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ALEXANDER'S HELLENISM AND PLUTARCH'S TEXTUALISM

'First learn history'

'The spirit of Alexander the Great is universal but his homeland Macedonia has been Greek for the past 3,000 years'

The slogans cited above were printed on stickers and T-shirts by the Greek National Tourist Agency under the government of Mitsotakis, the former leader of the conservative Nea Demokratia party.[1] Their most striking aspect—other than the bizarre and hardly snappy heavy-handedness of the second—is the self-consciousness expressed about the relationship between narrative historiography and nationalism. Although there is none of the relativism that characterizes academic enquiries into identity politics ('learn history' means 'learn the *truth*'), these lapidary proclamations forge a clear link between the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories that we tell about great figures from the past. And such stories are always self-implicating: even the supercilious language of non-implication that is inevitably adopted in academic discussions of such issues bespeaks an agenda, a millennial supranationalism (that is itself revealingly occidentalist).

Alexander was always a culturally contentious figure, as indeed were pre-Alexandrian Macedonians. In his 'ethnological digression' in Book 1, Herodotus writes that the Greek *ethnos*, after being uprooted by the 'Cadmaeans', 'settled in the area around Pindus that is called Macednon (*sic*)' (*οἴκεε ἐν Πίνδωι Μακεδνὸν καλεόμενον*, 1.56.3).[2] One of the players in the Persian narrative is Alexander I of Macedon, who claims to be a 'Greek man' (*ἀνὴρ Ἕλλην*, 5.20.4; cf. 9.45.2, *Ἕλλην γένος . . . τὐρχαῖον*); and indeed the narrator himself constructs an Argive genealogy for him (8.137). Yet this Alexander is viewed by (?other) Greeks as an ambiguous figure. The Spartans, notably, present him as a Persian *collaborateur* and a tyrannical comrade of Xerxes (8.142.4–5). In an important passage, Alexander seeks to compete in the Olympic games, but is barred by the Greeks on the grounds that 'the contest is not open to barbarians, only Greeks' (*οὐ βαρβάρων ἀγωνιστέων εἶναι τὸν ἀγῶνα ἀλλὰ Ἑλλήνων*, 5.22.2). In response, Alexander 'showed that he was an Argive, and was judged to be a Greek' (*ἀπέδεξε ὡς εἴη Ἀργεῖος, ἐκρίθη τε εἶναι Ἕλλην*, 5.22.2), and subsequently won first prize. The victory in the games, capping the discussion, serves as a literal instantiation of the 'performativity' of identity: to 'be' Greek has to

[1] See A. Triandafyllidou, M. Calloni, and A. Mikrakis, 'New Greek nationalism', *Sociological Research Online* 2.1 (1997), 4.7 (available online at http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/1/7.html). The offical Macedonian perspective is (equally tendentiously) advanced at http://faq.Macedonia.org/history/11.1.html. See Triandafyllidou et al., 4.1–3 on the role of ancient history in the discursive construction of modern Greek nationalism: 'any questioning of the "hellenicity" of Alexander the Great is perceived as a threat to the very essence of the nation because it casts doubt on the continuity of the national community through history'.

I should like to thank Ewen Bowie, Simon Goldhill, Richard Hunter, and particularly Judith Mossman and Chris Pelling, for comments on this article at various stages.

[2] For a hypothetical historical stratification of the various Macedonian claims to Hellenism in this period, see J. M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1997), 63–4.

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do less with inner being and more with the public dramatization and recognition of social roles.[3]

For all that Herodotus presents Macedonians as victors in the struggle for Greek identity, he also reveals that there was a struggle to be waged. On the margins between the world of the Greek *poleis* and the non-Greek North, and hence on the imaginary boundaries between Hellenism and barbarism, Macedonia constitutes an intellectual testing-ground for ideas of Greekness. The history of Macedonia throughout antiquity shows the persistence of this ambiguity. In the fourth century B.C.E., Isocrates argued that Philip should be the leader of a pan-Hellenic expedition to avenge the invasions of the Persians; while Demosthenes a little later encouraged the Athenians to resist Philip as a barbarian.[4] These positions are almost exactly inverse. The schematic polarity of Greek–barbarian emerged with particular intensity (although not *e nihilo*) during and in the aftermath of the fifth-century Persian wars.[5] Isocrates and Demosthenes are replaying this paradigmatic narrative, the former presenting Philip as a Themistocles, the latter as a Xerxes.

This article will consider Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* in the light of the cultural complexity in the representation of Alexander and the Macedonians. It is important to recall before we proceed, however, that in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds the figure of Alexander provided an opportunity to explore ideas not only of identity but also of monarchical power.[6] In Roman contexts, Alexander was both a positive paradigm of military success and a negative paradigm of immoral excess. Roman generals compared themselves to him (not always to their own advantage: Julius Caesar is said by Plutarch to have broken down in tears while reading an account of Alexander's deeds[7]), while Stoicizing writers criticized his lust for power.[8] The accession of Trajan (who conducted his own *aemulatio Alexandri*[9]) is sometimes cited as the point of transition from a generally negative view to a generally positive view,[10] but this is

[3] T. J. G. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2001), esp. 20–6.

[4] Isocr. *Ad Phil.* 32–4, 68, 76–7, 111–15; Dem. *Ol.* 1.17, 1.24, 3.31, 3.45, etc. See further M. Trédé, 'Quelques définitions de l'Hellénisme au IVè siècle avant J.-C. et leurs implications politiques', in S. Saïd (ed.) *'ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ: quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grec* (Leiden, 1991), 76–80; S. Usher, 'Isocrates: *paideia*, kingship and the barbarians', in H. A. Khan (ed.), *The Birth of the European Identity: the Europe–Asia Contrast in Greek Thought* (Nottingham, 1993), 140.

[5] E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989); P. Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Study of Self and Others* (Oxford, 1993), 36–62.

[6] I forego here discussion of the Hellenistic reception of Alexander, on which see esp. A. B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander*. Vol. 1: *Commentary on Books 1–3* (Oxford, 1980), 13–14; P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Flavius Arrien entre deux mondes', in P. Savinel (trans.), *Arrien, Histoire d'Alexandre* (Paris, 1984), 337–41.

[7] *τηλικοῦτος μὲν ὢν Ἀλέξανδρος ἤδη τοσούτων ἐβασίλευεν, ἐμοὶ δὲ λαμπρὸν οὐδὲν οὔπω πέπρακται* ('Alexander already ruled over so much when he was my age, but I have done nothing glorious yet', *Vit. Caes.* 11.5–6). This story also appears in a slightly different form at Suet. *Div. Jul.* 7.1 (T. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* [Oxford, 1999], 86 on the question of sources), but Plutarch's specific reference to Caesar's *reading* suggests a metaliterary interpretation, a sort of internal *synkrisis*. On *aemulatio Alexandri*, see esp. D. Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius* (Brussels, 1967); O. Weippert, *Alexander-imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit* (Augsburg, 1972); P. Green, 'Caesar and Alexander: *aemulatio*, *imitatio*, *comparatio*', *AJAH* 3 (1978), 1–26; P. Greenhalgh, *Pompey, the Roman Alexander* (London, 1980); further references cited at Vidal-Naquet (n. 6), 333, nn. 105–6.

[8] J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1969), lx–lxii; J. R. Fears, 'The Stoic view of Alexander the Great', *Philologus* 118 (1974), 113–30, rightly emphasizing the Roman provenance of this tradition.

[9] Fears (n. 8), 127; see further Cass. Dio 68.29.1, 68.39.1.

[10] Fears (n. 8).

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an oversimplification, not least because the relevant first-century texts are Roman, whereas the second-century texts are Greek:[11] to argue on this basis for a transition is not to compare like with like). Alexander was always a highly charged figure, a point of confluence for different factions with different agendas.

Representations of the Macedonian general also became a site of cultural conflict between Greeks and Romans. 'The most trivial of the Greeks' (*levissimi ex Graecis*), according to Livy, asserted that Alexander would have conquered Rome had he turned west.[12] The shrill tone of Livy's denunciation bespeaks his anxiety to protect Rome's status as the ultimate world-empire. But there were indeed Greeks prepared to represent Alexander as a culturally charged icon of Hellenism. Some accounts of Alexander's conquests presented early Romans doing obeisance to the Macedonian general: a comforting fantasy for those now subject to Roman rule.[13] Plutarch's essays *On the Fortune of the Romans* and *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander* (the latter split into two subsidiary essays),[14] which seem to operate together as a diptych,[15] attribute the success of Rome to 'fortune' (*τύχη*) and that of Alexander to 'virtue' (*ἀρετή*) without fortune. Although, as commentators have been quick to assert, there is no explicit denunciation of Rome thereby,[16] Plutarch's silence on the matter of Rome's 'virtue' invites (without demanding) a negative assessment of Roman militarism in comparison to Alexander's. Indeed, *On the Fortune of the Romans* closes with a fantasized engagement between Alexander and the Roman army—but tactfully breaks off before stating the imagined outcome (326b–c)!

