# Revisiting the Roman Alexander*


## ABSTRACT

Green (1978) overturned the standard view of Romans' desire to compare themselves with Alexander the Great. He especially criticised the too-credulous acceptance of Caesar's 'Alexander complex'. Gruen (1998) and Martin (1998) extended Green's arguments to include Pompeius. This paper argues that in attempting to redress the balance Green, Gruen and Martin go too far. Alexander *was* a powerful icon in first-century BC Rome but the desire to be compared to him grew out of specific, not general, considerations. In the case of Pompeius and Caesar, emulation of Alexander was as much about competition between themselves as it was about any third party.


In 1998, Erich Gruen posed a provocative question: 'Did the Romans, in fact, engage in imitation or emulation of Alexander the Great?'[1] On reflection, his


* We embarked on this joint venture after we discovered that we had independently come to a similar view by different routes. We would like to thank Erich Gruen for his gracious engagement with the paper at the conference in his honour and after it. Other scholars and friends also assisted us to refine the argument and to eliminate errors, among them Alastair Blanshard, Kai Brodersen, Bob Cowan, Jill Harries, Kit Morrell, Andrew Pettinger, Anton Powell, Paul Roche, Andrew Stiles, Martin Stone and Richard Westall. We particularly thank Paul Burton and the anonymous readers of *Antichthon* for their helpful and searching critiques. All errors and infelicities remain our own.


Translations have been adapted from the following editions: H. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History, Volume II: Books 3-7* (Cambridge MA 1942); D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero: Letters to Atticus* (Cambridge 1966) vol. 5; F.W. Shipley, *Velleius Paterculus: Compendium of Roman History. Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Cambridge MA 1924); N.H. Watts, *Cicero Pro Archia. Post Reditum in Senatu. Post Reditum ad Quirites. De Domo Sua. De Haruspicum Responsis. In Pisonem. Pro Scauro. Pro Fonteio. Pro Rabirio Postumo. Pro Marcello. Pro Ligario. Pro Rege Deiotaro* (Cambridge MA 1931).

1 E.S. Gruen 'Rome and the Myth of Alexander', in T.W. Hillard et al. (eds), *Ancient History in a Modern University* (Grand Rapids MI 1998) 1.178-91. Important studies of Alexander-*imitatio* in Rome include W.W. Tarn, 'Alexander Helios and the Golden Age', *JRS* 22 (1932) 135-60; N.J. DeWitt, 'Caesar and the Alexander Legend', *CW* 36 (1942) 51-3; S. Weinstock, 'Victor and Invictus', *HThR* 50 (1957) 211-47; D. Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius* (Bruxelles 1967); id., *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971); O. Weippert, *Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republik-anischer Zeit* (Augsburg 1972); J.S. Richardson, 'Review: Weippert, Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit', *JRS* 64 (1974) 238; C. Meier, *Caesar*, trans. D. McLintock (London 1996) 141; D. Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth* (Exeter 2002); A. Kühnen, *Die Imitatio Alexandri in der römischen Politik 1. Jh. v.Chr.– 3. Jh. n.Chr.* (Münster 2008); Spencer, 'Roman Alexanders: Epistemology and Identity', in W. Heckel and L.A. Tritle (eds), *Alexander the Great: A New History* (Malden MA 2009) 251-74.




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answer was that they did not. 'The Romans', he said, 'astutely manipulated the myth of Alexander the Great to their own distinct advantage. He was held up not as a model or inspiration but as a foil whereby to demonstrate to the world both the tangible and the moral superiority of Rome.'[2]

Gruen's target was a well-established view that certain Romans practised *imitatio Alexandri*. According to the *communis opinio*, the habit, while constant in Rome, was especially rife in the late Republic and early Empire. In 1978, Green rightly questioned this paradigm, arguing the need to distinguish carefully between three categories, *imitatio*, *aemulatio* and *comparatio*.[3] *Imitatio* he took to be the practice of directly copying the actions of Alexander, *aemulatio*, the desire to rival or surpass, and *comparatio*, a comparison 'perceived or derived by some third party', which might have had only a tenuous connection to the Roman subject. In determining whether an individual was an *imitator*, an *aemulator* or a comparand, Green argued that it was necessary to ask about the personal motivation (or lack of it) of each individual and the probable provenance of the stories that connected him to Alexander. He concluded that, while it was reasonable to see *imitatio Alexandri* in the career of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and certain emperors, especially Augustus and Trajan, his stricter categorisation of the evidence suggested that Gaius Julius Caesar, though frequently compared to Alexander by later writers, showed no interest himself in imitating or emulating him.[4]

Green acknowledged that his definitions did not account for all the evidence. He identified 'a difficult no-man's-land' where we cannot be certain which of them applied, 'in particular, where apparent *imitatio* may turn out to be based on sedulous flattery – or, alternatively, hostile propaganda – by some third party with an axe to grind. In all such cases the issue of motive looms large'.[5] Green subsequently stated that no serious politician would be motivated by a desire to imitate Alexander, the subtext of which was that Caesar could not have been an *imitator Alexandri* but Pompeius, a 'subtly ridiculous figure', probably was. Ultimately, Green's negative assessment of Pompeius as a political operator matches his disdain for Romans who utilised the Alexander image in manufacturing their own.[6]

[2] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 191.

[3] P. Green, 'Caesar and Alexander: Aemulatio, Imitatio, Comparatio', *AJAH* 3 (1978) 1-26, reprinted in *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1989) 193-209. Green's paper is still widely accepted: see e.g. S.J.V. Malloch, 'Gaius' Bridge at Baiae and Alexander-Imitatio', *CQ* 51 (2001) 206-17, at 211 and 214; C. Rubincam, 'A Tale of Two '*Magni*': Justin/Trogus on Alexander and Pompey', *Historia* 54 (2005) 265-74, at 266; C.B.R. Pelling, *Plutarch: Caesar* (Oxford 2011) 26-8, 184, 439.

[4] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 14-15.

[5] Ibid. 2.

[6] Ibid. 4-6; Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 187. Green makes his low opinion of Pompeius and his appearance very clear in other works: e.g. *Alexander to Actium* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1990) 578, 658-9.

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Gruen, as well as his former student Martin,[7] reasonably argue that Green's methods can be used to cast as much doubt on Pompeius' intentions as on Caesar's. Gruen ultimately stretches Green's analysis to cover every Roman situation before the onset of the Principate, arguing that the Romans as a whole saw Alexander simply as a means to highlight their excellence and moral superiority.

Between them, Green and Gruen leave more questions than answers. Both are right to problematise the traditional view of *imitatio Alexandri*. It was too simple and too uncritical of the source material upon which it depended. But to suggest that the Romans had no interest in associating themselves with the iconic Macedonian monarch goes too far.

