

Ory Amitay, *From Alexander to Jesus*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 246. ISBN: 9780520266360. \$49.95.

Ory Amitay's book is not another biography or military history of Alexander. Instead, its aim is "to suggest a possible link connecting the life, career and posthumous reputation of Alexander the Great with that of Jesus Christ" (p. 2). This involves five steps: the first (Chapters 1–3), an investigation of Alexander's "self-relation" to Herakles, the outcome of which is that Alexander "lived his entire life in emulation, competition, and even self-identification with his ancestral hero" (p. 5); the second (Chapters 4–5), an examination of "a sort of symbiosis" (p. 6) resultant from a melding of Alexander's drive to imitate Herakles and attribution to Herakles of adventures that served to bring his exploits in line with Alexander's—*e.g.*, Herakles' alleged attempt on Mt. Aronos—and which, during Alexander's lifetime and after his death, contributed to the application to Alexander of motifs central to the Herakles cycle—*e.g.*, Divine Sonship, double paternity, a world Mission on behalf of humanity, and ... *apotheosis*" (p. 7); the third, a description of how the debt of Hellenistic kingship to Alexander solidified his status as superhuman and demonstrated how a man could become a God; the fourth, an exploration of the effect of Alexander the man, myth, and symbol on Jewish eschatological theory, particularly with respect to the conviction that his advent, inasmuch as it marked a new, final stage of history, was a precondition for the coming of the Messiah; the fifth, the connection of the Alexander mythology that resulted from steps 1–4 with the Christian mythology of Jesus.

Many Alexander scholars, regardless of their position vis-à-vis each element outlined above, will find none of this especially novel. This will hardly be so when it comes to Amitay's explanation of why all this happened as it did: an ability of "memes" associated with the historical and mythical Alexander to replicate together, thereby constituting a "memplex." The ubiquity of this memplex facilitated the replication of some of its constituent memes within the Jesus memplex, and "[e]ventually, each memplex found a separate niche—Jesus in the fields of faith and religion, Alexander in the fields of history and myth" (p. 5). To readers receptive to meme theory (for which, see S. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999]), this will be of great interest and make perfect sense. Unreceptive hosts may engage with *From Alexander to Jesus* on different terms. Both groups, though, must recognize Amitay's commitment to meme theory in order to appreciate how it influences his handling of the evidence that underpins each step of his argument, but especially steps 1–2.

There the crux of the matter is the difficulty of distinguishing testimony contemporaneous with Alexander from post-Alexander material and then the more formidable challenge of deciding how much that material actually tells us about what Alexander thought as opposed to what those who lived when he did thought about him. Of course, centuries separate Alexander from our earliest extant narrative sources and, except when read in light of a few fragments from historical authors who wrote after Alexander's death, never does what remains of contemporary accounts unambiguously

attribute to Alexander a devotion to Herakles any greater than what might reasonably be expected of any Argead king. None of the authors included in F. Wehrli's *Die Schule des Aristoteles*, 12 vols. (Basel: B. Schwabe, 1944–1978), mentions Herakles in connection with Alexander, while the image of Herakles, even beardless, was by Alexander's reign so much a staple of Macedonian coinage that its presence on his issues would have struck few—and certainly not Alexander himself—as distinctive. Yet Amitay is undeterred. He is quick to hypothesize, to stack hypotheses on hypotheses, and to use the cumulative result as justification for a particular take on some ancient testimony. His handling of Alexander at Tyre provides a good example. Alexander's arrival there coincided with the *Egersis* festival, during which Melqart, regularly identified with Herakles, became incarnate in the person of the *Egerseitês*. Amitay wonders how much Alexander knew about *Egersis* and what part in the festival he wished to play. If he presided as *Egerseitês* and realized what this implied, "that would amount, at least in Tyrian eyes, to his identification as Herakles incarnate" (p. 62). Might he be, then, a son of Zeus, as was Herakles? Alexander visited Siwah, Amitay thinks, to pose this question. Of course, in light of the oracle's affirmative answer, it makes sense that, upon his return to Tyre from Egypt sometime close to the time of *Egersis*, Alexander held musical and athletic contests, and "if the essence of *Egersis* was retained, and since [he] must have presided over the festivities ... , [to view this as] a clear case of Alexander enacting complete self-identification with his ancestral Hero" (p. 62). Ultimately, this line of reasoning disposes Amitay to accept as "perfectly plausible" the testimony of Statius and Martial that Alexander carried with him a statuette of Herakles—though "one must consider the possibility that [the story] was invented by a creative art dealer, who wished to increase the value of the merchandise at his disposal"—and to embrace Ehippos' claim that Alexander periodically dressed as Herakles, among other divinities—any doubts about which [seemingly rest on] "prejudice, supported by very slender evidence" (p. 68). This freewheeling approach better serves Amitay's steps 3–5, where its application yields much that is provocative, insightful, and convincing. Nonetheless, one may wonder if "memetic affinity between Alexander and Jesus is the source of the notion that Jesus died exactly at thirty-three" (p. 125) or if Olympias' alleged impregnation by Zeus really has that much in common with some Christians' belief in the immaculate conception and perpetual virginity of Mary (pp. 132–134).

Of three Appendices, "Sacrifices and Other Religious Matters in the Alexander Histories" (pp. 155–161) is more revealing if used in conjunction with H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich*, Vol. I (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1926), pp. 85–92, while a misunderstanding of Arrian *Anabasis* 4.9.1 or, rather, of Brunt's Loeb translation, mars "Alexander Alcoholicus" (p. 163). As complements to Amitay's References (pp. 217–231), on Indian matters add P. Brunt, "Dionysus, Heracles and India," Appendix XVI of Arrian, *The History of Alexander and Indica*, Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 435–442; A. Dahlquist, *Megasthenes and Indian Religion* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962); and S. Hartman, "Dionysus and Heracles in India according to Megasthenes: A Counter-argument," *Temenos* 1 (1965), pp. 55–64.

On p. 61, there is a missing note or n.31 is misplaced. There, too, Amitay misunderstands Pausanias 2.1.5 (which he does not cite) and makes Alexander fail to dig through the Isthmus of Corinth rather than through a portion of the peninsula formed by Mt. Mimas in Ionia opposite Chios. The relevance of Mikkalos of Klazomenai at p. 187, n.32, is unclear. At p. 195, n.33, Minythyia is a conjecture of Alfred von Gutschmid, not a manuscript variant for the Minithyia of Justin 2.4.33. P. 194, n.28, unfairly imputes Tarn with “failing to credit” Mederer, whose work Tarn more likely did not know. There are a few inconsequential printers errors, e.g., Tibrius (p. 141) and Plutrach (p. 196, n.46).

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