Such exercises in 'virtual history'[17] may have the air of light *divertissement* now (and Livy may attempt to dismiss them as such), but in cultural-historical context their implications are acute. In the *Parallel Lives*, Alexander is paired with Julius Caesar,

[11] Plut. *De fort. Alex.* 1–2 (possibly late first century); Arr. *Anab.*; Dio Chrysostom wrote a (now lost) *περὶ τῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου ἀρετῶν*: for the title, cf. Suda s.v. *Δίων, ὁ Πασικράτους, Προυσαεύς, σοφιστὴς καὶ φιλόσοφος, ὃν Χρυσόστομον ἐκάλεσαν*. Alexander also figures heavily in Dio Chr. *Or.* 2; 4; see also Ael. Ar. *Or.* 36.24–7. Quintus Curtius Rufus may be second century, but it is impossible to tell for sure.

[12] Liv. *Ab urb. cond.* 9.18.6–7. The allusion to anti-Roman Greeks is usually taken to refer to Timagenes and/or Metrodorus: see G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), 109–10; H. R. Breitenbach, 'Der Alexanderexkursus bei Livius', *MH* 26 (1969), 156–7; M. Sordi, 'Timagene: uno storico ellenocentrico e filobarbaro', *ANRW* 2.30.1 (1982), 797; see, however, the pertinent objection of Fears (n. 8), 129, n. 99. Conversely, Polybius adjudges Rome's conquests superior to Alexander's (*Hist.* 1.2.4–8: see further C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, trans. H. Leclerc [Ann Arbor, 1991], 31).

[13] A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1988), 83–93 on the sources. Diodorus Siculus (17.113.1–4) and Justin's epitome of Trogus (12.13.1–2) only mention the Roman embassy extremely briefly. See esp. Ps.-Callisth. 1.29.3–8 (in the 'b' recension) for a reading that humiliates the Romans. The *Alexander Romance* seems Egyptocentric: T. Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1983), 127; R. Stoneman, 'Oriental motifs in the *Alexander Romance*', *Antichthon* 26 (1992), 95–113.

[14] On the connection between the two essays, and on the numerous textual problems, see S. Schröder, 'Zu Plutarchs Alexanderreden', *MH* 48 (1991); A. D'Angelo, 'Analisi formale e critica del testo nel *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut uirtute*, Or.1 Plutarcheo', in J. A. Fernández Delgado and F. Pordomingo Pardo (eds), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: aspectos formales* (Salamanca, 1996), 115–22.

[15] Compare e.g. Dio Chr. *Orr.* 14 and 15; 75 and 76.

[16] Hamilton (n. 8), xxiii–xxxiii; C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford, 1971), 68–9; Schröder (n. 14), 151–7. See also S. C. R. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, A.D. 50–250* (Oxford, 1996), 160, n. 76.

[17] N. Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1998). For a novelistic spin, see S. Fry, *Making History* (London, 1996).

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conventionally considered in this period as the first Roman emperor. It is beyond the scope of this article (though it would be of considerable interest) to consider the two *Lives* as a dyad:[18] how do we understand Alexander's relationship to Roman imperial power? As complementary or contrapuntal? Any answer will be left to the judgement of the reader, but certainly cannot be overlooked. Alexander *mattered* in the ancient world (as he matters now to Greek and Macedonian nationalists), and any interpretation of this embattled figure was invariably as polemical as his own life.

PLUTARCH, HELLENISM, AND ALEXANDER

Issues of culture and power are to the fore in the very generic structure of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. Pairing Greek lives with Roman invites the reader to engage in a process of cultural as well as intellectual *synkrisis*, to explore the degree to which the Greek language and the Greek intellectual tradition can accommodate difference. In many cases, Plutarch completes his pair with a formal *synkrisis* ('comparison'), in which the relative merits and successes of the two subjects are evaluated.[19] His politics are, however, subtle: he rarely makes explicit judgements about the relative merits of Greek and Roman culture. In some cases, the Roman figure is presented in more positive terms than the Greek: in one extreme example, the Roman Numa is said to be 'a much Greeker lawgiver' (*μακρῶι τινι . . . ἑλληνικώτερον . . . νομοθέτην*, 1.10)[20] than the Spartan Lycurgus.

This apparent even-handedness, however, does not imply that 'Greeks and Romans are completely equal in value'.[21] The very use of the term 'Greek' as a term of

[18] Some nuance would be needed to modify Judith Mossman's argument that 'for Plutarch, external factors destroyed Caesar, whereas internal forces worked on Alexander' (J. M. Mossman, 'Tragedy and epic in Plutarch's *Alexander*', *JHS* 108 [1988], 92; article also repr. in B. Scardigli [ed.], *Essays on Plutarch's Lives* [Oxford, 1995], 209–28). Not only is Alexander in a sense acted upon by external forces (see below, 'West to East'), but also Caesar's make-up is crucially influential upon his life. As is the case in the *Alexander*, Caesar is educated by an illustrious intellectual (*σοφιστεύοντος ἐπιφανῶς καὶ τὸν τρόπον ἐπιεικοῦς εἶναι δοκοῦντος*, 3.1); but, again like Alexander, Caesar fails to make the most of his education (devoting himself instead to military matters, 3.2). Caesar also suffers from a deficient physiology, resulting in epilepsy, like Alexander's humoral imbalance (below, 'West to East') a Hippocratic affliction (see *De morb. sacro*). This is variously described as a *νόσος* (17.2) and a *πάθος* (17.2, 17.3, 53.6). On the other hand, this terminology of 'internal' pathology does indeed link Caesar's pathology to that of the city of Rome: *νόσος* is used both of his epilepsy (17.2, 53.5, 60.5) and of the 'sickness' of the republic (23.6); similarly, *ταραχή* and derivatives are used in relation to both epilepsy (53.6) and the city (33.6, 60.3, 67.1).

[19] The pairs without transmitted *synkriseis* are *Themistocles–Camillus*, *Alexander–Caesar*, *Phocion–Cato minor*, *Pyrrhus–Caius Marius*. On Plutarch's use of the device of *synkrisis*, and possible reasons for its omission in these cases, see H. Erbse, 'Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis in den *Parallelbiographien* Plutarchs', *Hermes* 84 (1956), 398–424; C. B. R. Pelling, '*Synkrisis* in Plutarch's *Lives*', in Brenk et al. (edd.), *Miscellanea Plutarchea: atti del I convegno di studi su Plutarco* (Ferrara, 1986), 83–96; S. C. R. Swain, 'Plutarchan synkrisis', *Eranos 90* (1992), 101–11; D. H. J. Larmour, 'Making parallels: *synkrisis* and Plutarch's *Themistocles and Camillus*', *ANRW* 2.33.6 (1992), 33–45; Duff (n. 7), 252–86.

[20] Compare the descriptions of the Thracian Spartacus as 'Greeker in both intelligence and gentleness than the race allotted him by fate' (*καὶ συνέσει καὶ πραιότητι τῆς τύχης ἀμείνων καὶ τοῦ γένους Ἑλληνικώτερος*, *Vit. Crass.* 8. 3), and of the Romans as acting 'in a Greek and gentle manner' (*Ἑλληνικῶς καὶ πράως*, *Vit. Marc.* 3.6). Further discussion, albeit not entirely satisfactory, by A. G. Nikolaidis in '*Ἑλληνικός—βαρβαρικός*: Plutarch on Greek and barbarian characteristics', *WS* 20 (1986), 229–44.

[21] G. J. D. Aalders *Plutarch's Political Thought* (Amsterdam, 1982), 13; cf. J. Palm *Rom,*

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approbation indicates the partiality of Plutarch's categories of analysis: Romans may be judged on equal terms, but those terms are resolutely Greek.[22] (A similar point may be made about Plutarch's essays the *Roman Questions* and *Greek Questions*: Greece is analysed from within, Rome as though it were an object of anthropological curiosity.) Plutarch follows in a tradition of Greek historians writing about Rome, of whom the extant examples are Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus; and like them, Plutarch translates Roman culture and institutions into a Greek vocabulary,[23] at once collapsing the polarity of Greek and Roman by assimilation and reifying the idea of cultural difference through the very act of appropriation, translation and objectification of another society.

For Plutarch, to be Greek means to think, and (crucially) to act, in an ethical way. Action is evaluated in terms of its coherence with or deviation from the precepts of the rich moral legacy of the Greek intellectual tradition: Plutarch repeatedly assesses the degree to which his subjects have internalized their Greek education.[24] The key terms of appraisal, *philanthrôpia* ('humanity'), *praiotês* ('gentleness') and *epieikeia* ('decency') refer to education, to social élitism, and to Hellenism.[25] That even Romans, as we have seen, can be approved in Plutarch's system demonstrates the (broadly Isocratean) cohabitation in these writings of an 'universalist' conception of human nature and a celebration of the vital civilising role played by Greek *paideia*.

The *Lives* themselves seek to enact such an educative role: in a famous passage in the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch asserts that biographies, unlike histories, seek to provide a 'revelation of character' (ἐμφασιν ἤθους, *Alex.* 1.2).[26] In the prologue to the *Life of*

Römertum und Imperium in der griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit (Lund), 1959, 30–43; Jones (n. 16), 103; J. Boulogne, *Plutarque: un aristocrate grec sous l'occupation romaine* (Lille, 1994), 57–71.