Both analyses minimise the extent to which Alexander was a complex icon, contested and manipulated as much in the Greek world as he was in Rome. His Hellenic *aemulatores*, like the Romans, associated themselves in ways which, as Smith argues, were 'related but separate'.[8] Like the Romans, they had to negotiate the negative Alexander material which, after all, was the product of a lively debate across the Mediterranean about the place of kingship in a city-state culture as much as it was about individual aspiration. In addition, both scholars ignore the extent to which the Greeks themselves continued to reassert the superiority of Alexander's military reputation, especially in the geographical extent of his conquests, and the anxiety this could cause among leading representatives of the *princeps populus*. Finally, they choose to ignore the ways in which elite Romans engaged in contests and comparisons among themselves as well as with the famous figures of Greek history in an effort to establish their individual and collective reputation for excellence. In our view, it is especially perverse to absolve either Pompeius or Caesar from any desire to join in these cultural and political conversations. Can a way be found to readjust the paradigm, taking account of Green's and Gruen's contributions, but still exposing the extent to which the Romans responded positively and negatively to the reputation of Alexander the Great?

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Of major importance to the task is a reassessment of *comparatio*. Green dismissed it for two related reasons: it was composed by a third party, and therefore tells us nothing about the motives of the individual concerned, and was written long after the event, and can thus be deemed of no relevance to the contemporary political situation. He was thinking of the direct comparisons between Caesar and Alexander made by Lucan, Velleius and

[7] D.J. Martin, 'Did Pompey Engage in *imitatio Alexandri*?', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 9 (1998) 23-51; Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 183 n. 30.

[8] R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford 1988) 58.

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Appian, which he branded 'not over-impressive sources all too late for comfort' and which he correctly pointed out proved nothing about *imitatio*.[9]

In oratorical theory, *comparatio* did more than assess likeness. It set up a contest between two figures and determined who was the winner in different categories and overall.[10] Duff's work on the sophistication of Plutarch's *synkriseis* has done much to advance our appreciation of this type of rhetoric.[11] Because *comparatio* was also fundamentally competitive, it should be regarded as the reverse side of *aemulatio*, rather than a different coin. Both categories use Alexander as a benchmark for measuring achievement and a standard to better. Putting *aemulatio* and *comparatio* together where it might reasonably be done allows us to move into the territory of association and identity more generally, which, as Whitmarsh points out, is where the real value of the comparison lies.[12]

Nor is it essential to determine whether the individual subjects or their friends and admirers initiated the comparison. Modern politicians do not mastermind their political campaigns or write their own speeches. The role of advisers and associates is assumed. Visual and literary association promulgated by friends, far from being a separate issue, was one of the means, and perhaps the most important, by which a subject engaged in this type of competition.[13] In the case of Pompeius and Caesar, we hope to show that tracing the origins of Alexander imagery to their close associates also demonstrates this. Once we leave aside the imponderable issue of an individual's personal attitude to Alexander and analyse his place in a web of political image-making processes, the evidence is much more fruitful.

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The clearest connection between Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus himself and Alexander imagery is displayed in the gold coin which commemorates him as Proconsul (*RRC* 402). Only three examples of the coin are known to have survived from antiquity.[14] The minting date is not certain: Crawford chose

9 Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 11.

10 Cic. *De Orat.* 1.60.257, 3.29.117; *Off.* 1.43.152; Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.21; Tac. *Dial.* 23.2.

11 T. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford 1999) 252-86; id., 'The Structure of the Plutarchan Book', *Class. Ant.* 30 (2011) 253-9.

12 T. Whitmarsh, 'Alexander's Hellenism and Plutarch's Textualism', *CQ* 52 (2002) 174-92, at 175.

13 The most quoted example of such behaviour is Cicero's request to his friend Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) to write a history of his consulship. For recent discussions, see J. Hall, 'Cicero to Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) in its Social Context. *valde bella*?', *CPh* 93 (1998) 308-21; J. Dugan, *Making a New Man: Ciceronian Self-fashioning in the Rhetorical Works* (Oxford 2005) 47-54.

14 The two published examples are held by the British Museum (ref. 18670101.584) and the Museo Civico di Bologna (inv. 26445). A third is kept in a private collection (A. Burnett *pers. comm.*).

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71, the year of Pompeius' Spanish triumph, while others argue for 61, the year of his third triumph.[15] Knowing the date, however, would clarify how early Pompeius had attempted to advertise the association, not whether he did so. A date of 71 would reinforce claims that his surname 'Magnus', prominently displayed on the obverse of the coin, was never meant to be a simple or conventional surname but was meant to recall the Macedonian king.[16] The later date links the iconography to Pompeius' triumph over Mithridates VI of Pontus.[17]



**Fig. 1: *Aureus* of Cn. Pompeius Magnus (*RRC* 402)**

A second coin is less obvious in its iconography, but still indicative. Faustus Sulla, Pompeius' son-in-law, produced a programmatic coin in the mid-fifties (*RRC* 426/4) on which the obverse depicts a very youthful Hercules and the reverse advertises Pompeius as a world conqueror.[18] An accompanying issue

[15] Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild* (n. 1) 39-47; H. Mattingly, 'Notes on Late Republican Coinage', *NC* 3 (1963) 51-4, at 51-2; M.H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge 1974) 733. Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 29 dismisses the coin without resolving the effect of the association, especially the elephant skull cap displayed by the Ptolemies and others on their coinage, on her argument. See also G. Mader, 'Triumphal Elephants and Political Circus at Plutarch, *Pomp.* 14.6', *CW* 99.4 (2006) 397-403.

[16] Against, Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 27-35; Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 185.

[17] B. McGing, *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI of Pontus* (Leiden 1986) 99-101; J.M. Højte, in J.M. Højte (ed.), *Mithridates VI and the Pontic Kingdom* (Aarhus 2009) 149; A. Mayor, *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithridates, Rome's Deadliest Enemy* (Princeton NJ 2011) 10, 41-6, 65-8.

[18] For more extended discussions of this coin and its impact, see Crawford, *RRC* (n. 15) 450-2, 734; M. Harlan, *Republican Moneyers and their Coins* (London 1995) 107-9; Cl. Nicolet, *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Empire* (Ann Arbor MI 1991) 37-8. On Pompeius' third triumph, see I. Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford 2009) 270-88, with references to earlier works; on Pompeius and Hercules, see Crawford, *RRC* (n. 15) 450-1. On Hercules/Alexander iconography, see A. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1993) 235-6, figs 76-9; on

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(*RRC* 426/3) displays three trophies, one for each of Pompeius' three triumphs. The head of Hercules, associated for several centuries with Alexander, in combination with a depiction of his mastery of the *oikumene*, suggest that Pompeius, through his son-in-law, actively encouraged an association between himself and the great Macedonian king.



