁷ Since the very beginning of the pharaonic period (c 3100 BC), the divinity of kingship was central to and an integral part of the social structure and belief system of the Egyptian people.⁸⁸ In many early inscriptions the kings have been referred to as ‘the god’ (*netjer*), or more commonly ‘the good god’ (*nefer netjer*).⁸⁹ Oakes and Gahlin suggest this title could identify the pharaohs as lesser or more minor gods in the Egyptian beliefs.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the pharaoh doubled as the high priest for every temple and to every god of the Egyptian pantheon.⁹¹ Due to this high position the pharaoh stood as the intermediary between the gods and the human world.⁹² Evidence of this is shown on temple reliefs, detailing the kings performing their ritual duties and dedicating offerings to the gods.⁹³ These temple reliefs were of the utmost importance, as it was necessary that the king be presented to be the one maintaining *ma’at* (truth, order, and justice).⁹⁴ It was his job to ensure the generosity of the gods and in extension guarantee harmony, peace and prosperity throughout Egypt.⁹⁵

The archaeological evidence tells us that Alexander was accepted by the native Egyptians as their new pharaoh; this is shown in hieroglyphic texts, which demonstrate that he bore traditional royal titles.⁹⁶ From these inscription scholars learn that of the five customary titles dating from the middle of the third millennium BC, Alexander was awarded the first, fourth,

⁸⁶ Wilcken, 1997: 115

⁸⁷ Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 342

⁸⁸ Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 342

⁸⁹ Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 342; Frankfort, 1978: 36

⁹⁰ Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 342

⁹¹ Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 344-345

⁹² IBID

⁹³ IBID

⁹⁴ Frankfort, 1978: 51; Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 344-345

⁹⁵ Frankfort, 1978: 51; Oakes and Gahlin, 2004: 344-345

⁹⁶ Wilcken, 1997: 114; Wilkinson, 2003: 54

and fifth.⁹⁷ These five titles were used to express the relationship that the king had with the gods⁹⁸. Alexander appears first as ‘protector of Egypt’ under his Horus name, which is used to describe the king as the representative of Horus.⁹⁹ His Golden name portrays him as ‘strong? ruler over the land’, Holbl takes this translation to mean ‘ruler over the entire empire’ in this instance, as the title is unique to Egyptian kings.¹⁰⁰ It is likely that both of Alexander’s throne-names are a reference to his distinct circumstances to do with his legitimization:¹⁰¹ ‘beloved by Ammon, and selected by Ra’ followed by ‘Son of Ra’.¹⁰² These throne-names became common in the New Kingdom. Alexander’s successors also used similar names, symbolising their legitimacy in ruling as they were chosen by the gods.¹⁰³ During this period Egypt was exceedingly unique, as the only country in the East where the rulers and divinity were intertwined; as a result of this Alexander was a recipient of divine honours.¹⁰⁴ If Alexander truly believed himself to be divine, then, within Egyptian religious beliefs, he must truly have been in his element.

Alexander as Pharaoh:

In order for Alexander to permanently solidify his pharaonic rule in Egypt, he would have had to fulfil his religious duties to the country and have the backing of the native priests. For the newly crowned pharaoh to do this he would have had to spend the next few months dedicating his time to showing the people that he respected their religion and was an avid supporter of their gods.¹⁰⁵ Also in performing these tasks Alexander would truly be taking on

⁹⁷ Wilcken, 1997: 114

⁹⁸ Holbl, 2001:79

⁹⁹ Holbl, 2001: 79; Wilcken, 1997: 114

¹⁰⁰ Holbl, 2001: 79

¹⁰¹ Holbl, 2001: 79

¹⁰² Wilcken, 1997: 114

¹⁰³ Holbl, 2001: 80

¹⁰⁴ Wilcken, 2001:115

¹⁰⁵ Freeman, 1973: 145

the active role of being the god's representative in Egypt, and by extension, representing himself as a living god.

The ancient city of Memphis had been the most important religious site in Lower Egypt since the Old Kingdom.¹⁰⁶ The city itself was well known in the Greek world and was a commercial centre, however, it seems to have been most famous for its temple to the god, Ptah.¹⁰⁷ During his stay in Memphis, Alexander secured his position by making public sacrifices to the local gods, the most notable of these was the Apis bull, which was the physical manifestation of the god Ptah. According to Herodotus the Persians had made a name for themselves in Egypt for their sacrilege, in connection to the Apis bull.¹⁰⁸ Artaxerxes and Cambyses were said to have slaughtered the holy bull, and in addition to this Artaxerxes was said to have roasted and eaten the sacred animal.¹⁰⁹ This claim is a controversial one as not all texts report the murder of the sacred bull, but for the sake of our argument it shall be taken as fact. Alexander would have been aware of these sacrilegious acts, most likely from Herodotus and in making sacrifice to the bull he was showing that he placed a great deal of importance on the Egyptian religion and his commitment to his role as pharaoh and in extension their living god. Alexander's care with the Apis bull is further reflected on an inscription found on a papyrus in Saqqara, which details further instructions regarding the protection of the sacredness of temple precincts.¹¹⁰ It was a traditional practice for Egyptian pharaohs to take on large building projects during their reigns, Alexander was no different. Before leaving Memphis in 331 BC the new pharaoh ordered the restoration of two temples at Karnak and Luxor.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Freeman, 1973: 146

¹⁰⁷ Freeman, 1973: 146

¹⁰⁸ Herodotus. 3.27 – 29; Vasunia, 2001: 267

¹⁰⁹ Herodotus. 3.27 – 29; Vasunia, 2001: 267

¹¹⁰ Vasunia, 2001: 226

¹¹¹ Both of which were likely destroyed by Cambyses. Green, 2005: 144.

