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THE MISSING LINK?
ICONOGRAPHY AND LITERARY LEGEND
OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

*Eius igitur Alexandri multa sublimia facinora
et praeclara edita fatigaberis admirando uel belli
ausa uel domi prouisa.*

Apuleius, *Florida* 7

Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to ask questions to what extent the study of images and imagery can become a tool for the historian and philologist, helping them to trace lost textual traditions by exploring the frame of mind and ways of expression of a given time as shown by the evidence of visual arts. The greatest flaw of modern Classical Studies seems to be their lack of cooperation between disciplines; this paper intends to show the assets of using the tools of various scholarly fields in order to shed more light on topics which transgress the boundaries of each of them. The case of Alexander's iconography and the tradition of the Alexander Romance seems a good starting point for such studies. Presented here are the preliminary remarks on the subject, which ought to be treated in depth in their numerous aspects¹.*

Keywords: *Hellenism; portrait, iconography; Alexander the Great; Alexander Romance*

There are few historical characters that would be as widely known as Alexander of Macedon, and at the same time remain so obscure, mysterious

¹ I tackle in more detail the topic of Oriental elements in Alexander's iconography in other place, see: Fulińska 2011.

and surrounded by legends. ‘There is no one over whom historians have been more numerous and less harmonious’², as one of the ancient authors observed. Nonetheless, the scarcity of both textual and archaeological sources from the lifetime of the conqueror is surprising, especially in the light of what is known about the importance of royal ephemera and chronicles during the Eastern campaign, and about the significance of Alexander’s figure in the Hellenistic age and in Roman times. Alexander served the Roman writers as example of both excess (*tryphe*) and temperance, of a good ruler and *tyrannos*, and while writing their biographical, moral or historical texts, authors such as Plutarch, Arrian, Curtius Rufus, but also Diodorus, Livy or Lucan, modelled their Alexanders on the writings of the king’s contemporaries and successors, all of which are now lost, apart from excerpts and citations. There is, therefore, a large gap between the lifetime of the great Macedonian and the earliest known extensive accounts of his deeds (1st century BC and the Augustan age), as well as there is one between the time when allegedly also his legend began to form (which would be at the time of the Successors, in particular at the Alexandrian court of Ptolemy), and the earliest preserved recensions of the *Alexander Romance* (3rd century AD). The historians themselves leave traces which allow modern scholars to assess their sources; for instance Arrian states very often that he relates events according to Ptolemy or Aristobulus as the most reliable sources, but he also goes as far as admitting that he includes pieces of information even though they are absent from his favourite sources – as in the case of the Amazon queen episode (Arr. *Anab.* 7.13), i.e. one of the favourite topics of Alexander legends. Philologists in turn can deduce tentative conclusions about the original shape of the *Romance* from the later redactions, especially that the late antique versions seem to preserve a good ratio of the original elements³. Also ancient historians allow for tracing the legendary tradition; when Arrian (*Anab.* 7.27) states that ‘One writer has not even shrunk from the statement that Alexander, perceiving that he could not survive, went to throw himself into the Euphrates, so that he might disappear from the world and leave behind the tradition more credible to posterity that his birth was of the gods and that to the gods he passed’, he clearly quotes sources close to what we know as the Pseudo-Callisthenes (cf. Baynham 1995, 5),

² Arrian, *Anabasis*, Preface. All quotations from Arrian after the edition: *Anabasis Alexandri* 1-2, transl. by E. Iliff Robson, London 1966.

³ A thorough and dependable overview of these is given by Stoneman (1991, 8-17), and most remarks on this particular topic in this paper are based on this study.

where similar accounts about events surrounding Alexander's death were very popular.

Archaeological sources for Alexander's campaigns are also far scarcer than might be expected from one of the greatest military endeavours of antiquity, which also resulted in major political and cultural shifts in the ancient world. It was, however, the cultural change brought about by Hellenism, which produced the image and romanticized legend of Alexander, and allowed for his representations in the guise of gods and in forms so far reserved for the divinities.