**Fig. 2: Faustus Sulla honours the victories of Cn. Pompeius (*RRC* 426/4)**

The contemporary evidence suggests that whatever might have been said or done to compare Pompeius to Alexander in the eighties or seventies, the connection was most clearly advertised in the moment of his triumph over Mithridates VI, himself a notable *neos Alexandros*.[19] This association undoubtedly made the image of Alexander more problematic in the eyes of contemporary Romans. Gruen's argument is at its best in its demonstration of how an individual's detractors could use association with Alexander as a political weapon. The coin evidence indicates the extent to which Pompeius was prepared to take the risk. The criticism he suffered was all the more effective precisely because he could not resist playing with the Alexander image.

In 62, Cicero defended the poet Archias on a charge of illegally assuming Roman citizenship. The charge grew out of the rivalry between Pompeius,

Alexander and Hercules on coinage, ibid. 79, 159, 231-6. M.J. Price, *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander and Philip Arrhidaeus* (London 1991), catalogues coins depicting Hercules wearing the lion skin and Alexander from across the Macedonian empire, with examples from Mesembria possibly minted as late as 65 BC. Mithridates VI had also adopted the Nemean lion skin as a symbol of his Herculean/Alexandrian ancestry (Højte, *Mithridates VI* [n. 17] 146-52). Roman examples of Hercules on coinage figure prominently in copper alloy coins from 211-86, sometimes showing a lion's skin cap, on others the boar's skin: Crawford, *RRC* (n. 15) 863; *RRC* 426 places the imagery on a denarius. Note the contrasting depictions of Hercules on *RRC* 426.2, commemorating L. Cornelius Sulla, and *RRC* 426.4, commemorating Pompeius.

[19] Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 26, 36; Højte, *Mithridates VI* (n. 17) 122.

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who was behind the prosecution, and Lucius Licinius Lucullus, Archias' patron and the subject of his epic poem.[20] In a climactic passage, Cicero draws a direct parallel between Alexander and Pompeius:

> quam multos scriptores rerum suarum Magnus ille Alexander secum habuisse dicitur! atque is tamen, cum in Sigeo ad Achillis tumulum astitisset: 'o fortunate,' inquit, 'adulescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerum praeconem inveneris!' et vere. nam, nisi Ilias illa exstitisset, idem tumulus qui corpus eius contexerat nomen etiam obruisset. quid? noster hic Magnus qui cum virtute fortunam adaequavit, nonne Theophanem Mytilenaeum, scriptorem rerum suarum, in contione militum civitate donavit, et nostri illi fortes viri, sed rustici ac milites, dulcedine quadam gloriae commoti quasi participes eiusdem laudis magno illud clamore approbaverunt?
>
> Cic. *Arch.* 24
>
> How many historians of his exploits is that famous Great Alexander said to have had with him; and he, when standing on Cape Sigeum at the grave of Achilles, said, 'O happy youth, to find Homer as the herald of your glory!' And he said the truth; for, if the *Iliad* had not existed, the same tomb which covered his body would have also buried his renown. What, did not our own Magnus, whose valour has been equal to his fortune, present Theophanes the Mytilenean, the historian of his actions, with citizenship in an assembly of the soldiers and did not these brave men of ours, even though rude soldiers, stirred up by a rush of glory, as if participants in his praise, applaud this with a great shout?

*Noster hic Magnus* is directly contrasted with *Magnus ille Alexander* of the previous sentence. For Cicero's defence to succeed, a strategic compliment was called for, not a comparison which Pompeius would find offensive. That the comparison is delicate emphasises rather than eliminates the possibility that Pompeius' desire to be associated with Alexander was already a well-known feature of the political discourse.[21]

Cicero says that Archias was no different in either status or usefulness from Theophanes of Mitylene, who had also received the citizenship from his

[20] For more detailed treatments of Cicero's defence of Archias and his oratorical strategies, see S. Murphy, *The Gift of Immortality: Myths of Power and Humanist Poetics* (Cranbury NJ 1997) 45-52; C. Steel, *Cicero, Rhetoric and Empire* (Oxford 2001) 94-8; Dugan, *Making a New Man* (n. 13) 31-43. See also C. Krebs, '*Magni Viri*: Caesar, Alexander and Pompey in Cat. 11', *Philologus* 152 (2008) 223-9.

[21] Spencer, *The Roman Alexander* (n. 1) 123. See also Gruen, 'Review: Spencer, *The Roman Alexander*', *IHR* 25 (2003) 639-41. Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 183, 184, 186, skirts around the reference but does not deal with its central importance. Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 42, states that Pompeius was following Roman, not Alexandrian, precedents in using Theophanes as an attendant historian, which is true. However, Cicero's oratorical point rests on a known association, not the exact precedent or even reason for Theophanes' presence in Pompeius' camp. Cicero also demonstrates that contemporary Romans associated the cognomen *Magnus* with Alexander and that Cicero could play with it in a forensic setting without too much explanation. For an analysis of how the structure of *Arch.* 24 reinforces the comparison and its rhetorical effect, see H.C. Gotoff, *Cicero's Elegant Style: an Analysis of the* Pro Archia (Chicago IL 1979) 190-5.

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patron in circumstances which paralleled Archias' case.[22] He suggests that Theophanes, who, like Archias, wrote in Greek, did Rome a service by proclaiming Pompeius' achievements in the most accessible language of the ancient Mediterranean (*Arch.* 23).[23] That he wrote up these achievements in a manner which invited comparison with Alexander is hinted at in the passage and more strongly suggested by the way that Plutarch, who read and used Theophanes, frames his biography of the Great Man.

Early in the *Life*, Plutarch comments on the way that Pompeius' hair lifted off his forehead and how the contours of his face gave him a resemblance to the portraits of Alexander, even if he adds that this was 'more talked about than apparent' (Plut. *Pomp.* 2.1).[24] He adds two anecdotes: first, that in Pompeius' early years many called him Alexander, a name which he did not decline (Plut. *Pomp.* 2.2), and, second, that Lucius Philippus, when defending Pompeius, said that it was only right if he, being Philip, loved Alexander (Plut. *Pomp.* 2.2). The provenance of such material, as Gruen notes, is hard to pin down. However, once Plutarch moves into the territory associated with Theophanes, namely the eastern campaigns, he transfers into another register. Stories such as the discovery of Amazonian armour among the bodies after the battle at the river Abas (Plut. *Pomp.* 35.3) and the deadly snakes which forced Pompeius to turn back on his journey to the Caspian Sea (Plut. *Pomp.* 36.1) associate and compare the Roman general to Alexander, even when Alexander is not named.[25] Such stories do not show that Pompeius actually imitated Alexander. Rather, Theophanes wrote up the campaign with sensational details which deliberately reinforced the parallels.

Plutarch also links the Alexander comparison to Pompeius' third triumph. He writes that 'His age at this time, as those insist who compare him in all points to Alexander and force the parallel, was less than thirty-four years, though in fact he was nearly forty' (Plut. *Pomp.* 46.1).[26] When he reflected on the evidence, Plutarch was sceptical about whether it was accurate in all its details – as well he should have been.[27] But the accuracy of the resemblance

[22] Spencer, *The Roman Alexander* (n. 1) 124.