[22] See esp. C. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarch and Roman politics', in I. Moxon et al. (edd.), *Past Perspectives: Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1986), 159–87, repr. in Scardigli (n. 18), 319–56; S. C. R. Swain, 'Hellenic culture and the Roman heroes of Plutarch', *JHS* 110 (1990), 126–45, repr. in Scardigli (n. 18), 229–64; Swain (n. 16), 138–40; Duff (n. 7), 301–9. For an analogous interpretation of the *Roman Questions*, see now R. Preston, 'Roman questions, Greek answers', in S. D. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome* (Cambridge, 2001), 85–119, which improves upon J. Boulogne, 'Les *Questions romaines* de Plutarque', *ANRW* 2.33.6 (1992), 4682–708.

[23] On Polybius' appropriative mode of writing, see A. D. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1974), 22–32; on Dionysius, F. Hartog, 'Rome et la Grèce: les choix de Dénys d'Halicarnasse', in Saïd (n. 4), 160–7; on Plutarch, see esp. Pelling (n. 22); Duff (n. 7), 301–9.

[24] A well-known feature: see esp. Duff (n. 7), 73–7.

[25] On φιλανθρωπία in Plutarch, and its associations with Hellenism and civilization, see R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig, 1912), 21–32; H. M. Martin, 'The concept of *philanthropia* in Plutarch's *Lives*', *AJP* 82 (1961), 164–75; Nikolaidis (n. 20), 239–41. The term is connected with kings in early moralists: Isocr. *Ad Nic.* 15, with L. De Blois and J. A. E. Bons, 'Platonic philosophy and Isocratean virtues in Plutarch's *Numa*', *AncSoc* 23 (1992), 171, and Xen. *Ag.* 1.22, and further J. J. Farber, 'The *Cyropaedia* and Hellenistic kingship', *AJP* 100 (1979), 509. On φιλανθρωπία and Ptolemaic ideology, see A. E. Samuel, 'The Ptolemies and the ideology of kingship', in P. Green (ed.), *Hellenistic History and Culture* (Berkeley, 1993), 189–91. On Plutarch's use of παιότης, see H. M. Martin, 'The concept of *prâotês* in Plutarch's *Lives*', *GRBS* 3 (1960), 65–73; and on his use of ἐπιείκεια and its Aristotelian heritage, D. A. Russell, 'Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus*', *JRS* 53 (1963), 27, repr. in Scardigli (n. 18), 357–72. On the paradigmatic role of rhetorical *logos*, see C. B. R. Pelling, 'Rhetoric, *paideia*, and psychology in Plutarch's *Lives*', in L. van der Stockt (ed.), *Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch* (Leuven, 2000).

[26] On this passage, see esp. P. Desideri, '"Non scriviamo storie, ma vite" (Plut. *Alex.* 1.2): la formula biografica di Plutarco', *Arachnion* 1.3 (1995); Duff (n. 7), 14–22; compare also *De fort.*

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Aemilius Paulus, he tells us that he shapes his own life in accordance with those of the subjects that he reads of (*Aem. proem.* 1–3).[27] The *Lives*, however, do not simply constitute an idealized handbook of philosophical Hellenism in action across Greek and Roman contexts; on the contrary, as recent scholars have stressed, they tend to avoid prescriptive theoreticism, exploiting the dyadic structure to explore tensions between different ways of thinking about the world.[28] As we shall see, the *Life of Alexander* does not simply prescribe proper modes of action, but leaves the crises and tensions raised by the figure of Alexander crucially unresolved. In this way, Plutarch can be seen as exploiting the uncertainties central to Roman Greek culture of what to do with this most alluring but intractable figure of history.

In this respect, the presentation of Alexander in the *Life* is fundamentally different to that in the first essay *On the Fortune of Alexander*, referred to above. In that text, following Onesicritus' well-known description of Alexander as a 'philosopher in arms' (*ἐν ὅπλοις φιλοσοφοῦντα*, *FGH* 134.17a36–7), Plutarch construes the Macedonian conqueror as a philosopher-king. This latter depiction is, of course—despite what was once thought[29]—less an accurate record of Alexander's own objectives than a *post eventum* idealization of figure of Alexander. In *On the Fortune of Alexander*, Plutarch repeatedly refers to Alexander as a philosopher, and indeed lauds him above mere philosophers for putting into practice (*ergon*) what others merely advanced in words (*logos*, *De fort. Alex.* 1.328a).[30] Plato wrote his *Republic*, but could not persuade

Alex. 330e; *Lyc.* 20.10; *Pomp.* 8.7; *Dem.* 11.7. Plutarch's words here recall theories of encomium: Menander Rhetor writes that panegyric should produce a 'revelation of character' (*ἤθους ἔμφασιν*, 372.5 Russell–Wilson), while Julian, in an encomium of Constantius, writes of actions (*τὰς πράξεις*) as 'signs of the virtues of the soul' (*γνωρίσματα τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετῶν*, *Or.* 1.4d). On 'character' in Plutarch, see F. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives* (Leiden, 1977), 176–83; C. Gill, 'The question of character development: Plutarch and Tacitus', *CQ* 33 (1983), 469–87; C. B. R. Pelling, 'Aspects of Plutarch's characterisation', *ICS* 13 (1988), 257–64; S. C. R. Swain, 'Character change in Plutarch', *Phoenix* 43 (1988), 62–8; Duff (n. 7), 72–98.

[27] I follow the MSS and Ziegler in attributing this preface to the *Aemilius*, not the *Timoleon.* On this passage, see Duff (n. 7), 30–4, with further references. On the *Lives* as ethical paradigms, see also *Per.* 1–2, *Demetr.* 1, cf. *De Aud. Poet.* 27e–f. The notion of education as imitation of paradigms is specifically Isocratean (*Evag.* 75, *Ad Nic.* 1, *Antid.* 7): see further Y. L. Too, *The Rhetoric of Identity in Isocrates: Text, Power, Pedagogy* (Cambridge, 1995), 184–9.

[28] Duff (n. 7), *passim*, esp. 249–86. On the distinction between 'protreptic moralism' (simple exhortation) and 'descriptive moralism' (unpacking of the ethical complexity of human action), see C. B. R. Pelling, 'The moralism of Plutarch's *Lives*', in D. Innes, H. Hine, and C. B. R. Pelling (edd.), *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Oxford 1995), 205–20.

[29] As argued by W. W. Tarn, 'Alexander the Great and the unity of mankind', *PBA* 19 (1933), 123–66, followed by D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism, from Diogenes to the 6th century A.D.* (London, 1937), 35; see, however, the dissent of M. H. Fisch, 'Alexander and the Stoics', *AJP* 58 (1937), 59–82, 129–52; U. Wilcken, 'Die letzen Pläne Alexanders der Grossen', *Sitzungsberichte der preussische Akademie* (1937), 198–201; T. S. Brown, *Onesicritus: a study in Hellenistic historiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949), 50; E. Badian, 'Alexander the Great and the unity of mankind', *Historia* 7 (1958), 425–44; C. Mossé, 'Les utopies égalitaires à l'époque hellénistique', *Revue Historique* 241 (1969), 297–308.

[30] See further A. Wardman, 'Plutarch and Alexander', *CQ* 5 (1955), 97 and esp. F. Hartog 'La passé revisité', *TR* 4 (1983), 174–9. Like most Greek philosophers (Pl. *Resp.* 471c–541b, Ar. *Eth. Nic.* 1095a; see further M. B. Trapp, *The Philosophical Orations of Maximus of Tyre, Translated with an Introduction and Notes* [Oxford 1997], 133), Plutarch prefers to see philosophy put to service in a 'life of action' (*βίος πρακτικός* or *πολιτικός*) rather than a 'life of speculation' (*βίος θεωρητικός*): see e.g. *An seni* 791c, 796d–e, and further Aalders (n. 21), 5–6. He censures the Stoics (*Stoic. Resp.* 1033e–f) and the Epicureans (*Adv. Col.* 1125c) for disdaining politics.

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anyone to live in it 'because of its austerity' (διὰ τὸ αὐστηρόν),[31] whereas Alexander founded over seventy cities (328e); few read Plato's *Laws*, but myriads use Alexander's laws (328e); Zeno wrote a *Republic* in which he proposed cosmopolitanism, but Alexander 'put the theory into practice' (τῶι λόγωι τὸ ἔργον παρέσχεν, 329b). At one point, he is made to comment 'I would have busied myself with studies had I not been a philosopher in action' (ἠσχολούμην ἂν περὶ λόγους εἰ μὴ δι' ἔργων ἐφιλοσόφουν, 331f).[32] Alexander is presented as the man who puts philosophical theory into practice, whose pragmatic approach is more efficacious than the austerity of the abstract philosophers. According to this Plutarchan text, Alexander would seem to represent an ideal fusion of monarchical practice and educated intelligence.[33] This presentation of Alexander, moreover, would intersect nicely with the spirit of post-Domitianic imperial self-representation: Trajan, Hadrian, Pius, and Marcus Aurelius are all keen to portray themselves (and, indeed, are portrayed by others) as educated rulers. As we shall discover, however, Plutarch's representation of Alexander in the *Life* itself is far more ambivalent.[34]

EDUCATING ALEXANDER

If educated civility—*paideia*—is the primary cultural capital of Hellenism, then it is no surprise that philosophical education occupies a key place in the articulation of Alexander's regal ethics in the *Life of Alexander*. Three tutors are mentioned: Leonidas, Lysimachus, and Aristotle (5.7–7.9). Between the two sections on Alexander's tutors, Plutarch sandwiches the story of the taming of Bucephalus.[35] This story is not placed here by chance; as Stadter argues, its prima-facie anecdotal aspect belies its thematic centrality to the *Life of Alexander*.[36] In accordance with a common collocation in Greek literature,[37] and one that is particularly emphatic in the celebrated chariot metaphor of Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a–57b),[38] the horse is assimilated to the unruly passion of the youth, which must be 'broken' by *paideia*. Bucephalus is described as 'difficult and altogether recalcitrant' (χαλεπὸς . . . καὶ κομιδῆι δύσχρηστος, 6.1),[39] and as 'savage (*agrios*) and uncorrected (*akolastos*)' (ἄγριον καὶ ἀκόλαστον, 6.2). The word *agrios* frequently refers to uncivilized behaviour (Plato's

[31] For austerity as a negative trait in a constitution, see also the *synkrisis* to *Lycurgus–Numa* (2.6), *Vit. Lyc.* 25.4, *Vit. Dion.* 52.7. Lucian makes a joke of the unpopularity of Plato's states at *Ver. Hist.* 2.17; see also *Vit. auct.* 17.