Iconography of Alexander is a topic with long scholarly tradition, and at the same time a *terra incognita* to some extent. After the optimistic 19th century-style approach (e.g. Schreiber 1903 and Bernouilli 1905 for the early monographies; the Alexander section in Suhr and Robinson 1931, and up to Bieber 1964; traces of this approach can be found in the iconographic part of Olbrycht 2004, 282-326) a reaction came, which can be epitomized by Ridgway's (2001, 109) hypercritical statement: 'Because Alexander has loomed so large and heroic in all these historical [i.e. 19th and early 20th centuries – AF] studies, and therefore in our own perception, we have wanted to recognize Alexander in a whole range of representations (...) that bear only superficial resemblance to the features of the man as we know him from contemporary evidence'. Attempts at monographic studies have been abandoned in recent years, possibly because the chronological and stylistic approaches were compromised due to the lack of original works and also to the aforementioned old-school optimism, which saw Alexander's portraiture in every sculpture that showed any similarity to the Lysippean model imagined after the descriptions in Plutarch (*De Alex. fort.* 2.2; *Alex.* 4). What is currently being published has in a major part the character of contributions, while a broader approach to the reception of Alexander in antiquity usually concentrates on detailed topics such as the political heritage in the Hellenistic and Roman times⁴, mostly negative image in Roman literature (Spencer 2002), or propagandistic

⁴ Literature on this particular aspect of reception is quite extensive, but since it is only distantly related to the topic of the present paper, a list of major works ought to be sufficient here: D. Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius*. Archäologische Untersuchungen, Brussels 1967; O. Weippert, *Alexander-imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit*, Augsburg 1972; C. Bohm, *Imitatio Alexandri im Hellenismus. Untersuchungen zum politischen Nachwirken Alexanders des Grossen in hoch- und späthellenistischen Monarchien*, Munich 1989; B. Tisé, *Imperialismo romano e imitatio Alexandri. Due studi di storia politica*, Galatina 2002; A. Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri in der römischen Politik (1. Jh. v. Chr.-3. Jh. n. Chr.)*, Münster 2008.

exploitation by the Hellenistic monarchies (Stewart 1993). The *Alexander Romance* and Alexander's legend in general have been recently receiving increasingly thorough attention from the scholars (Stoneman 2008; Amitay 2010; Ogden 2011) but modern scholarship still lacks a suitable methodology to deal with the full corpus of alleged images of the Macedonian conqueror and their relationship with Hellenistic and Roman cultural frame.

The most important question to pose in this context is whether there really is a corpus of 'extant portraits', to quote Bernouilli's classical title. Hardly any of the preserved sculptures can be dated to Alexander's lifetime, and a vast majority of these attributed to 4th century sculptors on stylistic grounds are in all likelihood either Hellenistic or Roman copies. For the purpose of this paper, however, the lifetime portraiture is of less importance, and the Hellenistic imagery poses more complex problems than the identification of possible copies of lifetime portraits.

The Hellenistic Alexander is the god Alexander in the first place, and as such is in most cases represented with the attributes or in the guise of various divinities; the most obvious examples being the early coins of Ptolemy and Seleucus, showing Alexander in the elephant scalp to allude to his Dionysiac apotheosis, and the ram horns on the coins of Lysimachus (cf. Mørkholm 1991 63 and 71-72; Houghton and Lorber 2002, 6-7; Dahmen 2007, 9-17) Coins, in general, form the most reliable group of images: even if not in physiognomic terms, then for certain in the issuers' and engravers' intention of showing the deified Alexander. The same applies to a number of gems, in particular the ones that repeat coin types, but also probably to the so-called Neisos gem from the Hermitage (inv. no. ZH 609), which presents the full figure of deified Alexander: naked and with the attributes of Zeus – the Aegis and the thunderbolt. Sculpted portraits in round are more problematic, because their context is less clear; a vast majority of coins and gems can be safely placed within the court and elite culture or political propaganda (Plantzos 1999, 42), even though dating in the case of gems often remains dubious, while the interpretation of the original meaning and placing of sculptures can be ambiguous.

Most identifications have been based, therefore, either on the analogies to alleged lifetime portrait copies or similarities to coin images, with special attention given to the most prominent features such as the *anastole*, the upward glance and inclined head. All these are consistent with the aforementioned description given by Plutarch, but one must bear in mind that the royal portraiture, and in particular that of Alexander, had become a model for

representation of idealized young men in the Hellenistic age, replacing the even more generic athlete types of the 5th and early 4th centuries BC.