[23] Steel, *Cicero, Rhetoric and Empire* (n. 20) 94-8.

[24] For Pompeius' portrait types and Alexander resemblances, see Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild* (n. 1) 55-66.

[25] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 5; E.J. Baynham, 'Alexander and the Amazons', *CQ* 51 (2001) 115-26, at 122. Against, Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 185, who argues that the story of Pompeius and the Amazon armour had no connection to Alexander.

[26] Pompeius' three triumphs over three continents were well advertised in his day. See e.g. Faustus' representation (*RRC* 426.3), along with Dio's description of his seal-ring (42.18.3); cf. Plut. *Pomp.* 80.5. Cicero referred to the phenomenon (e.g. *Div.* 2.9.22). Other references include Prop. 3.11.35; Luc. 8.813-15, 553, 9.177-8, 599-600; Plin. *NH* 2.6.13; Plut. *Pomp.* 40, 45; Martial 5.74. For a complete list, see M.E. Deutsch, 'Pompey's Three Triumphs', *CPh* 19 (1924) 277-9, and for descriptions of the placards, see Östenberg, *Staging the World* (n. 18) 280-90.

[27] G.B. Townend, 'C. Oppius on Julius Caesar', *AJP* 108 (1987) 325-42 at 326; Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 183-5; Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 41.

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was hardly the point. What he demonstrates is that the parallel was forced in the first place and looked even stranger after the fact of Pharsalus. The sceptics and detractors had even more scope in that context, but the image already existed and was not dislodged. The fragment of Sallust's *Histories* reinforces this very point. Sallust states:

> sed Pompeius a prima adulescentia sermone fautorum similem fore se credens Alexandro regi facta consultaque eius quidem aemulus erat.
>
> Sall. *Hist.* 3.88
>
> But Pompeius from earliest youth, believing from the talk of his supporters that he would equal Alexander the King, emulated his deeds and even his plans.

Both Gruen and Martin exclude the comment as evidence because Sallust's portrait of Pompeius is negative.[28] Sallust's comment is almost certainly critical, but it reinforces the possibility of a contemporary comparison (of which Sallust and others disapproved) rather than suggesting that no comparison existed. In the light of the numismatic evidence and quotations of Theophanes' history preserved in Plutarch's biography, it makes better sense to argue that the attempts at association emanated from those closest to Pompeius (implied in the phrase *sermo fautorum*), that he wanted it to happen (*se credens*), and that Sallust thought the imagery worthy of a response.

Theophanes was more than the historian of Pompeius' campaigns. He travelled back to Rome with him and remained as one of his most influential advisers.[29] Although we cannot know the fine detail of Theophanes' role in shaping the comparison between Pompeius and Alexander, when the evidence of Cicero and Plutarch is combined, it is hard to argue that he had no part in it at all.

Pompeius' claims of resemblance to Alexander were based on his appearance, his military reputation, the young age at which this was acquired and his success in territory associated with Alexander's conquests. He and his image-makers did not engage in a comparison of *character*. This is an important point. Pompeius, or more rightly his literary agents, led by Theophanes, could pick and choose from the Alexander material, and their choice fell on the role of the great conqueror. The idea of being morally better than Alexander seems to come into the picture only with Caesar's

[28] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 185; Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 42-4. Martin and Gruen argue that a decontextualised fragment could have been part of an accusation, allegation or speech. Even if it was (and it is possible), it still points to a situation in which Pompeius or his friends played a role in associating him with Alexander.

[29] *Att.* 2.17[37].3; 5.11[104].3; 7.7[130].3; 9.1[167].3; Strabo 13.2.3; Plut. *Pomp.* 42.4; *Cic.* 38.4; K. Welch, 'The Office of *praefectus fabrum* in the Late Republic', *Chiron* 25 (1995) 131-45, at 140-2.

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friends, who, knowing Pompeius had the conquest of the world wrapped up, had to force the comparison with Alexander into a different sphere.[30]

It was the competition between Pompeius and Caesar and the success, not failure, of Pompeius' career as an image-maker and political operator which gave the image of Alexander such vitality in the late Republic and early Empire. Unlike modern scholars, Caesar did not underestimate Pompeius; he always saw him as a worthy competitor, even after his death. Caesar's contest with Alexander makes much more sense if we understand it as an implicit contest with the ghost of Pompeius as well as an explicit desire to outdo the great Macedonian.

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In the first part of 45, Cicero attempted to write a letter of advice to Caesar which was supposed to follow the model of letters from Aristotle and Theopompus to Alexander.[31] Green recognised the possibilities inherent in the exercise but dismissed its importance, in part because he had as little respect for Cicero as he had for Pompeius. He commented, 'Weinstock states, without argument, that Caesar not only requested this literary exercise but himself insisted on the parallel with Alexander. Were this in fact true, we would possess evidence, as rare as it was valuable, for Caesar's indeed having employed Alexander as a model in his political propaganda campaign.'[32] Gruen said simply, 'No inferences should be drawn on the basis of Cicero's abortive letter of advice to the dictator which drew some comparisons – or contrasts.'[33]

While reviewing Shackleton Bailey's edition of Cicero's letters to Atticus (Volumes 5 and 6), Gruen wrote:[34]

> The famous συμβουλευτικόν which Cicero composed to Caesar in 45 and which was never delivered because of censorship by Oppius and Balbus is among the most fascinating episodes of this period . . . That a letter of advice to Caesar should be written at all was Atticus' idea, not Cicero's, and the latter was reluctant from the beginning (V, pp. 138, 150). Cicero insisted that a draft be shown first to Caesar's agents

[30] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 4-6, makes a similar point, but his low opinion of Pompeius and failure to realise his continued popularity leads him to underestimate the task Caesar faced in the post-Pharsalus period. On this issue, see R. Westall, 'The Forum Iulium as Representation of *Imperator* Caesar', *Römische Mitteilungen* 103 (1996) 83-118.

[31] Cic. *Att.* 12.40[281]; 51[293].2; 13.28[299].3; 31[302].3; Weinstock (1957) (n. 1) 233; Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 12-13; Spencer, *The Roman Alexander* (n. 1) 53-64; Steel, 'Friends, Associates, and Wives', in M. Griffin (ed.), *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Malden 2009) 112-25, at 123; Pelling, *Plutarch: Caesar* (n. 3) 28.

[32] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 13.

[33] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 188.

[34] Gruen, 'Review: Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*', *AJP* 89 (1968) 487-91, at 490.

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> (V, p. 158), and it was with mixed feelings of annoyance and relief that he learned of their disapproval (V, pp. 164, 166, 168).

This passage is followed by pertinent observations on Shackleton Bailey's failure to explore the issues further.