Divine Alexandria:

This section will focus on Alexander's use of cities as a possible form of expressing his divine rights. I would like to suggest a theory that after Alexander returned from his pilgrimage from Siwa (Chapter three), he was filled with thoughts of his divinity and so upon his construction of the city of Alexandria he named it for himself, perhaps as its patron god. According to ancient Greek custom a *polis* would be dedicated to a specific 'city-state patron god.'¹¹² The most obvious example of this is the city of Athens which was named for their patron goddess Athena.

After leaving Memphis in 331BC Alexander was sailing down the Nile towards the delta when he glimpsed a 'large stretch of land rising above the delta and the Mediterranean.'¹¹³ As Pomeroy states it is more than likely that Alexander selected the location for his new city -the fishing village Rhakotis - before his journey to Siwa, but the foundation of Alexandria took place after his return.¹¹⁴ The site also happens to have Homeric associations, which likely influenced Alexander's choice of location further. Less than a mile offshore lay Pharos, which had played a part in the Odyssey.¹¹⁵ The king is said to have had a considerable role in the building of the city:

He himself marked out where the cities agora was to be built, how many temples there were to be, and the gods, some Greek, and Isis, the Egyptian, for whom they were erected, and where the wall was to be built around it.¹¹⁶

It is clear that the construction of this city was of significance to Alexander; whether this was because it was his first city in his conquered lands or, as I argue, because it was a symbol of his newly confirmed divinity. There is of course the fact that this was not the first city that

¹¹² Lawson, 2012: 54-55.

¹¹³ Bose, 2004: 182.

¹¹⁴ Pomeroy et al., 2012: 451.

¹¹⁵ Pomeroy et al., 2012: 451.

¹¹⁶ Arrian, *Anab.* 3.1.5.

Alexander named after himself, so one could argue this was not a sign of him expressing his divinity.

Alexander founded his first city in 340 BC at the age of sixteen when he had successfully put down a revolt by the Maedians, naming this city, Alexandropolis.¹¹⁷ During correspondence with Professor Elizabeth Carney, she expressed belief that Alexander was likely to be imitating his father Philip II of Macedon, as he too had founded multiple cities and named them Phillippopolis (342 BC) and Philippi (358/7 BC) after himself.¹¹⁸ Whilst this is true I believe that this adds more weight to the argument of the divine construction.

Philip II came to the Macedonian throne in 359 BC, at a time when Macedon was threatened with complete dissolution and had been weakened through a decade of dynastic fighting.¹¹⁹ By the time of his death, after reigning for only twenty-four years, the Macedonian empire stretched from Southern Greece to the Danube.¹²⁰ During his reign Philip managed to secure his kingdom from external threats, unite the whole of Greece under his rulership and develop agriculture, trade, and mining. In doing so managed to turn an almost tribal society into a centralised monarchy.¹²¹ It is not difficult to understand Alexander's emulation and later resentment of his father. Alexander had begun to resent the continuous victories and achievements and began to believe he may never be able to surpass them or gain glory of his own: 'my father will forestall me in everything until there will be nothing great left to do in the entire world.'¹²² For Alexander it seemed the only way for him to outdo his father was to become deified in his own lifetime.

¹¹⁷ Worthington, 2004: 121.

¹¹⁸ Carney, 2018; Philip founding Philippi in 356, Roisman, 2014: 86. Founding of Phillippolis: Fredricksmeier, 1990: 306.

¹¹⁹ Bosworth, 1990:6; Worthington, 2008: 194.

¹²⁰ Worthington, 2008: 194.

¹²¹ Fredricksmeier, 1990: 303.

¹²² Plutarch. *Alex.* 5.4

However, there has been evidence through a number of literary and material sources, which suggests to scholars that Philip tried to have himself deified.¹²³ Fredricksmeyer claims that Philip sought these honours shortly after the battle of Chaeronea.¹²⁴ There is known to have been a royal cult dedicated at Olympia, and in addition to this there was a cult to Philip at Amphipolis, a alters to Zeus Philippios at Eresus, and a statue of him in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus.¹²⁵ The most notable evidence however comes from Diodorus, in which he depicts the procession at Aegae in 336 BC. This the was the day of his daughter, Cleopatra's, wedding to Alexander of Epirus, and the day he was assassinated.¹²⁶ Diodorus tells us that statues of the twelve gods were carried in this procession and in addition a thirteenth statue, that of Philip:

Along with lavish display of every sort, Philip included in the procession statues of the twelve gods brought with great artistry and adorned with a dazzling show of wealth to strike awe to the beholder, and along with these was conducted a thirteenth statue, suitable for a god, that of Philip himself, so that the king exhibited himself enthroned among the twelve gods.¹²⁷

Despite this evidence Worthington argues this is not grounds for Philip to claim divine rights, and in this we agree. During the text Diodorus does not refer to the statue of Philip as *agalma*, the Greek word for a cult statue, but rather as *eikon*, which was a statue depicting a person and held no religious meaning.¹²⁸ The idea of Philip vying for divine honours does not seem feasible. He was known for being a pious man and the idea of self-deification was considered blasphemous by the ancient Macedonians and Greeks.¹²⁹ The belief that the idea of Philip's divinity came into being during later periods, such as the Hellenistic and Roman

¹²³ Worthington, 2008: 200.