Apart from the coins, the only inscribed likeness is the Azara Herm from the Louvre (inv. no. Ma 436), which gives the information so characteristic for the Roman portrait busts of famous people: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ, and despite its poor condition is quite unanimously considered to be a good replica of the original described as 'Alexander with the lance' by Lysippus. Because of the identifying inscription it has become, together with the Lysimachus coins, the reference point for Alexander's physiognomy. Nonetheless, the portrait's features corroborate the description given by Plutarch in only one aspect, the *anastole*; the herm lacks the upward glance and the turn of head, unlike many small bronzes regarded as copies of the work by Lysippus. Goukowsky (1978, 63) suggests that the 'Alexander with the lance' was executed by the sculptor only after the Indian campaign. This chronology is based mostly on the anecdote about the disagreement between the sculptor and Apelles in regard of the king's attributes (Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 24), which makes a weak argument, but it is worth our attention because the context of possibly planned deification would make the upward glance one of its main characteristics. Moreover, the absence of the two features listed by Plutarch can hardly be explained by the hermaic shape of the sculpture: other busts (e.g. the 'Capitoline' Alexander-Helios) are shaped in accordance with these characteristics. Pollitt (1986, 21), however, goes as far as stating that 'even if the inscription did not exist, the portrait would probably be safely identifiable as Alexander because of the way the hair above the center of the forehead stands straight up'. This stance seems slightly exaggerated: the form of the *anastole* on the inscribed sculpture is repeated on many marble, bronze and terracotta heads (for instance a whole showcase in the Etruscan section of the Vatican Museums; exhibit No. 13758 is described as: 'Head from the statue of a youth. The accurate details and rendering of the hair, combined with local accents, recall the type of Alexander the Great's portrait.'), which are not necessarily associated with Alexander himself, and it is hard to say whether without the inscription the Azara Herm would stand out so prominently as the possible physiognomic portrait, given its expression of 'tiredness', especially when compared to the youthful, idealized representations, even on the coins of Lysimachus.

The popularity of the idealized Alexander as model for youthful male representations in the Hellenistic age makes the attempts at identification of many specimens almost futile; one has, of course, other tools handy, such

as the analysis of style, but the controversy around two sculptures regarded for decades as undoubted Alexanders: the 'Alexander Rondanini' and the 'Alexander Schwarzenberg' (Munich Glyptotek, inv. nos GL 298 and GL 559, resp.; cf. von Schwarzenberg 1967; von den Hoff 1997; Lorenz 2001), shows to what extent the problem of Roman copies and their individual execution on one hand overshadows the research, and on the other is continually being neglected. The most important recent argument against Alexander Rondanini and its attribution to either Leochares or Euphranor, expressed by Ridgway (2001, 115-116: 'To me, the head looks remarkably vacant, cold, and classicizing, and not particularly close to that of the Belvedere Apollo, to which it has been compared. Nor does the body look especially individualized.'), does not take into account the possibility that it might be a classicized version of a far more dynamic and expressive original, and the opinion is based on subjective judgment, to an extent similar as of the criticized early scholars.

Physiognomic approach fails even more in the case of representations with attributes of deities and heroes. A fine example is the discussion over the Boston Heracles head (Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 52.1741), which is a subject of popular doubt nowadays (Ridgway 2001, 119; Stewart 1993, 282), even though half a century ago it was considered an Alexander (Bieber 1964, Tab. XX: 39a-b, after Sjöqvist 1953), while a similar head from Athens (National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 366) does not provoke as much argument (for detailed bibliography see: Kaltsas 2002, 272). The method of comparative stylistic analysis is very feeble in this case, and has never actually been properly approached, so it would appear that it is the dubious provenance of the Boston head from Sparta which makes the main argument against the identification, while the certain finding place of the Athens head gives it more credulity. Ironically, provenance may indeed form a decisive argument for or against identification; it is obvious that there are places where a monument to Alexander would be more likely present than in others, and Sparta hardly makes a good example of the former. One must, however, bear in mind the aforementioned spreading of Alexander model and its influence on generic representations, as well as on representations of divinities and heroes he was associated with. The place of finding or origin can act as evidence in favour or against the intent of representing Alexander, but the similarity of a given work of art to the model should not be denied or neglected in scholarship, even if it pertains to a different topic.