Relevant to this discussion is an assessment of the relationship between Cicero and Atticus in the middle months of 45. The death of his daughter had left Cicero shattered, but even while Atticus sympathised, the letters of March and April reveal a pattern of Atticus urging Cicero to maintain an interest in politics, so that his (and, by extension, Atticus') influence did not wane unnecessarily.[35] In early March, it is quite apparent that Cicero and Atticus are on different wave-lengths: Cicero is obsessed with the monument he plans for Tullia, Atticus with redirecting Cicero's attention to matters more in line with Atticus' priorities. Contrast Cicero's intransigence (12.36[275].1: *neque hoc mihi dissuaderi potest* . . .) with Atticus' frustration (*Att.* 12.38a[279].1: *quod putas opportere* . . .). When Cicero first mentions the topic of the letter of advice, the image is of one suffering writer's block:

> συμβουλευτικὸν saepe conor. nihil reperio et quidem mecum habeo et Ἀριστοτέλου et Θεοπόμπου πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον. sed quid simile? illi et quae ipsis honesta essent scribebant et grata Alexandro. ecquid tu eius modi reperis? mihi quidem nihil in mentem venit.
>
> Cic. *Att.* 12.40[281]. 9 May 45
>
> I make repeated attempts at the essay of advice. I can't find anything to say, even though I have by me the letters of Aristotle and Theopompus to Alexander. But what analogy is there? They could write what was honourable to themselves and acceptable to Alexander. Can *you* find anything of that sort? Nothing occurs to me.

Commentators assume that the initiative came from Cicero, even though he displays absolutely no enthusiasm for the task. *Saepe conor*, he says, *nihil reperio*. His attitude concerning the letter of advice can be compared directly to his enthusiasm for Aulus Hirtius' *Anticato* which he mentioned in the previous paragraph. Seduced by its flattery of himself, Cicero had requested that Atticus' *librarii* disseminate it widely (*Att.* 12.40[281].1), even though it traduced his friend and hero. The letter of advice, on the other hand, left him cold. Moreover, it is clear that both works are part of an ongoing conversation between the two men, although this is the first mention we have of either. Cicero's emphatic use of *ecquid tu reperis* challenges Atticus to break the deadlock, because he cannot. Gruen's observation that the initiative had come from Atticus, and not Cicero, is acute, and almost right, but there is

[35] *Att.* 12. 23[262].1; 28[267].2; 29[268].1; 38a[279].1. On the need to take Atticus' attitudes into account when assessing the evidence in the letters, see Welch, 'T. Pomponius Atticus: A Banker in Politics?', *Historia* 45 (1996) 450-71 at 464-71; id., *Magnus Pius: Sextus Pompeius and the Transformation of the Roman Republic* (Swansea 2012) 50-7.

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even more to it.[36] Atticus' role becomes even clearer in the next reference to the hated letter of advice project:

> epistulam ad Caesarem mitti video tibi placere. quid quaeris? mihi quoque hoc idem maxime placuit, et eo magis quod nihil est in ea nisi optimi civis, sed ita optimi ut tempora; quibus parere omnes πολιτικοί praecipiunt. sed scis ita nobis esse visum ut isti ante legerent. tu igitur id curabis. sed nisi plane iis intelleges placere, mittenda non est. id autem utrum illi sentiant anne simulent tu intelleges. mihi simulatio pro repudiatione fuerit.
>
> Cic. *Att.* 12.51[293].2. 20 May 45
>
> I see you are happy for the letter to be sent to Caesar. Well, I was very much of the same opinion, especially as it contains nothing unbefitting a loyal citizen – loyal, however, as the times permit. Obedience to them is the precept of all experts on politics. But you know that I think your friends should read it first, so you will please see to this. But unless you are quite sure they approve, it must not be sent – and you will be able to tell whether they really approve. Pretence I shall regard as tantamount to rejection.

'But I want *you* to make sure that *they* read it first,' says Cicero. The identity of 'them' is incontrovertible. For at least the previous four years, Gaius Oppius and Lucius Cornelius Balbus had been active in developing and packaging Caesar's public image.[37] After the outbreak of civil war, they assisted in a letter-writing campaign designed to persuade wavering senators to stay in touch with Caesar and Italy. As Caesar's domination of Roman institutions increased, so too did their ability to intervene in the management of day-to-day government. In early 45, with Caesar once again on campaign and not due to return until late in the year, their power was more entrenched than ever.[38]

Cicero's emphatic juxtaposition of the *tu* and the *isti* reveals Atticus, Oppius and Balbus as commissioners of the work and determined to vet what was in it.[39] Atticus, it seems, is both the initiator, as Gruen proposed, and the mediator between Caesar's image controllers and the reluctant Cicero.

As Gruen said, 'There is strain evident even between Cicero and Atticus.'[40] But what has caused it? Churning out flattery was not the problem. In August 45, Cicero responds to Atticus' request to write *uberiores*

[36] Gruen, 'Review: Shackleton Bailey' (n. 34) 490.

[37] J. Malitz, 'Die Kanzlei Caesars: Herrschaftsorganisation zwischen Republik und Prinzipat', *Historia* 36 (1987) 51-72 at 56-60; Welch, 'The *praefectura urbis* of 45 BC and the Ambitions of L. Cornelius Balbus', *Antichthon* 24 (1990) 53-69; P. White, 'Tactics in Caesar's Correspondence with Cicero', in F. Cairns and E. Fantham (eds), *Caesar against Liberty: Perspectives on his Autocracy* (Cambridge 2003) 68-95, at 75-80.

[38] Townend, 'Oppius on Julius Caesar' (n. 27); Welch, 'L. Cornelius Balbus' (n. 37); id. 'T. Pomponius Atticus' (n. 35) 469-70.

[39] Steel, 'Friends, Associates and Wives' (n. 31) 123.

[40] Gruen, 'Review: Shackleton Bailey' (n. 34) 489.

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*litterae* about Caesar (*Att.* 13.50[348].1) by composing a response to Caesar's *Anticato*. He thought Caesar might like it, and indeed Oppius and Balbus approve it enthusiastically and send it on. Along with his measured reactions to Hirtius' and Caesar's tracts against Cato, he produces the *Pro Marcello* in 46 and the *Pro Ligario* in June 45 (*Att.* 13.12[320].2). In the case of topics which Cicero can control, there is no need for Atticus to intervene or prod. It is *this* topic which causes the strain, because Cicero does not wish to do it and Atticus will not let it be. The particularities of this case suggest that neither the topic nor the way it would be treated were Cicero's – or perhaps even Atticus' – choice.

In a bad mood already, Cicero eventually complains that the comparison he could draw between a young king who handled power badly and an old *imperator* who over time had moved further away from Republican practice would hardly be flattering to Caesar:

> quid? tu non vides ipsum illum Aristoteli discipulum, summo ingenio, summa modestia, postea quam rex appellatus sit, superbum, crudelem, immoderatum fuisse? quid? tu hunc de pompa, Quirini contubernalem, his nostris moderatis epistulis laetaturum putas? ille vero potius non scripta desideret quam scripta non probet.
>
> Cic. *Att.* 13.28[299].3
>
> Don't you see that even Aristotle's pupil, eminent as were his gifts and excellent as was his moderation, became proud, cruel and intemperate once he was declared king? Do you really suppose that this figure in the procession, this fellow-lodger of Quirinus, will be gratified by a sober letter like mine? Better let him want for what I don't write than disapprove what I do.