¹²⁴ Fredricksmeyer, 1979: 60.

¹²⁵ Fredricksmeyer, 1979: 39-60; Worthington, 2008: 200.

¹²⁶ Worthington, 2008: 200.

¹²⁷ Diodorus, *Histories*: 16,95.2

¹²⁸ Worthington, 2008: 201.

¹²⁹ Worthington, 2008: 226.

periods is conceivable, when it was common practice for statues of rulers to be carried into theatres and to receive sacrifice.¹³⁰

As stated previously it appears the only way Alexander could outshine his father was to receive divine honours in his lifetime. The timing of the construction of Alexandria seems to closely match Alexander's trip to Siwa to an extent that it is not likely to be coincidental. The newly declared divine king built his city with his divine right in mind, and in order to surpass his great father.

Conclusion:

Whilst in Egypt Alexander was not only exposed to a land that deified its kings but was also, in the eyes of the Egyptians, declared to be a living god on earth. The way of life in Egypt seems to have had a profound effect on the young king, and during his time there he may have in fact come to believe that he was indeed a god and within his rights to receive divine honours. The following chapter will also cover moments of Alexander during his time in Egypt and will further the argument for his belief in his divine parentage.

¹³⁰ Worthington, 2008. 232.

Chapter Three: Siwa and the possibility of divinity

Whilst in Egypt word reached Alexander that the oracle of Apollo at Didyma had finally proclaimed him to be the divine son of Zeus.¹³¹ Ian Worthington suggests that this is when Alexander decided to visit the oracle at Siwa, in order to get confirmation of his divine parentage from the oracle of Zeus himself.¹³² The oracle of Siwa was one of the most revered in the ancient Mediterranean; for this reason, it would not seem unexpected for Alexander to visit and pay his respects. The temple of Zeus Ammon lies in the Oasis of Siwa, in Libya. Built in the sixth century BC the temple resides in the middle of the northwest section of the Aghurmi village.¹³³ The site had been inhabited since the tenth millennium BCE, long before the temple was constructed.¹³⁴

Alexander's expedition to Siwa is one of the most controversial events of the king's life. Many ancient and modern scholars have wondered what his true intentions were for making the journey. We are told that Alexander was overtaken by a great '*pothos*' (longing) to visit the oracle at Siwa.¹³⁵ The journey would not have been an easy one, as the temple was located three hundred miles west of the Nile and in the centre of the Sahara Desert.¹³⁶ The journey across the desert was said to be 'notoriously difficult'¹³⁷, because of its tough climate variations and the dangers of piratical groups of Bedouin¹³⁸. The purpose of this section will be to analysis the sources of Arrian, Curtius Rufus, and Plutarch and their retelling of the events at Siwa. This analysis is crucial in understanding the changes of Alexander's divinity presented through various sources throughout the ages.

¹³¹ Worthington, 2004. 116

¹³² Worthington, 2004. 116

¹³³ Planet, 2018

¹³⁴ Planet, 2018

¹³⁵ Arrian and Romn, 2005

¹³⁶ Freeman, 1973.

¹³⁷ Worthington, 2004. 117

¹³⁸ Worthington, 2004. 117

Ancient source analysis:

Even within the primary sources there is some debate over the events that allegedly occurred at Siwa. Within this section several ancient sources will be critically analysed, which depict Alexander's journey to Siwa, each retelling demonstrating slight differences. All of these sources must be read with caution as none of the authors were alive during the time of Alexander, or within the hundred years after his death.

Arrian:

The first account is that of the Greek historian and philosopher, Arrian (87AD – 145). Despite being Greek he was a Roman citizen and had even served in the Roman army.¹³⁹ His work was known as the *Anabasis*, concerning the campaigns of Alexander and it was written in the second century AD, most likely during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. It should be taken into consideration that Arrian's work on Alexander is considered to be one of the most valuable of the ancient sources. This in part is due to the fact that he adhered closely to his primary sources, namely Ptolemy I and Aristobulus, who were eye witnesses during the campaigns of Alexander.¹⁴⁰ Of these sources he was additionally critical, stating that if this main sources differed he would choose to recount the one he found to be the most likely.¹⁴¹ In addition to this Arrian was an experienced military man, leading administrator and a man of letters, meaning that he understood warfare, and acts of administration making his insight into the matter of Alexander's campaigns invaluable.¹⁴² The following is the important extract regarding Siwa:

(A) longing (*pothos*) seized Alexander to pay a visit to Ammon in Libya, for one reason to consult the god, since the oracle of Ammon was said to be infallible, and to

¹³⁹ Lendering, 2017

¹⁴⁰ Arrian, *Anab.* Preface; Hammond, 1993: 189.

¹⁴¹ Arrian, *Anab.* Preface; Hammond, 1993: 189.

¹⁴² Hammond, 1993: 317-319

have been consulted by Perseus...and by Heracles...Alexander sought to rival Perseus and Heracles, as he was descended from them both; and in addition he himself traced his birth in part to Ammon, just as the legends traced that of Heracles and Perseus to Zeus. In any case he set out for Ammon with this idea, hoping to secure more exact knowledge of his affairs, or at least to say he had secured it...

