
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. Arorno—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 “memeplex.” The ubiquity of this memeplex facilitated the replication of some of its constituent memes within the Jesus memeplex, and “[e]ventually, each memeplex 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 Ephippos’
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
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, Megaesthesia and Indian Religion (Stockholm: Almqvist &
Wiksell, 1962); and S. Hartman, “Dionysus and Heracles in India according to
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, Minythia is a conjecture of Alfred von Gutschmid, not a manuscript variant for the Minithia 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 Plutarch (p. 196, n.46).

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