Cicero's annoyance with Atticus is once again obvious. He is so angry that he lets drop the fact that the specific comparison was what Caesar wanted (*ille vero potius non scripta desideret*) and in his view was not appropriate on any level. He had thought what he had written was suitable but it had been rejected, precisely, he says, because it was too modest. Unwilling to embark again on such a distasteful project, he finally demanded that Atticus drop the subject:

> de epistula ad Caesarem κέκρικα; atque id ipsum quod isti aiunt illum scribere, se nisi constitutes rebus non iturum in Parthos, idem ego suadebam in illa epistula. utrum liberet facere posset auctore me. hoc enim ille exspectat videlicet, neque est facturus quicquam nisi de meo consilio. obsecro, abiciamus ista et semiliberi saltem simus.
>
> Cic. *Att.* 13.31[302].3. 28 May 45
>
> As for the letter to Caesar, my mind is made up! And the very point which your friends say he makes in his letter, that he will not go to fight the Parthians until he has settled affairs here, was recommended in my epistle. He might do whichever he pleased on my authority – that's what he's waiting for, of course, and won't do anything except on my advice! For pity's sake, let us chuck all this nonsense, and be half free at any rate.

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*quod isti aiunt illum scribere*: Cicero had turned the tract into a reminder to Caesar that he had some work to do in Italy before he went off to play at being the new Alexander in a war against Parthia.[41] In something of a huff, Caesar's friends, Oppius and Balbus, had responded that of course their man was planning to do so, so could Cicero please rewrite that bit! Atticus had thought it a reasonable request: Cicero did not, and says so in clear terms. We hear nothing further on the topic and Cicero soon found other ways to display to the world that he and Caesar were still friends.

Perhaps Cicero had been deemed the ideal person to write the letter because he had argued so memorably that the command of the Mithridatic war be given to Pompeius in his speech *De Imperio Cn. Pompei*. This had brought about the culmination of Pompeius' Alexander *aemulatio* through the conquest of the east. Moreover, Cicero had advanced Pompeius' case by advertising his possession of the four essential characteristics of the greatest general: *scientia rei militaris*, *virtus*, *auctoritas* and *felicitas* (Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 28). In 45, Caesar intended to go further east than Pompeius and asked Pompeius' apologist to do something as spectacular for him. The letter project ran aground, but Cicero's efforts at compromise might be found in the direct comparison between Caesar and Pompeius embedded within his speech *de rege Deiotaro* delivered later in the same year:

> quantum nomen illius fuerit, quantae opes, quanta in omni genere bellorum gloria, quanti honores populi Romani, quanti senatus, quanti tui, quis ignorat? tanto ille superiores vicerat gloria, quanto tu omnibus praestitisti. itaque Cn. Pompei bella victorias triumphos consulatus admirantes numerabamus, tuos enumerare non possumus.
>
> Cic. *Reg. Deiot.* 12
>
> Of the greatness of his name, of his wealth, of his renown in every kind of warfare, of the honours he received from the Roman people, the senate and yourself, who is ignorant? He had surpassed his predecessors in renown as far as you have excelled all men, so we numbered with admiration the wars, victories, triumphs, consulates of Gnaeus Pompeius; yours we cannot number.

Pliny (*NH* 7.99) took up Cicero's terms of comparison between Pompeius and Caesar and, moreover, added Alexander to form a three-way contest.

Green argued that Caesar had better things to do with his life than to be thinking about Alexander.[42] And for the most part he is right, but that is a far cry from saying that the comparison was never on the agenda. He poses the question: 'In the light of the evidence we have examined, and of Caesar's own life as we know it, how – if at all – might *Alexander-imitatio* have

[41] On the ideological significance of Caesar's Parthian expedition, J. Malitz, 'Caesars Parther-krieg', *Historia* 33 (1984) 21-59.

[42] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 13-14.

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helped him *at each successive stage of his career*?' (his italics).[43] His answer is, understandably, not much. Green himself, however, noted that the bulk of the evidence for the comparison is connected to the final months of Caesar's life.[44] This aspect is significant and deserves further consideration.

Only after Caesar had defeated Pompeius, the man who had already claimed to have outdone Alexander, did the comparison enter the equation. It was in this phase of his life that the new forum, including a Lysippan statue of Alexander's horse Bucephalus with Caesar himself astride, was designed and constructed.[45] In 45, when he planned to campaign in Parthia, his friends attempted to elicit a subtle treatment from Cicero, the elder statesman, which would associate them rather than crudely compare and contrast. The result was too subtle to be useful and Cicero refused to make the point more obvious. As luck would have it, Caesar was murdered three days before he was due to leave for Parthia, and so never got his 'Alexandrine' war. As a result, the comparison of Caesar to Alexander had to be left to others and had to shift to different ground.

* * * * * *

As part of his pen-portrait of Caesar, Velleius stops for a moment to offer his own comparison:

> forma omnium civium excellentissimus, vigore animi acerrimus, munificentia effusissimus, animo super humanam et naturam et fidem evectus, magnitudine cogitationum, celeritate bellandi, patientia periculorum Magno illi Alexandro, sed sobrio neque iracundo simillimus . . .
>
> Vell. Pat. 2.41.1-2
>
> He was exceedingly keen and vigorous of mind, lavish in his generosity, and possessed a courage exceeding the nature, and even the credence, of man. In the magnitude of his ambitions, in the rapidity of his military operations, and in his endurance of danger, he closely resembled that famous Great Alexander, but only when Alexander was free from the influence of wine and master of his passions.

[43] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 14. Even the Gades story, if, as we suspect but cannot prove, it was created by Lucius Cornelius Balbus, would probably have gained currency after Caesar's death, not during his lifetime.

[44] Ibid. 14. As part of the same dismissal of Caesar's Alexandrine ambitions, Green suggests that none of the evidence for Caesar wanting to establish a Hellenistic monarchy with Cleopatra should be taken seriously because of the trouble that rumours of the same desire caused Antonius a decade later. It should be pointed out that Caesar aroused such hatred that he was assassinated. The evidence should be given more weight than Green allows.

[45] Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.84-7; Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 13; Westall, 'The Forum Iulium' (n. 30) 92-4. Westall, loc. cit. 88-90, argues that Alexander's shadow hangs over accounts of Pharsalus. He also reminds us (loc. cit. 86) not only that Oppius wrote works which extolled Caesar's character but that he was involved from the beginning in the design of the forum.

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Velleius also emphasises Caesar's divine/noble birth, his personal beauty, his energy and his superhuman spirit, but the direct comparison is made in terms of ambition, speed, endurance and moderation. At first it appears to offer little to the debate.[46] There is, however, much more to this passage than meets the eye.