Alexander marvelled at the place and posed his questions to the god Ammon. When he had heard what his heart desired (as he said), he led the army back to Egypt...¹⁴³

Arrian does not seem concerned about the question of Alexander's divinity. Instead he chooses to focus on the symbolic rivalry between the king and his heroic ancestors, Heracles and Perseus. Arrian is suggesting to his readers that there is no divine connection to be made, stating that Alexander's only motivation for this trip was to outdo the deed of his ancestors, turning the king into a symbolic heroic figure rather than a divine one. Interestingly he does make reference to Alexander's desire to secure some sort of knowledge regarding his affairs, or to misrepresent the information that the oracle had imparted to him. This could be interpreted as reference to Alexander's supposed desire for proof of his divinity. Furthermore, Arrian does not go into detail as to what the king asked the oracle, only stating that Alexander 'heard what his heart desired.'¹⁴⁴ This may be Arrian's subtle attempt to sidestep the question of Alexander's divinity, neither confirming nor denying the rumours. The same cannot be said for some of his fellow historians.

Quintus Curtius Rufus:

The second extract for closer study is that of Roman historian, Curtius Rufus (+53AD). Very little is known about his life, and because of this there has been much debate which emperor he wrote under.¹⁴⁵ The opinion of J Hamilton the most plausible of which seem to be that of

¹⁴³ Arrian, *Anab.* 3.4.5

¹⁴⁴ Arrian, *Anab.* 3.4.5

¹⁴⁵ Lendering, 2015; Hamilton, 1988: 445–456.

Vespasian or Claudius.¹⁴⁶ Curtius Rufus' account of the *Life of Alexander* is an extremely important one, as it is the only surviving Roman account of Alexander. The following section is Curtis's interpretation of the events of Siwa:

...the king drew near, the eldest of the priests called him son, declaring that his father Jupiter gave him that name. Alexander indeed said that he accepted and acknowledged it, forgetful of his human condition.... Then after sacrifice had offered, gifts were given both to the priests and to the god, and the king's friends also were allowed to consult Jupiter. They asked nothing more than whether the god authorized them to pay divine honours to their king. The prophets replied that this also would be acceptable to Jupiter...

Accordingly, Alexander not only allowed himself to be called the son of Jupiter, but even ordered it, and thus while he wished to increase and renown of his exploits by such a title, he really spoilt it.¹⁴⁷

For Curtius Rufus it seems apparent that his main focus in this part of the text is the subject of Alexander's divinity. Furthermore, it suggests that he believed Alexander only travelled to the oracle at Siwa to gain confirmation of his divinity. What is also interesting to note is the mention of the king's men being admitted into the temple for an audience with the oracle, who also relays to them that Alexander is indeed the son of Jupiter and is permitted to receive divine honours.¹⁴⁸ The account is almost the opposite to that of Arrian, who more than likely had access to the first-hand accounts of Ptolemy and Aristobulus, Hammond suggests that Curtius Rufus most likely used Cleitarchus as a source, so it is curious that their retellings differ so drastically.¹⁴⁹ Another is the reference to the king demanding that he be recognised as the son of a god. This is an attempt to emphasise and encourage public knowledge and praise for his actions. However, through Curtius Rufus's eyes, this contributes to destroying

¹⁴⁶ Hamilton, 1988: 445–456.

¹⁴⁷ Curtius Rufus. Rolfe.

¹⁴⁸ Curtius Rufus. Rolfe.

¹⁴⁹ Hammond, 1993: 60.

its sanctity. It is likely and has been suggested that Curtius Rufus used his *Life of Alexander* to make a political statement about the tyranny of Caligula and Tiberius.¹⁵⁰ It may be this difference in the views of both Roman authors to the divinity of the Roman Emperors that leads to the differences in how they approach Alexander's claim to divinity.

Plutarch:

The final source that needs to be analysed is that of Plutarch (46 CE – 119), in his *Comparative lives of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar*. Plutarch was born in Chaeronea in 46 CE and died in (approximately) 119 CE. He was a Greek biographer, writer, and scholar. Some of his most interesting works are that of his *Lives*, biographies/ moral treatises, in which he would describe the lives of a famous and influential Greek and Roman and compare them. Plutarch's *Comparative lives of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar* was written four hundred years after the death of Alexander, around the same time as Arrian's account. Whilst analysing Plutarch's account of the *Life of Alexander* it is imperative that the reader recall the author's earlier claims, in which he is not dedicated to recording the acts of famous men but focuses on aspects of their personalities.¹⁵¹ As Hammond points out, one must deduce it is likely that Plutarch is not writing his works with the insistence of historical accuracy but rather treating it with 'the biographer's love of traditional anecdotes.'¹⁵² This can be seen in his version of events below:

...This is the account which most writers have given of the oracles pronounced by the god, but Alexander himself in a letter to his mother says that he received certain secret prophecies which he would confine to her, and her alone, after his return. Others say that the priest, who wished as a mark of courtesy to address him with the Greek phrase '*O, paidion*' (O, my son) spoke the words because of his barbarian origin a '*O*

¹⁵⁰ Lendering, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Hammond, 1993: 5.