[32] Modelled on the famous utterance 'if I had not been Alexander, I would have been Diogenes' (εἰ μὴ Ἀλέξανδρος ἤμην, Διογένης ἂν ἤμην: see e.g. Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14.5). See S. L. Radt, 'Zu Plutarchs *Vita Alexandri*', *Mnemosyne* 4 (1967), 120–1.

[33] See further S. Humbert, 'Plutarque, Alexandre et l'hellénisme', in Saïd (n. 4), 175–81.

[34] On this point, see further Wardman (n. 30); Mossman (n. 18); Duff (n. 7), 65.

[35] On the sources for this story, see A. R. Anderson, 'Bucephalas and his legends', *AJP* 51 (1930), 1–21.

[36] P. A. Stadter, 'Anecdotes and the thematic structure of Plutarchean biography', in Fernández Delgado et al. (n. 14), 291–6; also Duff (n. 7), 85–6.

[37] See esp. the equine imagery of Eur. *Hipp.* (546, 1425, 1213–48). The name Hippolytus ('horse-looser') is, obviously, etymologically significant.

[38] R. Ash, 'Severed heads: individual portraits and irrational forces in Plutarch's *Galba* and *Otho*', in J. M. Mossman (ed.), *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (Oxford, 1997), 192–6; see also Duff (n. 7), 79 n. 25, and for the contemporary popularity of this passage M. B. Trapp, 'Plato's *Phaedrus* in the second century', in D. Russell (ed.), *Antonine Literature* (Oxford, 1990), 141–73, esp. 172.

[39] Recalling Plato's 'difficult and bad-tempered' (χαλεπὴ . . . καὶ δύσκολος) horse in the *Phaedrus*' chariot simile (246b).

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tyrant has 'savagery', *to agrion*, in his soul: *Resp.* 571c); and *akolastos*, frequently used to mean morally 'licentious', implies through the alpha-privative prefix a lack of educative correction (*kolazein*). Alexander notices that the horse fears its shadow and turns it towards the sun, a strikingly Platonic touch that evokes the famous 'sun simile' of the *Republic* (514a–21b). Philip seems initially to interpret Alexander's ability to rein in his horse not as an index of his philosophical self-control but as a prognostication of his future rule over foreign lands (7.8).[40] The narrator, however, underlines the Platonizing interpretation of the anecdote in the following section, dealing with the appointment of Aristotle as Alexander's tutor. Philip observes that Alexander's nature is 'hard to influence' (*dyskinêton*, 7.1), as Bucephalus was 'recalcitrant' (*dyskhrêstos*); and Alexander's education is metaphorically linked with the breaking of horses when Plutarch describes it, by way of a quotation from Sophocles, as 'a job for many bits and rudders' (*πολλῶν χαλινῶν ἔργον οἰάκων θ' ἅμα*, Soph. fr. 785N^2). Bucephalus too wears a 'bit' (*χαλινός*, 6.7).[41] The taming of the horse is thus constructed as a model for the domination of education over passion.

The *Life of Alexander* goes to great lengths to stress the philosophical 'self-control' (*sôphrosynê*) of its subject.[42] When the king captures beautiful Persian women, he refrains from violating them, 'displaying in response to their attractiveness the beauty of his own self-restraint (*enkrateia*) and self-control (*sôphrosynê*)' (*ἀντεπιδεικνύμενος . . . πρὸς τὴν ἰδέαν τὴν ἐκείνων τὸ τῆς ἰδίας ἐγκρατείας καὶ σωφροσύνης κάλλος*, 21.11). This episode inspires a memorable Plutarchan *bon mot*: 'it is more kingly to rule oneself than to rule others' (*τοῦ νικᾶν τοὺς πολεμίους τὸ κρατεῖν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλικώτερον*, 21.7).[43] Moreover, Alexander is presented as particularly amenable to philosophical instruction. Plutarch relays the celebrated story of Alexander's encounter with Diogenes the Cynic (14.2–5), eschewing the spikiness of, for example, Dio Chrysostom's account in the fourth *Kingship Oration*, concentrating instead upon Alexander's receptivity to philosophical *paideia*. The king is also represented as impressed by an Egyptian philosopher named Psammon (27.10–11), although this is slightly more ambivalent: Psammon's Egyptian provenance might, in the prejudiced view of a Greek reader, make him a somewhat less trustworthy advisor.[44]

In the wider context of representations of Alexander in the early principate, these aspects of his representation constitute a polemic reassertion of his philosophical status, impugned (as we saw) by Roman writers of the first century.[45] Yet Alexander's behaviour is hardly unambiguously that of a philosopher-king, and at several points, especially later in the narrative, we see him betraying the autocratic intolerance typical of a tyrant. In particular, I wish to consider two feasting scenes, the murders of Clitus and of Callisthenes.

[40] The use of equine imagery to express the idea of political conquest is already found at Aesch. *Pers.* 176–214.

[41] The metaphorical range of *χαλινός* is complex: the word connotes both tyrannical coercion and philosophical self-restraint (E. Villeri, 'Il *chalinos* come *sphragis* del tiranno', *CCC* 9 [1988], 111–21). The ship imagery that is brought in here is commonly found in discussions of character (Gill [n. 26], 481).

[42] Humbert (n. 33), 171–3.

[43] The sentiment is more fully worked out at *Ad princ. inerud.* 779e–780c: see also Whitmarsh (n. 3), 184–6.

[44] Like the suspect Egyptian advisors (*σύμβουλοι*) of the Ptolemies (*Vit. Pomp.* 77.2). The association with Egypt may also compromise Alexander's Hellenic credentials, given that one tradition claims that he is the descendant of the Pharaoh Nectanebo (*Alexander Romance* 1.1–12).

[45] As noted by Wardman (n. 30), 96.

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Following in the Platonic and Xenophontic traditions, Plutarch is keenly interested in sympotic ethics. Particularly central to Plutarch's conception of the symposium are the notions of controlled pleasure,[46] friendship,[47] and licensed speech.[48] The symposium is what Foucault might have called an 'other space'[49] in which the normal regulations of life are suspended, and friendship and camaraderie take over. The symposium is an ideal place to manifest philosophical self-control, precisely because excess is on offer: proper self-regulation is essential. Yet the ideal of the symposium, wherein sociopolitical tensions are sublimated, is not achieved in the *Life of Alexander*. Both of the scenes discussed here transgress all the ethical parameters established by Plutarch elsewhere: coercion replaces pleasure, brutal insult replaces licensed pleasantry, and friendship is dissolved into enmity.

The first episode is the murder of Clitus, said to occur 'more savagely (*agriôtera*)' (*ἀγριώτερα*) than the execution of Philotas (50.1); the use of this particular adverb recalls the description of Bucephalus as 'savage' (*agrios*, 6.2), and implies that Alexander's *paideia* is beginning to lose out to his 'spirit' (*θυμός*). Clitus is said to be 'naturally harsh in respect of his anger, and wilful' (*φύσει τραχὺς . . . πρὸς ὀργὴν καὶ αὐθάδης*, 50.9), qualities that Plutarch elsewhere blames for the failure of Dio of Syracuse,[50] and antithetical to the spirit of sodality upon which the symposium thrives. Anger is an important subject for Plutarch (who wrote a moral treatise *On anger*), and is 'almost always wrong' in his eyes.[51]

Drunkenness and revelling is a constant theme of the *Life* (see below, 'West to East'), but sympotic drunkenness is a particular problem. Clitus' drunkenness leads him to 'free speech' (*παρρησιαζομένου*, 51.3; *παρρησίαν*, 51.5), but of a kind negatively marked in the text. He delivers a *makarismos* (loosely modelled upon *Odyssey* 5.306–12), a formal speech extolling the fortunes of 'those already dead', pronouncing them luckier than those who have lived to see Alexander's degeneration (51.2). Clitus' theme is Alexander's decadence, how he has passed from Greek austerity to Eastern luxury (51.5). This outburst is particularly interesting since, as we shall see, the narrative itself validates this notion of the progressive 'barbarization' of the general. Despite Clitus' apparent perceptivity, the narrative marks Clitus' behaviour as improper. Sympotic ethics suggest that drink should produce relaxation and camaraderie, but in this instance Alexander is incensed (*παροξυνθείς*, 51.1[52]), Alexander's friends begin to 'confront and abuse' (*ἀνταναστάντων καὶ λοιδορούντων*) Clitus, and it is left

[46] On the general relevance of this notion, see F. Dupont, *Le plaisir et la loi: du 'banquet' de Platon au 'satiricon'* (Paris, 1977), 19–39.