Appian's contribution, introduced as the climax of Book 2 (*BC* 2.149-150), contrasts the skill in war of the two men, their rapidity of executing decisions, their fearlessness in the face of danger, the capability they demonstrated in daring exploits, and the loyalty which each man engendered in his soldiers. Appian then says that both were handsome, both were descendants of the gods and both were as ready to fight adversaries as they were to make peace, but the Roman Caesar was only nearly as victorious as Alexander because his officers let him down on more than one occasion and there were those minor setbacks at Gergovia and Dyrrachium.

The Alexandrian Appian gives first prize to Alexander, if only marginally. He passes over Alexander's faults, while raising the spectre of Caesar's defeats. For his part, the Roman Velleius declares Caesar the winner because he was the more moderate man. Although each writer, perhaps unsurprisingly, chooses a different winner, the specific categories by which they are judged are extraordinarily similar. Gruen regards the comparison of Alexander and Caesar as 'natural',[47] but more germane is the observation of Adcock that '[T]he likeness between them belongs to rhetoric rather than to history.'[48] In fact, it is the product of a carefully constructed rhetorical exercise which permeates the comparisons no matter what their language or genre.

Although his *synkrisis* of the two men no longer exists, Plutarch might hold the key to the arrangement. At *Caes.* 17, he breaks from the narrative of Caesar's Gallic Wars, largely taken from Caesar himself, to a very different type of history: Caesar the Hero. We have mention of Caesar's love of honour, his passion for distinction, the unselfish and unsparing distribution of money and honours among his friends, his fearlessness in the face of danger, his feats of endurance, his energetic and assiduous attention to detail, his rapidity and expertise as a rider.

The stories were undoubtedly related by many, but Plutarch (*Caes.* 17.4) makes specific reference to Oppius. Reference to Oppius' efforts as a historian is also made by Suetonius, Pliny and Charisius.[49] It comes as no surprise that his material was flattering to Caesar and hostile to Pompeius (Plut. *Pomp.* 10). Suetonius (*Iul.* 56.1) says that he might have been the author of that most Alexandrian text, the *de bello Alexandrino*, in which

[46] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 181, 183, 187. On Velleius, Caesar and Alexander, see also Pelling, *Plutarch: Caesar* (n. 3) 28.

[47] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 188.

[48] F.E. Adcock, 'Caesar's Dictatorship', *CAH*[1] 9.691-740, at 739.

[49] Townend, 'Oppius on Julius Caesar' (n. 27).

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Caesar takes control of three continents and conquers the city in which Alexander's body still lay in splendour. Even if we cannot establish whether or not Oppius wrote that work, it is still of interest that commentators in antiquity considered it likely that he was the author.[50]

What is of most importance to us is the match between Oppius' material and the categories which Velleius and Appian employ in their *comparationes* of Caesar and Alexander. Oppius is particularly connected to stories demonstrating Caesar's good manners. Suetonius (*Iul.* 53) cites him for the anecdote of Caesar not drawing attention to a host's mistake in serving stale oil, and again (*Iul.* 72) for the story of Caesar giving his place to Oppius, his sick friend, and sleeping *sub divo*. Plutarch (*Caes.* 17.5–6) repeats the same story in a chapter which, as a comparison with Suetonius' anecdotes show, owes more to Oppius than Plutarch suggests. It is clear that whatever Oppius wrote about Caesar stressed his moderation, his kindness to his friends and his sobriety, and that these virtues formed the basis of the *comparatio* tradition which we find reproduced in Velleius and Appian.

* * * * * *

We can bring together many of the strands of the Alexander problem in a passage from Pliny's *Natural History* Book 7 which has been insufficiently utilised in this context. Examining the passage as a whole, not just the single reference to Alexander, we can see the ongoing debates about Pompeius, about Caesar and about comparison to Alexander.

As part of a lengthy discussion about memory, Pliny states that the person of the most outstanding mental vigour in Roman history was Caesar the dictator. In fact, his term *vigore animi* brings us directly back to Velleius (2.41.1). Pliny defines mental vigour as the ability to grasp something quickly, and then goes on to give an example: 'We are told that [Caesar] used to write or read, and dictate or listen, simultaneously, and to dictate to his secretaries four letters at once on his important affairs – or, if otherwise unoccupied, seven letters at once' (*NH* 7.25.91). As Plutarch shows in the passage cited above, the information derives from Oppius.[51]

After marvelling at Caesar's epistolatory abilities, Pliny starts tallying up statistics. Caesar fought fifty pitched battles, more than Marcus Marcellus, who fought thirty-nine. Caesar killed 1,192,000 people in his battles, in addition to the Roman citizens he killed, whom he never counted. This might

[50] M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. P. Needham (Oxford 1968) 251, argued that Hirtius was probably the author of the work, as has, more recently, L.G.H. Hall, 'Hirtius and the *Bellum Alexandrinum*', *CQ* 46 (1996) 411-15. Our own view is that, while Hirtius might have intended to undertake the task, and might even have prepared to do so, he would have had little opportunity to do so. If he did not, then Oppius was seen as an obvious candidate to take his place.

[51] J. Paterson, 'Caesar the Man', in Griffin (ed.), *Companion to Julius Caesar* (n. 31) 139. See also Townend, 'Oppius on Julius Caesar' (n. 27) 330.

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have been unavoidable but it was still not praiseworthy, and, Pliny argues, Caesar himself confirmed this by not publishing the casualty numbers for the civil wars. Pliny turns momentarily to Pompeius and inserts the detail that Pompeius captured 846 pirate ships, a statistic he regards with more approval.

Pliny then raises the issue of Caesar's *clementia* which surpassed that of all others. Moreover, there was his magnanimity, also unparalleled, in providing shows, donations of money and public works. While this was a virtue, it was worrying because it smacked of *luxuria*. It is a very Ciceronian and Sallustian moment. The most outstanding proof of *illa vera et incomparabilis invicti animi sublimitas* lay in his decision to burn the material contained in Pompeius' dispatch cases after Pharsalus and Scipio's at Thapsus. Caesar was incomparable.

Yet in the very next section he is compared to Pompeius:

> Verum ad decus imperii Romani, non solum ad viri unius pertinet, victoriarum Pompei Magni titulos omnes triumphosque hoc in loco nuncupari, aequato non modo Alexandri Magni rerum fulgore, sed etiam Herculis prope ac Liberi patris.
>
> Plin. *NH* 7.26.95
>
> But it concerns the glory of the Roman Empire, and not that of one man, to mention in this place all the records of the victories of Pompeius Magnus and all his triumphs, which equal the brilliance of the exploits not only of Alexander Magnus but even almost of Hercules and Father Liber.

That Alexander, like Pompeius, would surface in this debate was a possibility from the beginning when we had material directly attributable to Oppius. What is remarkable is that Pliny switches to a Pompeius-Alexander *comparatio*, and Caesar is left to hang. Pompeius has not only equalled Alexander, but has moved on to Hercules and Dionysus, both of whom were also associated with the Macedonian.