¹⁵² Hammond, 1993: 5.

pai Dios’ (O, son of Zeus), and the Alexander was delighted at this slip of pronunciation, and hence the legend grew up that the god had addressed him as ‘O, son of Zeus’... Even more philosophical was Alexander’s own opinion and pronouncement on this subject, namely that while God is the father of all mankind, it is the noblest and best whom he makes especially his own.¹⁵³

For the better part of his retelling of events, Plutarch discusses the opinions of other writers. During his retelling he offers his readers at least three accounts of the story, whereas Arrian and Curtius Rufus offer one version of events, their own. It is clear from the beginning of the account that he has consulted several sources before writing his own version, by claiming ‘most authors.’¹⁵⁴ The most obvious difference between these three extracts is that Plutarch makes reference to letters Alexander sent to his mother Olympias. It appears Plutarch believed these letters to have been a genuine occurrence, the content is said to reveal Alexander received secret prophecies, which he intended to one day share with his mother.¹⁵⁵ This demonstrates Plutarch’s attention to the character and personality of Alexander, which contrasts with the account of Arrian whose goal was to be as historically accurate as possible. Plutarch references Alexander’s supposed divinity but appears reluctant to confirm its authenticity. The biographer also makes reference to the priest of Ammon’s slip of tongue, stating that ‘Alexander was delighted at this slip of pronunciation;’¹⁵⁶ indicating that Plutarch too may have believed the king journeyed to the shrine for divine confirmation. Furthermore, Plutarch also specifies that after Alexander’s visit to Ammon it became known that the priest had addressed him as the son of Zeus.

¹⁵³ Plut. *Alex.* 27.5.

¹⁵⁴ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983.

¹⁵⁵ Cook, 2000: 356

¹⁵⁶ Plutarch., Whalen and Scott-Kilvert, 1983.

Conclusion:

Through analysing these sources, it is clear there is no definitive version of the alleged events that took place at the oracle of Siwa. What is apparent and agreed on by all three of these sources is that Alexander made the trip to consult the oracle for some reason or another. Arrian clearly states that he is not going to directly discuss Alexander's divinity. This is in direct contrast to that of Curtius Rufus who is adamant that Alexander did receive the divine confirmation whilst taking it a step further, and stating he was given the right to divine honours. Plutarch sits comfortably between them. He mentions the possibility of divinity but is careful not to explicitly confirm whether it was attained but is also clear that it became known that Alexander was greeted as the son of Zeus. This evidence reveals the importance of the event of Siwa, as it seemingly confirms Alexander's supposed divinity. Taking into account Darius' rebuilding of his forces, Alexander's journey to Siwa must have been significant. In Curtius Rufus it is stated that this may have set Alexander onto his divine path, this divinity can be observed through other literature and imagery that is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Imagery

Images of Alexander have been present throughout antiquity, stretching from his reign and well into the Renaissance. However, attempting to determine iconography for his earlier depictions proves to be difficult.¹⁵⁷ The Roman essayist, Apuleius, wrote that in order for his depictions to be as true to life as possible, Alexander only allowed select people to capture his likeness:

...Only Polyclitus could cast it in bronze; only Apelles could paint it; and only Pyrgoteles could engrave it. Besides these three – the most illustrious in their fields – if anyone else at all was found putting his hand to the sacrosanct image of the king, he would be punished as if he had committed sacrilege.¹⁵⁸

This edict is surely to be a fictional one as it did not stop others from attempting to capture the king's likeness. There have been a substantial number of images, statues, and busts which depict a youthful un-bearded man, with wavy hair and slightly tilted head, all of which ancient and modern scholars have identified with Alexander.¹⁵⁹ However, those specific characteristics are not all restricted to depictions of Alexander. These traits are also often associated with depictions of heroes of Greek city states, as well as the youthful Apollo.¹⁶⁰ Images of the king transcended cultural differences and aided in the coming together of the multi-cultural kingdoms that appeared after his death.¹⁶¹ There is no doubt that Alexander's art heavily influenced his successors, who would carry on using his image into the Hellenistic age. Alexander's image continued to be used even after the event of his death, and was glorified as one of power, strength, and divinity.¹⁶² This section will focus on the imagery of Alexander, which was produced during his lifetime and perhaps depict him as divine.

¹⁵⁷ Dahmen, 2007: 2

¹⁵⁸ Roisman, 2003: 31

¹⁵⁹ Dahmen, 2007: 2

¹⁶⁰ An example of this is the hero of Kyzikos, Dahmen, 2007:2

¹⁶¹ Dahmen, 2007: 2; Neer. 2013: 359

¹⁶² Bradford, n.d: 26.

Specifically looking at Alexander's depictions in the Egyptian temple at Luxor, and Apelles's controversial painting.

Luxor Barque:

The grandeur and mystery of Egypt was rejuvenated under Alexander's restoration of significant temple complexes. His time in Egypt was short but monumental. The importance of Alexander's depiction in Egyptian art cannot be overstated, as the native Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was truly a living god on earth, by extension all images of the pharaoh were images of a god. Apart from his founding of the city of Alexandria, the new pharaoh's main architectural project was conducted at the city of Thebes.¹⁶³ Thebes was one of the most important cities of the ancient world during the Middle Kingdom and later went on to become the political capital during the New Kingdom.¹⁶⁴ The temple complex at Luxor is the southernmost of the monuments on the Theban eastern bank, and was dedicated to the Egyptian god Amun or Amun-Re.¹⁶⁵ According to Lanny Bell "we can now describe the temple at Luxor as the temple dedicated to the divine Egyptian ruler or, more precisely to the cult of the royal *ka*."¹⁶⁶ The cult of the royal *ka* in Luxor was used to establish and confirm the validity of new rulers whose legitimacy could be seen as problematic.¹⁶⁷

Alexander's reconstructions at Luxor can be dated to the early 320's.¹⁶⁸ The shrine of Alexander is located in the inner sanctum of the temple and was constructed out of white sandstone.¹⁶⁹ Located on the eastern and western sides are eighteen carved panels, in overlaid

¹⁶³ Grieb, Wojciechowska and Nawotka, 2011

¹⁶⁴ Wilkinson, 2000: 154.