[47] Elsewhere, Plutarch refers to *τὸ φιλοποιοῦν . . . τῆς τραπέζης* (*Quaest. conv.* 612d; cf. *Cat. Maj.* 25.4).

[48] At *Quaest. conv.* 707e, he refers to the *παρρησία πλείστη* of the symposium; for further examples, see S.-T. Teodorsson, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Table Talks. Vol. III: Books 7–9* (Gothenburg, 1996), 90; and on the centrality of this concept to sympotic ethics, see M. Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table-talk in the Renaissance*, trans. J. Whiteley and E. Hughes (Cambridge, 1991), 98. See further I. Gallo, 'La *parrhesia* epicurea e il trattato *De adulatore et amico* di Plutarco: qualche riflessione', in I. Gallo (ed.), *Aspetti dello stoicismo e dell' epicureismo in Plutarco* (Ferrara, 1988), 119–28.

[49] M. Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), 22–7.

[50] *Vit. Dion.* 8.2 (*τραχύτης*); 8.4, 52.5 (*αὐθάδεια*). The *Life of Dio* has many similarities with the *Life of Alexander*, as will become clear from my notes.

[51] Duff (n. 7), 87–9 (quotation from p. 87), good on the Platonic roots of such psychological models.

[52] The word also marks negative evaluation of Alexander at 9.8; significantly, however, it also marks the reaction of the tyrant Dionysius to Plato's free speech at *Vit. Dion.* 5.3.

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to the old men to try to quell the 'uproar' (θόρυβος, 51.3). Finally, Alexander cannot sustain his 'anger' (ὀργή), and seeks to kill him (51.5).[53] This 'anger' represents for Plutarch the triumph of passion over reason; and it is significant that it is at this point that Alexander's Hellenic façade cracks, and he breaks into Macedonian (51.6). Balancing Alexander's possession by passion is the equally intractable Clitus, who will not yield (μὴ εἴκοντος, 51.5; οὐχ ὑφιέμενον, 51.8): the bloody outcome is, it seems, inevitable. If Plato's and Xenophon's *Symposia* constitute the paradigms of philosophical friendship, then the Clitus episode represents the negative image of such serenity and self-control. This corruption of the symposium occurs implicitly because the Macedonians do not understand the proper etiquette.

Linking this passage to the death of Callisthenes is a brief episode in which Alexander is consoled by the philosopher Anaxarchus (52.3–9). In the tradition, Anaxarchus is opposed to Callisthenes, as a flexible and occasionally flattering survivor to a stern and principled martyr.[54] The two philosophers are brought to the king by his companions in an attempt to console him. Whereas Callisthenes attempts to speak 'ethically and gently' (ἠθικῶς . . . καὶ πράως, 52.4: two terms with strongly positive connotations for Plutarch), Anaxarchus' argument is that the king, *qua* king, can define what is just; it follows, then, that his action in killing Clitus is just. Plutarch comments that this lightened the king's passion (τὸ . . . πάθος ἐκούφισε), and ingratiated him into his favour; but he also made his ἦθος more vainglorious and transgressive (χαυνότερον καὶ παρανομώτερον, 52.7). By linking and playing off various approaches of Clitus, Anaxarchus, and Callisthenes, Plutarch shows the complex and reciprocal modes of influence between king and subjects, and the difficulty of negotiating such a fraught relationship.[55] At the same time, the biographer develops the theme of the interplay between philosophy and kingship, and its centrality to an investigation of the ethics of monarchical power.

After this paradigm of paideutic *rapprochement* comes another of paideutic alienation. Callisthenes, we are told, annoyed 'the other sophists' (τοὺς . . . ἄλλους σοφιστὰς) because he was popular through his 'studies' (λόγος) and his 'lifestyle' (βίος), 'because he was well-disciplined, haughty (*semnos*) and independent' (εὔτακτον ὄντα καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ αὐτάρκη, 53.1). These epithets are largely positive, although *semnos* can imply an excessive self-righteousness,[56] and his austerity (τὸ αὐστηρόν) has already been stressed (52.7).[57] Callisthenes displays a philosophical high-mindedness, but Plutarch (as we have seen) tends to prefer pragmatism to idealism. Callisthenes' unpopularity with the other sophists, combined with his austerity, suggests his inability to translate ideals into successful social intercourse. Callisthenes' cultivated aloofness, we are told, engenders 'envy' (φθόνος) in the other courtiers, since he refuses to join in with the fun during drinking parties (53.2). What creates a 'bitter and deep hatred' (πικρὸν καὶ βαρὺ . . . μῖσος, 53.6), however, is his behaviour at one particular party.[58]

[53] This sequence is loosely based upon Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors. Odysseus' 'leaping up' (ἆλτο, *Od.* 22.2) is parallelled by Alexander's leaping up, and the din in Alexander's court recalls the suitors who ὁμάδησαν . . . κατὰ δώμαθ' (22.21–2).

[54] See J. Brunschwig, 'The Anaxarchus case: an essay in survival', *PBA* 82 (1992), 66–70.

[55] E. D. Carney, 'The death of Clitus', *GRBS* 22 (1981), 149–60 stresses Plutarch's focus upon court intrigue in the Clitus episode.

[56] E.g. *Vit. Dion.* 32.5.

[57] *Supra*, p. 180, on austerity.

[58] Certain pointers tie the Macedonians' behaviour here to the Dionysian episodes that recur throughout the *Life* (see below): the 'clapping' (κρότος) recalls the courtiers' reactions to the burning of Xerxes' palace (38.5) and foreshadows the embrace of Bagoas (67.8), while the

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He is challenged to speak in praise of the Macedonians, but Alexander suggests instead a denunciation, 'so that they can improve themselves by learning what they lack' (*ἵνα και βελτίους γένωνται μαθόντες ἃ πλημμελοῦσιν*, 53.4). As a sophist, Callisthenes should be capable of speaking on both sides of the matter;[59] he responds, however, with a rather too spirited invective, which Plutarch describes as 'free-speaking' (*παρρησιάσασθαι*, 53.5). Like Clitus, Callisthenes is over-bold, and creates enmity in the drinking party; his reaction, however, is due not to his own over-indulgence but to his over-rigid application of ideals. This inflexibility makes him paradoxically foolish for a sophist: the art of sophistry lies in creating pleasure and persuasion, not in principled objection, and so Alexander responds that he has shown 'hostility' rather than 'cleverness' (*δεινότης*, 53.6).[60] Elsewhere, Alexander cites in relation to him Euripides' line 'I hate a sophist who is not wise in respect of himself' (*μισῶ σοφιστήν, ὅστις οὐχ αὑτῶι σοφός*, fr. 905N^2, 53.2); whilst Aristotle comments of him that 'he was a capable speaker, but he lacked sense' (*λόγωι μὲν ἦν δυνατὸς καὶ μέγας, νοῦν δ' οὐκ εἶχεν*, 54.2).

The point of these stories is to dramatize the tense, nuanced relationship between philosophy and power. It is not just Alexander's ethical status which is under scrutiny, but also that of his interlocutors, and indeed the whole set of dynamic interrelations in the court. These issues are further developed in the episode that leads to the conspiracy of the pages, which results in the death of Callisthenes. This occurs 'at a symposium' (*ἐν συμποσίωι*)—an extremely marked context for Plutarch, as we have seen—where Alexander receives *proskynêsis* and a kiss from one of his courtiers (54.6). *Proskynêsis*, 'prostration', is the paradigmatic act of Persian subservience: its increasing appearance (according to Plutarch) in Alexander's court is an important index of the king's decline into oriental barbary. Later, Cassander laughs at barbarians performing *proskynêsis*, and the reason Plutarch gives for his finding the sight comical is his Greek upbringing (*τεθραμμένος Ἑλληνικῶς*, 74.2–3).[61] Callisthenes refuses to prostrate himself before Alexander, and Plutarch comments that his refusal is enacted 'strongly and philosophically' (*ἰσχυρῶς καὶ φιλοσόφως*, 54.3): philosophy is here connected with resilience and refusal to submit to power. In so doing, Callisthenes is said to give expression to what the best and elder Macedonians felt in private, and the sophist is commended for this; likewise, by attempting to divert Alexander from *proskynêsis*, he is performing a positive action by saving him from great shame (54.3). Yet, comments Plutarch, it is this that leads to Callisthenes' death, because he was seen 'to coerce that king, rather than persuade him' (*ἐκβιάσασθαι . . . μᾶλλον ἢ πεῖσαι τὸν βασιλέα*, 54.3). Callisthenes may have been right—and 'philosophical'—to reject *proskynêsis*, but force should yield to persuasion at a symposium.

The question of the relationship between Alexander and philosophy comes to a head in the scene with the gymnosophists (64). Plutarch's very inclusion of the scene is interesting itself, as the account does not, so far as we can tell, appear in any of the traditionally authoritative sources for the history of Alexander.[62] Alexander captures

crowning of Callisthenes recalls the drunken crowning of another Aristotelian protégé, Theodectus (17.9). See further Mossman (n. 18).