We then have an extensive catalogue of the military achievements of Pompeius, the proof of why he is worthy of comparison with Alexander and why he deserves his name Magnus. Pliny interrupts the account with an aside: with *greater* spirit (*maiore animo*), Pompeius did not report his victory over Sertorius (*NH* 7.26.96). This phrase asserts the superiority of Pompeius in a virtue which Caesar and his friends had claimed specifically for him.

Now the focus turns completely to Pompeius, who conquered the whole of the sea and the East, bringing back titles like a sacred victor, to crown his *patria*. The passage is a nice balance of personal achievement and the glory which redounded to Rome because of him. Pliny then appends the inscription Pompeius set up in the temple of Minerva, which states that he had defeated, though not necessarily killed, 12,183,000 people, sunk or taken 846 ships, and received the surrender of 1538 towns and forts (*NH* 7.26.97). The million people Caesar killed seems a small number in comparison with the twelve

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million people Pompeius brought under Roman power – *without* killing them. Pliny also transcribes the plaque from the triumphal procession, which listed the territories and peoples Pompeius had conquered (*NH* 7.26.98). He concludes his review of Pompeius' achievements by quoting Pompeius himself, that finding Asia on the edge of empire he had made it the centre (*NH* 7.26.99).

Pompeius has been made to look like a greater and more merciful conqueror than Caesar. Therefore, Pliny's conclusion is startling:

> si quis e contrario simili modo velit percensere Caesaris res, qui maior illo apparuit, totum profecto terrarum orbem enumeret, quod infinitum esse conveniet.
>
> Plin. *NH* 7.26.99
>
> If anybody on the other side desires to review in similar manner the achievements of Caesar, who showed himself greater than Pompeius, he must assuredly roll off the entire world, and this it will be agreed is a task without limit.

The conclusion is a sudden *recusatio*: Pliny does not attempt to put Caesar's case, even though he knows that others have. The argument moves from facts and inscriptions to hyperbole: Caesar conquered the whole world. The abrupt ending is fascinating. Caesar comes out on top, but the bulk of the information concerns the defeated Pompeius, who, by virtue of the strange arrangement of the passage, remains the Roman Alexander.

What do we make of this text? Pliny has combined, or found already combined in another source, at least three different things – the Caesar material we have linked to Oppius, the Pompeius as Alexander material found in Theophanes and a continuing conversation about which of the two Roman leaders was the better. The incongruity of the whole comes from the fact that Pliny has preserved but not resolved the arguments and claims of his sources.

* * * * * *

Quite different from the potential for criticism and political point scoring, which Gruen rightly identifies,[52] is another recognisable Alexander trope. As Appian shows, Alexander remained the stick by which 'conquered Greece' could unsettle her Roman overlords. All she needed to ask was whether any Roman was *really* greater than Alexander.

Parthia, the geographical scene of Alexander's triumphs, always eluded the masters of the world. After Crassus' and Antonius' efforts, things just got worse. Anxiety and not triumphalism is most apparent in Livy's famous statement:

> id vero periculum erat, quod levissimi ex Graecis qui Parthorum quoque contra nomen Romanum gloriae favent dictitare solent, ne

[52] Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 191.

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> maiestatem nominis Alexandri, quem ne fama quidem illis notum arbitror fuisse, sustinere non potuerit populus Romanus.
>
> Liv. 9.18.6
>
> Was there really a danger, as the most frivolous amongst the Greeks, those who promote the Parthians in the face of everything that Roman glory entails, rehash at every opportunity, that the Roman people would not have been able to resist the *maiestas* of Alexander's name, despite the fact that in my opinion he was not even known to them by repute?

Whether or not the *levissimus ex Graecis* was Timagenes, as is often thought, or someone else does not matter.[53] Anyone, if they wished, could point to Roman failure in Parthia as strong proof that the Romans were not as good as Alexander. And it seems that many wished to, including, however gently, Appian himself. Livy responded by asserting something which could not be true: that the Romans at the time wouldn't even have heard of Alexander and, if they had, they wouldn't have cared. They knew they were superior. Weren't they? Timagenes the Alexandrian, or someone, wrote about the Romans and Parthia and it wasn't pretty; Appian the Alexandrian suggests, however delicately, that Caesar was lesser. And if Caesar was lesser, who could be greater? A claim had been made that the Romans weren't as good or as moral as they thought and Livy responds by insisting that they were.

Lucan, on the other hand, is not so sure. In his description of Caesar's visit to Alexandria and the rush he was in to view Alexander's body, he suggests that 'tiny Pella' kept control of a geographical area which had witnessed so many Roman disasters.[54]

> non felix Parthia Crassis/ exiguae secura fuit provincia Pellae.
>
> Luc. 10.51-52
>
> Unlucky for the Crassi, Parthia was a peaceful province for little Pella.

When even Roman writers were prepared to use Alexander as a stick to beat their own generals, it was not that hard for a resilient and determined culture to keep the question of Alexander's superiority alive and well.

The Romans were not always fixated on Alexander and the form varied with the context. However, the broad spread of evidence suggests that Alexander was, in certain circumstances, hot currency. In different ways which reflected the different moments of his life, Pompeius played with fire

[53] Baynham, *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor MI 1998) 76; R. Morello, 'Livy's Alexander Digression (9.17-19): Counterfactuals and Apologetics', *JRS* 92 (2002) 62-85; Spencer, *The Roman Alexander* (n. 1) 106-8.

[54] Green, 'Caesar and Alexander' (n. 3) 7, 18; Gruen, 'Myth of Alexander' (n. 1) 188; Martin, '*imitatio Alexandri*' (n. 7) 26. On Lucan, Caesar and Alexander, see C. Tesoriero, 'Trampling over Troy: Caesar, Virgil, Lucan', in C. Walde (ed.), *Lucan im 21. Jahrhundert: Lucan in the 21st Century: Lucano nei primi del XXI secolo* (Leipzig 2005) 205-6; A. Rossi, '*sine fine*: Caesar's Journey to Egypt and the End of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*', in Walde, loc. cit. 238-52; M. Leigh, 'Neronian Literature: Seneca and Lucan', in Griffin (ed.) *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (n. 1) 242.

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and Theophanes helped him. Caesar was already of mature years when his opportunity came. His envisaged grand 'Alexander conquest' was prevented by his death, and the comparison had to take a different, less Parthian-centred and more sober route. His friends strove to place him among the gods, but before they could, they had to deal with the quintessential Hellenistic hero, who, though the Romans claimed supremacy over him, never quite left them alone.[55]

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[55] T.D. Barnes, 'The First Emperor: The View of Late Antiquity', in Griffin (ed.) *Companion to Julius Caesar* (n. 31) 283-4, notes that Alexander, not Caesar, is still the default comparand for the late antique period.

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