¹⁶⁵ Wilkinson, 2000:166.

¹⁶⁶ The *ka* is a personified inherited life force, the pharaoh's *ka* was supposed to be the immortal spirit of divine kingship. Alexander's reconstruction of this temple is of symbolic importance. Bell, 2018: 251; Redford, 2002:68.

¹⁶⁷ Stewart, 1993: 174-175.

¹⁶⁸ Vasunia, 2001: 267.

¹⁶⁹ Stewart, 1993: 174-175.

registers, in which there are fifty-two carved surviving images of the king.¹⁷⁰ These images depict Alexander in the company of the Egyptian deities Ammon-Re and the *ka* bearing Ammon-Re Khamuter after introductions by Monthu and Atun.¹⁷¹ There are four more panels of a similar nature located on the sides of the south door, which feature the king meeting with Ammon and with Waset and Ipet. The representation of the goddesses cannot be overlooked as they were the guardians of the pharaoh and also of the temple itself.¹⁷²

The reliefs and hieroglyphs featured present Alexander as the legitimate ruler and protector of the traditions of Egypt.¹⁷³ The images depict him being introduced to Ammon and Ammon-Re Khamutef, doing his pharaonic duties in sacrificing and praying to them, while receiving gifts in return from Ammon. Some of these gifts include the *sed* sign, which is representative of rejuvenation.¹⁷⁴ In these images Alexander is often portrayed carrying an *ankh* which is a symbol of long life, he is also present wearing a number of different crowns: that of the white, red, blue, double, Atef, double-feathered, Nemes, horned, and gold-ribbon.¹⁷⁵ Also present are a number of other divine and pharaonic symbols.

Furthermore, the following inscription speaks of Alexander's rebuilding of the temple in the name of his 'father':

The renovation of the monument is what the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the Two Lands, 'chosen of Re and beloved of Ammon/ beloved of Re and chosen of Ammon', son of Re, lord of appearances, Alexander, has made his father Ammon-Re, foremost of his harem. He has created the 'great chamber' anew in white and beautiful sandstone after it existed since the time of the majesty of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Nebmaatre, son of Re Amenhotep, ruler of Thebes.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Stewart, 1993: 174-175; Vasunia, 2001: 267

¹⁷¹ Stewart, 1993: 174-175.

¹⁷² Stewart, 1993: 174-175.

¹⁷³ Ibid: 176-177.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Grieb, Wojciechowska, and Nawotka, 2011: 63.

The inscription not only indicated that Alexander is the son of gods but he himself is chosen by them and is, in extension, divine himself. These texts and images would have been of the utmost importance to the native Egyptians, as they served the purpose of guaranteeing the survival of Egyptian society.¹⁷⁷ It is without a doubt the Egyptians believed Alexander to be a living god amongst men and this is how they portrayed him in their art. Therefore, it is without doubt that Alexander represented himself as divine during his time in Egypt.

The Divine Alexander of Apelles:

Apelles of Cos (c. 352- 308 BC) is arguably one of the most important and renowned painters of his time, earning the admiration of many ancient authors, including Pliny the Elder. None of his works have survived and not very much is known about him. What is known is that he was an Ionian Greek and he attended the Dorian school of Sicyon in southern Greece and worked under the painter Pamphilus. It is known that Apelles was recognised as the court painter in Macedon under Philip II and Alexander. He also has more anecdotes written about him than any other painter in antiquity.¹⁷⁸

Apelles is known for painting possibly the most controversial image in the ancient Greek world, which is the painting depicting Alexander grasping a thunderbolt, which was made for the temple of Artemis of Ephesus (which also held a statue of Philip II).¹⁷⁹ The closest image we can get to this that still survives is that the Porus Medallion with details on the reverse side a Macedonian man (presumably alexander) holding a sarissa or royal sceptre in his left hand and while in his right what appears to be the thunderbolt of Zeus (Fig 9).¹⁸⁰ What is known of Apelles image can be credited to Pliny, who described it in some detail:

¹⁷⁷ Stewart, 1993: 176-177.

¹⁷⁸ Boardman, Dorig, Fuchs, and Hirmer, 1967: 457

¹⁷⁹ Bieber, 1949: 384; Stewart, 1993: 191.

¹⁸⁰ Prous medallion, n.d.)