[59] The Latin phrase is *in utramque partem disputare*. For this point see further P. Merlan, 'Isocrates, Aristotle and Alexander the Great', *Historia* 3 (1954–5), 76.

[60] *δεινότης* is the quality that allows one to speak frankly without offence: see Demetr. *De eloc.* 240–5, with F. Ahl, 'The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJP* 105 (1984), 176–7.

[61] This scene is a doublet of the earlier Callisthenes episode, and exacts a similarly aggressive response. On Plutarch's presentation of *proskynêsis*, see Hamilton (n. 8), 150–2.

[62] On the sources for the gymnosophists, see R. Stoneman, 'Naked philosophers: the

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ten of the gymnosophists who encouraged Sabbas to revolt and caused more trouble to the Macedonians, and, since they seem to be clever (*deinos*: *deinotês* is the characteristic denied to Callisthenes at 53.6) at 'brachyologic' (that is, succinct) responses (τὰς ἀποκρίσεις καὶ βραχυλόγους), he poses difficult questions to them, saying that he will kill the first one to answer incorrectly, and then the rest in a similar manner (64.1).

The episode with the Indian gymnosophists asks probing questions of the reader, engaging him or her in a complex duel for identity. How are Greek readers to site themselves in relationship to this strange episode? According to the traditional framework, Greek philosophy is supposed to instruct kingship: thus Alexander's moral decline can be charted by reference to his increasingly contemptuous treatment of philosophical advice. But do the gymnosophists count as Greek philosophers? There are certainly familiar aspects to their wisdom: their 'brachylogy' is Socratic (see esp. Pl. *Grg.* 449b–c), and in other respects they resemble Cynics.[63] From this perspective, Plutarch's Greek philosophical readers might be invited to identify with the philosophers in their free-speaking dialogue with the king. On the other hand, there remains a crucial element of cultural distance. This is re-emphasized in the following episode, in which Onesicritus is sent off to meet the philosophers, and the Indian philosopher Calanus is sent to travel with the Greeks (65.1–8).[64] Here, the narrative is focalized through the eyes of the Greek, with the result that the gymnosophists are presented as 'other' under the ethnographic gaze. Even Calanus' name is not his real name, but the result of some Greek 'Hobson–Jobson': he is actually called Sphines, but the Greeks call him Calanus because the Indian word for 'hello' is *kale* (65.5). Another gymnosophist, Dandamis, passes judgement on the Greek philosophers Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes, that they are 'too reverent of convention (*nomoi*)' (λίαν . . . τοὺς νόμους αἰσχυνόμενοι, 65.3). To describe these figures, who were each radically unorthodox by normal Greek standards, as too bound by convention is to imply an altogether different framework of *nomoi* (a word that can mean 'cultural patterns', too). The gymnosophists, then, although occupying the 'Greek' position of philosophical advisers, are also notably un-Greek, a people whom we (that imagined community of Greek readers) must explore through the guiding figure of Onesicritus.

This episode, with its sustained focus upon intercultural interpretation, finds its place in what Cheyfitz calls 'the violent history of translation':[65] Alexander's attempt to comprehend the wisdom of the East occurs within a narrative of usurpation and

Brahmans in the Alexander historians and the *Alexander Romance*', *JHS* 115 (1995), 99–114. Indian philosophers are alluded to, Strabo tells us, by Megasthenes (Strab. 15.1.59–60), and 'advisors' (σύμβουλοι) and natural philosophers by Nearchus (*FGrH* 133.13). Onesicritus' account, we are told, recorded a conversation between himself (Onesicritus) and the 'naked sophists' (*FGrH* 134.17a). None of these sources attests to a question-and-answer session between the king and the gymnosophists. The earliest source for the interview is *P.Berol.* 13044, apparently from a Cynic diatribe (H. van Thiel, 'Alexanders Gespräch mit den Gymnosophisten', *Hermes* 100 [1972], 343–58). By the second century C.E., it is standard in Alexander accounts: see Arr. *Anab.* 7.2.1–4 and *P.Genev.* inv. 271 (dating: K. Maresch and W. H. Wills, 'The encounter of Alexander with the Brahmans: new fragments of the Cynic diatribe *P. Genev. inv.* 271', *ZPE* 74 [1988], 59–83).

[63] Arrian stresses the relation between Diogenes and Eastern philosophy by juxtaposing his Diogenes narrative to the Calanus episode (*Anab.* 7.2.1–3.6). Generally on Cynic elements in the gymnosophists, see the (rather inconclusive) discussion of C. Muckensturm, 'Les gymnosophistes étaient-ils des cyniques modèles?', in M. O. Goulet-Cazé and R. Goulet (edd.), *Le cynisme ancien et ses prolongements* (Paris, 1993), 225–39.

[64] This episode is modelled on the account of Onesicritus himself (*FGrH* 134.17a).

[65] E. Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism. Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (1991), 87.

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conquest, and the pedagogical scene is framed by the threat of the imminent death of the gymnosophists. We the readers, also travelling East in the search of *paideia*, are made to re-experience uncomfortably this process of violent cultural transgression. Plutarch's account of the exchanges between the Macedonians and the Indian philosophers deliberately confounds any faith the reader might have in the universal applicability of the pedagogical paradigm. What sort of paradigmatics of Hellenism is this scene constructing? Do we 'identify' with Alexander or the gymnosophists? As Alexander heads East, not only does philosophy's grip upon the monarch become more slippery, but also for the reader the relationship between philosophy and monarchy becomes a much less stable, and much more unsettling, cultural matrix.

WEST TO EAST

The representation of Alexander as an ideal philosopher-king, then, is distorted and contused as he heads East: the linear geographical narrative that underpins the *Alexander* is a vehicle for the literary and philosophical exploration of the ethics of kingship. Alexander is represented by Plutarch as a curiously divided figure, combining elements of both East and West. Counterposed to the serenity of the Aristotelian *paideia* discussed earlier is a darker stratum of violence and force, which (I shall argue, following Mossman[66]) is particularly associated with the Dionysiac and the Orient (although, as we shall see presently, Plutarch does not allow his readers to repose in such cosy Hellenocentrism). In the first speech *On the Fortune of Athens*, Dionysus is named (apparently without precedent) as Alexander's ancestor (332b). From Hellenistic times, the legend of Dionysus—who had previously been thought to have travelled from East to West[67]—was conceptually linked with the narrative of Alexander's eastern conquests.[68] The *Life of Alexander* is similarly Dionysian[69] and, as in those other instances, the imagery here is not redundant. When Alexander is conceived, Olympias feels a bolt of lightning in her womb (2.3): the story of Semele is recalled, who was consumed by Zeus' lightning-bolt when she had given birth to Dionysus.[70] A little later on (2.7–9), Plutarch gives a variant story in which Olympias engages in 'Orphic and Dionysiac rites' (*τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς . . . καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὸν Διόννυσον ὀργιασμοῖς*) in a 'more barbaric' fashion (*βαρβαρικώτερον*) than the other women. Olympias represents the link between Dionysus and the wild, barbaric,

[66] Mossman (n. 18).

[67] E.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 13–20. See further Hall (n. 5), 151–2.

[68] A late tradition records that the Athenians deified Alexander in Dionysus' aspect (Diog. Laert. 6.63). Arrian's account represents the Macedonian as passing various Dionysian landmarks (*Anab.* 5.1.1–2, 6.28.1–2, 7.20.1; *Ind.* 1.4–8, 5.8–9). See in general A. D. Nock, 'Notes on ruler-cult, I–IV. I: Alexander and Dionysus', *JHS* 48 (1928), 21–30; repr. in id., *Essays on Religion in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1972), 134–44. E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford, 1983), 45–115 discusses the Ptolemies' strategic attempts to link themselves to Dionysus through the figure of Alexander; it does not follow, however, that the historical Alexander presented his journey in Dionysiac terms (as Rice seems to imply at 83–4).

[69] Plutarch repeatedly associates the Orient with Dionysus: see esp. *Ant.* 60.5, with C. B. R. Pelling, *Plutarch, Life of Antony* (Cambridge, 1988), 265 for further references; and on Dionysiac aspects in the *Crassus*, see D. Braund, 'Dionysiac tragedy in Plutarch's *Crassus*', *CQ* 43 (1993), 468–74. On Plutarch's tendency to use Dionysus as an unsettling, provocative force in the *Lives* (a tendency borne out in the *Alexander*, as my account below makes clear), see also Pelling, 'Dionysiac diagnostics: some hints of Dionysus in Plutarch's *Lives*', in J. G. Montes, M. Sánchez, and R. J. Gallé (edd.), *Plutarco, Dioniso y el vino* (Madrid, 1999), 359–68.

[70] Eur. *Bacch.* 6–12.

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Dionysiac East; implicitly, Plutarch represents Alexander's desire to head East as a genetic disposition.