He painted also, in the temple of Diana (Artemis) at Ephesus, Alexander the Great wielding the Thunderbolt...the figures have all the appearance of projecting from the surface, and the lighting seems to be darting from the picture. And then, too, let the reader bear in mind that all these works were executed by the aid of four colours only...¹⁸¹

Apelles during his studies learned how to represent light, therefore in this particular painting of Alexander he darkened the figure of the king to make the thunderbolt appear brighter.¹⁸² In addition to this, scholars are told by Pliny that Apelles invented a special varnish called *atramentum*, which protected his paintings from dirt and softened their colour.¹⁸³ There is little doubt that the painting was finished before Alexander's death in 323 BC, and although its exact date is unknown the king is likely to have commissioned it,¹⁸⁴ perhaps after Siwa or the battle of Gaugamela.¹⁸⁵

It is not difficult to see why this painting would be frowned upon by certain audiences, particularly those of Greek origin who did not believe a living man could be a god. As far as we are aware this was the first instance that a mortal was depicted with divine attributes.¹⁸⁶ However, it was not uncommon for poets to praise a particular person by calling them 'god like' or 'equal to the gods,'¹⁸⁷ but to give a mortal a divine aspect was something else entirely. This is highlighted by Plutarch who contrasts Apelles with Lysippos, another artist:

Lysippos the sculptor blamed the painter Apelles for drawing Alexander's picture with a thunderbolt in his hands. He had represented Alexander holding a spear, which was natural and proper, for him as a weapon, the glory of which time would not rob him.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹ Pliny. *Natural histories*. 35.36.72-97.

¹⁸² Groenewegen-Frankfort, and Ashmore: 241.

¹⁸³ Stewart, 1993: 192.

¹⁸⁴ Stewart, 1993: 193.

¹⁸⁵ Stewart, 1993: 195

¹⁸⁶ Bieber, 1949: 384.

¹⁸⁷ Stewart, 1993: 193.

¹⁸⁸ Plutarch. And Griffiths, 1970: 360D

For the above reasons, some Greeks and Romans took this image to signify that Alexander was representing himself as a god on earth and in his own right, *theos epiphanes* or *deus praesens*.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, others chose to see it as a metaphor, attributing to Alexander's power being akin to that of the god whose attributes he wore – in this case Zeus – but making no claim to divinity himself.¹⁹⁰ This is entirely subjective, it seems likely that when Alexander commissioned this piece he intended it to portray his own divine power, doing so by using his 'divine fathers' attributes. It is difficult to see what other reasons could incite such a negative reaction from critics, especially as he had already been accepted as a living god amongst the native Egyptians, and this may have been his first step in fully introducing the Greek world to his divinity.

Conclusion:

The image of Alexander has been used and recognised throughout history, although at times it may be difficult to identify such works of him because of the generic iconography in which he is described. However, it is difficult to misinterpret the image of Alexander in Egypt where he is clearly depicted and named on many reliefs, and in the lost work of Apelles which was commissioned by the king. Alexander's depictions in Egypt are irrefutable, in those images he is a god, as the Egyptians believed that their pharaoh was a living god. It is harder to argue this of Apelles painting, as it has been suggested this image could simply depict Alexander with the attributes of Zeus, rather than declaring his divinity.¹⁹¹ However, through the examination of both of these portrayals of Alexander I can only conclude that both of these images are meant to be perceived as Alexander the god, not Alexander the man. Which then in turn went on to influence his successors to do the same with their own images.

¹⁸⁹ Stewart, 1993: 198.

¹⁹⁰ Stewart, 1993: 198.

¹⁹¹ Stewart, 1993: 198.

Final Conclusion:

The purpose of this dissertation was to assert, using ancient and modern sources available to us, that Alexander the Great represented himself as divine in his lifetime. This question is not as straight forward as one would think, as you must try and determine what the ideology and motives of both Alexander and other writers at the time, and that of those who wrote after the fact. However, I have been able to conclude through my research Alexander had a role to play in his divine representation.

It is apparent that Alexander's divine ancestry and speculated paternity was a catalyst that launched him towards ideas of his own divinity. Alexander was obsessed with obtaining honour and glory of his own, and his pre-existing connection with the divine gave him the opportunity he needed to surpass not only the deeds of his heroic ancestors Heracles and Achilles, but also those of his earthly father Philip II.

His campaign took him into Egypt in 332BC, the ancient land was the perfect place for a young Alexander who was looking to out match the deeds of his ancestors and father. In Egypt the natives saw and worshipped their king's as living gods. It was in Egypt Alexander truly began to believe in his own divinity, travelling to the oracle of the god Ammon at Siwa the king had his suspicions confirmed, he was indeed the son of Zeus, some sources such as Curtius Rufus even going as far to proclaim Alexander was given the right to divine honours by the oracle. I speculate that the newly confirmed divine Alexander believed in his divinity to the extent of building a city to himself in Egypt, where he would be its patron deity.

Finally, Alexander was represented as divine in artwork. The most obvious of these being the works found in Egypt, it is no surprise that he would be depicted in a divine fashion as he was, to the Egyptians, a god walking the earth. The Luxor Barque in particular depicts Alexander a staggering number of fifty-two times as pharaoh and amongst the gods.

However, the most compelling artwork is that of the lost work of Apelles, who famously painted Alexander holding the thunderbolt of Zeus in his hand. What is most compelling about this piece is the fact that the king commissioned it himself, indicating his wish to be seen as divine. From this, it's possible to derive that Alexander embraced and actively encouraged his dalliance with the divine.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Maps