The Dionysiac aspect of Alexander is underlined in the numerous accounts of his drunkenness.[71] He inherits this aspect from his bibulous father, who almost kills the young Alexander at a drunken party before slipping 'because of his spirit and his drunkenness' (*διὰ τὸν θυμὸν καὶ τὸν οἶνον*, 9.9, a neat zeugma with slight hendiadys).[72] Although Plutarch specifically denies Alexander's dipsomania (23.1–2), this point is belied by the narrative itself;[73] and the narrator's very self-contradiction mirrors his subject's oscillations between philosophical self-control and Dionysiac excess. Drunkenness, as Eckstein has recently noted in relation to Polybius, is a central means for ancient moralists of expressing disapprobation.[74] In every case bar one (the crowning of the statue of Theodectus, 17.8–9), Alexander's drunkenness results in disaster.[75] At 38.1–8, a courtesan named Thaïs persuades Alexander during a revel (*κῶμος*) to burn the palace of Xerxes, and Plutarch notes the transgression involved in a woman's leading this procession (38.2); the event is also presented in terms of 'luxury' (*τρυφή*, 38.3), so that Oriental values are seen to triumph over Greek. Alexander subsequently repents (38.8), but, having been led by a barbarizing woman, he has already succumbed to the temptations of the 'other.' The Clitus episode, discussed above, is another example of destructive drunkenness, and this time the disastrous results are much more tangible. The role of drink is stressed throughout this passage ('under the influence of wine', *ἐν οἴνωι* 13.4; 'drunkenness', *μέθην* 50.2; 'drink', *πότου* 50.8; 'drunken', *μεθύων* 50.9). The thematic role of drunkenness in the *Life* as a whole is stressed in the Clitus episode, where Plutarch uses linked vocabulary and themes to refer back to the episode of Philip's assault on Alexander (9.7–11)[76] and the Thaïs episode.[77] As was discussed earlier, the Clitus episode also links forward into the drunkenness of the Callisthenes episode.

The Dionysiac intensity of the *Life* is increased by the celebrated revel in chapter 67, and brought to a head in two final drinking scenes. In the first, Alexander's drinking contest causes the death of forty-one men (70.1–2); shortly afterwards, he returns to find a man named (significantly) Dionysius on his throne, clearly a portent of his impending death (73.7–9).[78] In the second, Alexander, distressed by various portents, throws himself into 'drunken partying' (*θυσίαις καὶ πότοις*, 75.3), and goes to revel (*κωμασόμενος*) with a certain Medius (75.4). He finally dies, we are told, through slaking a feverish thirst with wine (75.6).

Alexander's death in the East from wine is thus presented as the final victory of the Dionysiac stratum over the philosophical *paideia* he has achieved; and, as we have seen, the Dionysiac is assimilated to the non-Hellenic, to all that opposes the order and

[71] Dionysus was associated with wine from an early stage (Archil. fr. 120 West); see further R. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace's Odes, Book 2* (Oxford, 1978) on Hor. *Carm.* 2.19.

[72] This scene is modelled loosely on Soph. *O.T.* 779–80.

[73] And, interestingly, specifically countermanded at *Quaest. conu.* 623d–e.

[74] A. M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1995), 285–9.

[75] Mossman (n. 18), 87. [76] Ibid. 86.

[77] 'leaping up' (*ἀναπηδήσας*, 38.5 ~ *ἀναπηδήσας*, 51.6); 'uproar' (*θορύβου*, 38.4 ~ *θόρυβον*, 51.4; *θορύβου*, 51.6).

[78] Dionysius is subtly assimilated to Dionysus. Sarapis has loosed his chains (73.9): Sarapis was identified with Dionysus (e.g. Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 362b), and the escape from chains recalls that of Dionysus at Eur. *Bacch.* 443–8. See D. Sansone, 'Plutarch, Alexander and the discovery of naphtha', *GRBS* 21 (1980), 73.

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self-control of the Greek philosophical tradition. As we shall see, one explanation offered by Plutarch for Alexander's decline centres upon the influence of the East. But the death of Alexander also links back to a crucial earlier passage in which Plutarch explains his sweet odour, citing Theophrastus:

> The reason, perhaps, lay in the mixture (*krasis*) of his body, which was hot and fiery: for a sweet fragrance is produced by the coction of liquid matter under the influence of heat.

αἰτία δ' ἴσως ἡ τοῦ σώματος κρᾶσις, πολύθερμος οὖσα καὶ πυρώδης· ἡ γὰρ εὐωδία γίνεται πέψει τῶν ὑγρῶν ὑπὸ θερμότητος (*Vit. Alex.* 4.5)[79]

Plutarch often explains his characters' success and failures in terms of the 'mixture' (*krasis*) of their constitutions, but the term is elsewhere employed primarily with reference to the mixing of innate nature with education.[80] Here, however, the reference is (as Sansone notes) to the Hippocratic theory of the humours, and in particular to the Aristotelian notion of perfect health as a balanced mean between extremes: Alexander's physiological excesses are thus marked as a pathological deviation from the norm.[81] The larger point I wish to make here, however, concerns the thematic centrality of fiery hotness and wetness to the *Life* as a whole. Alexander's death, as we have seen, occurs as a result of the action of wine upon a fiery fever (75.6). The seeds of Alexander's degeneration, Plutarch suggests, were implanted in him from the very start: the physiological make-up of his person was such as to self-destruct naturally. It was his 'heat' (θερμότης), Plutarch tells us, that made him 'bibulous and spirited' (ποτικὸν καὶ θυμοειδῆ, 4.7):[82] his Dionysiac drunkenness and his passionate quality can be directly attributed to his humoral disposition.[83]

At first sight, then, this passage might be seen to propose an explanation for Alexander's decline different from the one we have considered thus far: it is congenital disposition rather than any external cultural factors that dictate the outcome. Plutarch, however, resists any such simplistic explanation. We have considered in detail the degree to which Alexander's actions are affected by those of his courtiers. It is tempting (although, as I shall suggest presently, simplistic) to conclude that it is the schematic spatial axis that most strongly underpins the narrative of decline: the further he goes, the greater the distance from the Greek *paideia* that moderates his behaviour, and the greater the king's decadence. I want to consider now how Plutarch uses this decadent

[79] The same explanation is given at *Quaest. conu.* 623e–f.

[80] A. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (London, 1974), 62; Swain (n. 26), 63; Duff (n. 7), 89–94.

[81] Sansone (n. 78), 66, who, however, errs in arguing that Plutarch presents Alexander as hot and *dry* (he is attempting to force Alexander into the scheme of the 'choleric' man, which is not attested before the Renaissance). The Hippocratic texts are inconsistent in their treatments of the humours (e.g. *De vet. morb. passim*, esp. 18–19; *De nat. hom.* 4: see L. Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* [Oxford, 1994], 10, n. 32, a notion that originates in cosmology [Alcmaeon *apud* Aëtius 5.30.1, Gal. 19.343; G. E. R. Lloyd, *Analogy and Polarity: Two Modes of Argumentation in Greek Thought* [Cambridge, 1964]). According to Aristotle, health lies 'in the mixture and symmetry of hot and cold elements' (ἐν κράσει καὶ συμμετρίαι θερμῶν καὶ ψυχρῶν, *Phys.* 246b): the concept is clearly related to the doctrine of the golden mean (see esp. *Eth. Nic.* 1107a).

[82] Alexander is also described as 'spirited' (θυμοειδής) at Dio Chr. 1.2.

[83] Similarly, Plutarch states in respect of Aratus that philosophers discuss two explanations for palpitations, pallor, and sphincteric incontinence prior to battle: either cowardice or 'some improper mixture (*dyskrasia*) and coldness concerning the body' (δυσκρασίας τινὸς περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ ψυχρότητος, *Vit. Arat.* 29.7–8).

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narrative to polarize East and West in ethical terms, but also to subvert this easy polarity.

In the passage just discussed, Plutarch exemplifies the process whereby a 'sweet fragrance' is produced from the action of heat upon liquid by reference to a paraphrase from Theophrastus:

> That is why dry, fiery parts of the world bring forth the most and the best spices: for the sun draws out the moisture that inheres in bodies, just as rotting matter does.

ὅθεν οἱ ξηροὶ καὶ διάπυροι τόποι τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ κάλλιστα τῶν ἀρωμάτων φέρουσιν· ἐξαιρεῖ γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος τὸ ὑγρόν, ὥσπερ ὕλην σηπεδόνος ἐπιπολάζον τοῖς σώμασιν (4.6 = Theophr. fr. 335 Fortenbaugh)

The reference to vegetables as 'bodies' associates the botanic example with human physiology, and the mention of 'rotting matter' implies the proclivity towards self-destruction that inheres in Alexander. Even so, however, this passage does not simply present a physiological explanation for Alexander's decline: fragrance is produced by *both* physiology *and* climate. The implication is that Alexander's decadence is due to both his nature and his cultural environs. Indeed, Plutarch's Theophrastean explanation also suggests the corrupting influence of Eastern civilization. Spices are conventionally associated with the East, and with oriental luxury.[84] Elsewhere in the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch reinforces this association: when the camp of Darius is captured, he comments that 'the [king's] domicile had a divine odour, as though from spices and myrrh' (*ὠδώδει δὲ θεσπέσιον οἷον ὑπ' ἀρωμάτων καὶ μύρων ὁ οἶκος*; 20.13); later, Leonides tells Alexander not to burn too much incense until he has conquered 'the spice-bearing lands' (*τῆς ἀρωματοφόρου* [sc. *χώρας*], 25.7). Alexander's sweet fragrance is thus linked into a complex of themes suggesting the corrupting influence of Eastern culture.

An important anecdote later in the text, however, suggests that the reference to Theophrastean 'coction' has a more direct relevance to the meaning of the *Alexander*. After discussing an amusing practical joke that involves using naphtha to inflict third-degree burns upon a singer, Plutarch digresses on the subject of this fiery liquid that ignites upon contact with a heat source (35). As Sansone notes, the naphtha recalls the fiery nature of Alexander himself, as well as the epic 'flash' of his aspect;[85] while the reference to the 'liquid' (*τὸ ὑγρόν*) as 'fuel for the flame' (*ὑπέκκαυμα τῆς φλογὸς*, 35.13) clearly recalls the earlier description of 'the coction of liquid matter under the influence of heat' (*πέψει τῶν ὑγρῶν ὑπὸ θερμότητος*). Particularly significant is Plutarch's statement that the emanations of fire have different effects upon different bodies: to some they impart merely 'light and warmth' (*φῶς καὶ θερμότητα*), but those that have 'a volatile dryness or a permanently greasy dampness' (*ξηρότητα πνευματικὴν ἢ νοτίδα λιπαρὰν καὶ διαρκῆ*) they 'inflame' (35.12).[86] These comments

[84] See esp. M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, trans. J. Lloyd (Hassocks, 1977), 5–35. Spices traditionally come from Arabia (ibid. 5–6), but Plutarch seems to link them to the East in general (see esp. 25.7–8, where Alexander claims to have conquered the spice-bearing lands).

[85] Sansone (n. 78). For Alexander's 'flashing aspect' (*σέλας τι καὶ φάσμα*), see *Vit. Alex.* 63.4, and *De fort. Alex.* 2.343e; as noted by Mossman (n. 18), 90, this phrase recalls the description of Achilles at Hom. *Il.* 19.375–83.

[86] This sentence presents textual and interpretative difficulties, on which see Sansone (n. 78), 71, n. 28. I am convinced by his interpretation of *πνευματικήν* as 'volatile'; the final part of the

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would seem to have a wider, allegorical implication for our reading of Alexander: the heat of the East is inflaming Alexander, whose nature is already highly flammable. Indeed, naphtha can be read as a metaphor for oriental combustibility: we are told that 'barbarians' (*οἱ βάρβαροι*, 35.3) use it, that it was the drug used by Medea to anoint Glauce's robe (35.10–11), and that its properties arise from the soil of Babylonia's being 'excessively fiery' (*σφόδρα πυρώδης*, 35.14).

The interrelation between the geophysical and the cultural properties of the East is further underlined in an anecdote that follows. Harpalus the gardener attempts to adorn the palace in Babylon with Greek plants, succeeding with all except the ivy, which dies because it cannot bear the *krasis* ('mixture') of the soil, since the soil is 'fiery' (*πυρώδης*) and the plant 'cold-loving' (*φιλόψυχρος*, 35.15).[87] This passage develops the familiar Plutarchan language of *krasis* (which here means 'temperature') in an extremely provocative direction. Ivy, a plant with notably Dionysiac connotations,[88] dies in contact with eastern soil; just as the Dionysiac Alexander will suffer 'over-coction' thanks to the heat of the East.

The death of Alexander from fever and wine, then, is implicitly linked to both his physiology and changing cultural factors. Nature and nurture are fused in a complex aetiological node: it is both his innate barbarism and the influence of the East that undermine his paradigmatically Hellenic *paideia*. This line of argument suggests that Plutarch's representation of Alexander's Eastern journey is far from a straightforward celebration of the superiority of Greek over barbarian.[89] Indeed, the apparently simple mapping of a linear trajectory (from Greece to the East) on to the ethical axis (from philosophical control to indulgence) is specifically complicated by the involved nexus of prognostications and cross-references that suffuse the entire range of the *Life*. Thus, for example, the city of Thebes is destroyed worryingly early in the narrative (11). For all its history of Medizing, its inhabitants are referred to by Plutarch as 'the Greeks' (*τοὺς Ἕλληνας*)—which implies that Alexander's cultural signifier is . . . what? And, conversely, it is at the edges of the earth, in India, that he finds his most outspoken and meaningful critics, in those eccentric *pepaideumenoi*, the gymnosophists. The deeply macabre, Dionysiac elements set in at the end of the narrative only when he has begun to head back towards Greece. It is never made clear to what degree the text's polemics occupy the plane of cultural paradigmatics rather than inner psychology, of geography rather than inner being.[90]

This is not to deny that he embodies Greek values in certain contexts. When he sees his men who have been 'thoroughly luxurified' (*ἐκτετρυφηκότας*), he chides them 'gently and philosophically' (*πράως καὶ φιλοσόφως*, 40.1–2). Greek standards are also insisted upon for Persian boys, who are trained to use 'Greek letters' (*γράμματα . . . Ἑλληνικά*) and Macedonian weapons (47.6). Yet this process is not

sentence, however, is undoubtedly corrupt, and I insist here only upon the presence of the prefix *πυρ-* (whence my translation 'inflame').

[87] That ivy is not generally found east of the Euphrates is observed by Strabo (15.1.55).

[88] Sansone (n. 78), 72.

[89] As argued by Humbert (n. 33), 180: 'un Grec authentique et un champion de l'hellénisme à travers le monde'.

[90] There is also a parallel question left to the reader, concerning the degree to which the Alexander narrative emblematizes the crises and lures of *all* monarchical power, a question of immediate cultural relevance to Plutarch—but that would be beyond the scope of the article. For example, Plutarch's coeval Dio Chrysostom, in his *Kingship Orations*, evaluates Roman contemporary imperial power in similar terms (Greek *paideia* moderating the innate tendency of kingship to slide into tyranny): see most recently Whitmarsh (n. 3), 200–14, with further references.

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unambiguously validated by the narrative. The training of the Persian boys produces 'bad spirits and fear' (δυσθυμία καὶ δέος) among the Macedonians, who fear that their role is being usurped (47.6): cultural syncretism has ominous implications. This uneasy accommodation between Greek and Persian is also evident in the case of Alexander's strategic adoption of Persian customs. This is apparently exonerated by the narrator, who comments that he does so primarily for the benefit of the barbarians, but only 'moderately and sparingly' (μετρίως καὶ ὑποφειδομένως) before the Greeks (28.1). Although this phrase may bespeak the public language of Trajan (distinguishing himself from the *dominus et deus*, Domitian), 'moderately and sparingly' is brilliantly provocative: there is an extraordinary irony in the notion of a 'moderate' self-divinization!

As to the famous adoption of Persian clothing, Plutarch is notably ambivalent here, too: either, he writes, Alexander was assimilating himself (συνοικειοῦν) as a means to rule the barbarians, or he was subtly attempting to introduce the custom of *proskynêsis* among the Macedonians, by gradually accustoming them to his change (45.1). The second explanation is more ominous, suggesting that cultural fusion is a two-way process: as the Macedonians Hellenize the East, the East orientalizes them. That Plutarch does not provide an answer to the amphibole suggests that he wishes both interpretations to resonate: Alexander is both Hellenizing barbarians and barbarizing Hellenes. The alienation of the Macedonian company is compounded in the episodes of Callisthenes and Cassander, which we have already discussed: by insisting upon the Persian custom of *proskynêsis*, Alexander is forced to reject those who cling to Hellenic ideals of freedom. As Alexander heads East, then, he begins to 'mix' Eastern and Western, and not simply for the sake of controlling the East. Plutarch's presentation of Alexander's behaviour operates in what post-colonialist writers call 'contact zones',[91] areas of bilateral influence between conqueror and conquered. The simplistic reading of Alexander's life in terms of straightforward cultural paradigmatics (such as Plutarch himself espoused in *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*) is ever probed and subverted by this most rich and readerly text.

The *Alexander*, then, is a strikingly rare text in the embattled *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Macedonian power: rather than engaging in the rather crude debate about whether Alexander 'was' or 'was not' Greek, Plutarch exploits the radical uncertainty surrounding his cultural identity to test his own conceptions of Hellenism in the crucible of narrative. This is not to suggest that Plutarch somehow escapes the lure to politicize the figure of Alexander according to his own preoccupations. On the contrary, the variety of Hellenism explored here (Isocratean, paideutic, 'universalizing') is conspicuously Plutarchan, and other identities signify primarily in terms of their difference from Hellenism (the Persians are 'barbarians' by antinomy with the Greeks; Macedonian identity is not an object of interest *per se*, rather it constitutes a curious *tertium quid* between Hellenism and barbarism). The exceptional status of this text lies not in any supposed transcendence of his own cultural horizons, but in its rich and meaningful representation of Alexander's liminality, its ability to engage the reader directly in the production of (culturally embattled) meaning.

In the introduction to the *Lives* of Aemilius Paulus and Timoleon, Plutarch compares the process of reading his biographies to adorning oneself in a mirror (*Aem.*

[91] M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (London and New York, 1992), *passim*; 'contact zones' are defined on 6.

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proem. 1–3).[92] The comparison is apt, since mirrors give us both a reflection of ourselves and an inversion. Plutarch's *Alexander* is a catoptric text: it engages and challenges the reader's sense of self, refusing any easy identification. History, for Plutarch, is not simply (as the T-shirt slogan suggests) a matter of factuality to be 'learned'; this is, rather, 'history as text', a variegated, subtle and rewarding exercise in profound intellectualism, a voyage of self-discovery (and in a sense self-destruction) for his readers as well as his subject.

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[92] See Duff (n. 7), 30–4 for a full treatment of this passage.

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