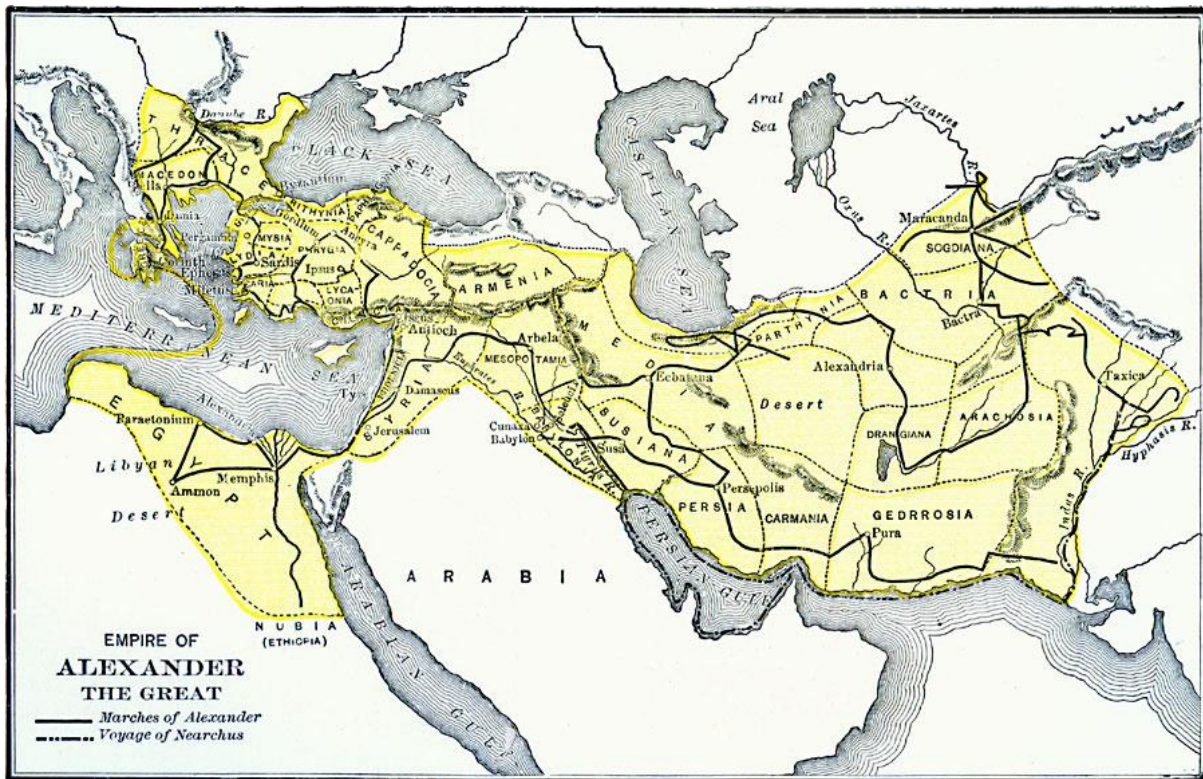


Figure 1: Map of the Empire of Alexander the Great



Figure 2: Map of Alexander's journey to Siwa.

Appendix 2: Luxor

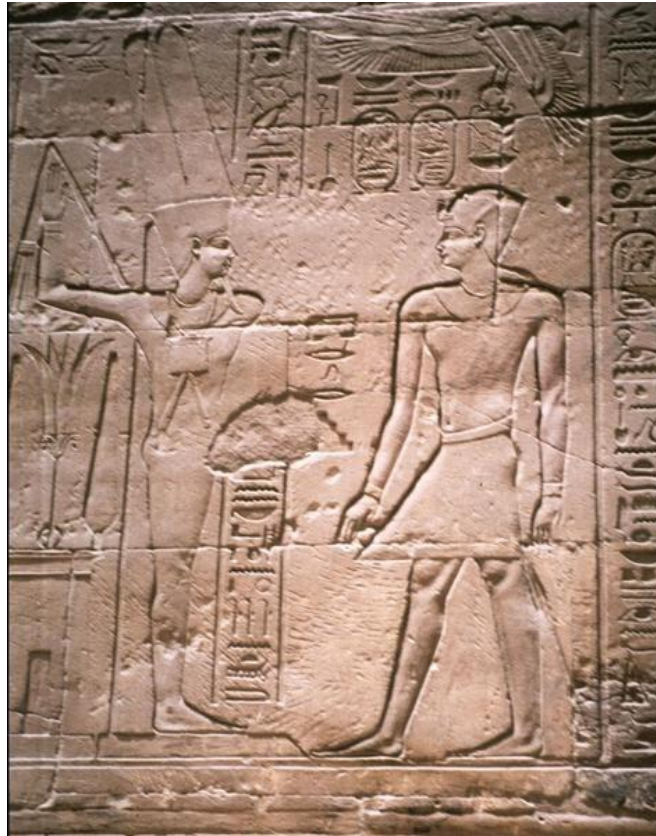


Figure 3: Alexander the Great depicted as Egyptian pharaoh, stand before Ammon, wall of Luxor temple in innermost sanctuary. The Barque shrine.



Figure 4: Alexander the Great depicted as pharaoh before the gods.

Appendix 3: Temple of Zeus Ammon Siwa



Figure 5: Temple of Ammon, Oracle of Siwa.



Figure 6: Temple of Ammon, Oracle of Siwa.

Appendix 4: Coins and Gems



*Figure 7: Gold coin of Philip II of Macedon.
Obverse: Laureate head of Apollo
Reverse: Charioteer driving biga; thunderbolt depicted below.*



Figure 8: St. Petersburg gem – Signed by the artist Neisos.



Figure 9: Porus medallion

Obverse: cavalryman (Macedonian) with Phygian-style helmet and sarissa charging at elephant.

Reverse: Mounted Macedonian horseman (Alexander) standing, being crowned by Nike. Carrying a sarissia or royal sceptre in left hand, and in his right hand the thunderbolt of Zeus.