Textual evidence about the monuments should be the natural other source for the research, but it is very scarce, and, as it has been mentioned before, dated at best to two hundred years after Alexander. Therefore, in order to reconstruct the Hellenistic image of the conqueror as presented in various media, one must try to fill the gap between the earliest preserved accounts and Alexander's lifetime with pieces found in various places: quotations in the (mostly Roman) authors whose texts survived to our times, development of various themes in literature (together with the forming of the *Romance*), and preserved iconographic testimonials. The latter should probably comprise the spreading of the generic image, and a wide study would be welcome on the subject, because its range and scope may add considerably to the sociology of the phenomenon. Numerous findings of small bronzes, reflections of the Lysippean type, in Roman context, seem to corroborate both the widespread popularity of the image as well as the *ethos*, and an interesting commentary to Pliny's (*NH* 7.57) statement about the three court artists (Lysippus for bronzes, Apelles for paintings and Pyrgoteles for engravings), is found in Apuleius (*Flor.* 7): 'If any other than these three ... should be discovered to have set his hand to reproduce the sacred image of the king, he should be punished as severely as though he had committed sacrilege. This order struck such fear into all men that Alexander alone of mankind was always like his portraits, and that every statue, painting, or bronze revealed the same fierce martial vigour, the same great and glorious genius, the same fresh and youthful beauty, the same fair forehead with its back-streaming hair.'⁵ This passage and its context demand a more in-deep study, beyond the scope of the present paper, but it is worth noting here that the conviction that all 'Alexander-type' images could be indeed Alexanders existed in antiquity.

Another important context is the role that Alexander began to play in the Hellenistic religious syncretism inherited by the Romans, by becoming a connective element for various deities. This would on one hand result in the Severan image of the Macedonian conqueror as the *Cosmocrator*, a universal 'king and god' figure (the idea as such is Hellenistic in its origins, see: Goukowsky 1978, 149-165), and on the other hand possibly influence the monotheistic ideas unifying Apollo, Dionysus and Helios/Sol or Mithras, as well as other divinities (*Macr. Sat.* 1.18; cf. Martin 1987, 91-98; see also: Amitay 2010, 128-129). Interestingly enough, the latter notion is not absent from the *Romance*: in the earliest version, the 3rd century BC *Recensio* α(1.6), we read that after the night on which Nectanebo visited her, '[Olympias]

⁵ *The Apologia and Florida of Apuleius of Madaura*, transl. by H. E. Butler, Oxford 1909.

rejoiced to be embraced by the serpent, Ammon, Heracles and all-divine Dionysus⁶. It is worth noting, too, that in art the development of this kind of syncretism can be observed since the Hellenistic age.

Alexander's posthumous apotheosis presents two main trends: the association with Zeus or Zeus/Ammon as the highest divinity, and the identification with various deities or heroes, the majority of them being sons of Zeus (Heracles, Dionysus, Apollo, Helios). In the first case we may assume that Alexander is regarded as the son of Zeus as well, which puts him on the very same level ('generation') as the other gods, with the possible exception of Helios, who originally had been regarded as one of the younger Titans, son of Hyperion and Theia, but then, at least since Homer's time, whose importance in the Hellenic pantheon had been decreasing, and who by the Hellenistic age was essentially associated with Apollo (even if the name Helios, meaning simply the Sun, was still in use; cf. Letta 1988, 593), especially in the context of the Asiatic cults of divinities such as Men or Mithras.

The Hellenistic age sees very little of Alexander in the spirit of Lysippus' choice, according to the mentioned before anecdote from Plutarch's *Moralia* – as the human king whose claim to greatness and glory are his military achievements, in contrast to Apelles' idea to represent Alexander with the thunderbolt of Zeus (the only mention of possible lifetime likeness with a divine attribute). Even if the argument between the two court artists had been made up by the biographer, it would still show two possible interpretations of Alexander's legacy and legend: a possibly larger than life human ruler of enormous charisma and impact on the world, or the divine or semi-divine personage, sibling of the Olympians and greatest heroes. The evidence given by archaeological sources seems to point out quite clearly that the latter model was prevalent: a majority of 3rd-1st century BC images show Alexander with divine attributes rather than with just the lance, the symbol of his earthly power.

The shape of the *Alexander Romance* as it is known from the 3rd century AD onwards, as well as the fragments of various Hellenistic texts as quoted or partially preserved, show that literature and history share a good deal of common material. Also the contextual evidence adds to the point: the growing popularity of miraculous stories about India (the *Romance* incorporates the apocryphal [*Alexander's*] *Letter to Aristotle on India*), as well as various anecdotes originating probably as early as

⁶ Translation by D. J. A. Ross (1963, 18) after the edition: W. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni (Pseudo-Callisthenes)* 1: *Recensio vetusta*, Berlin.

the 3rd century BC: the *Last Will* possibly connected in its origins with the king's actual dealings with the Rhodians (Heckel 1988, 2-3; Stoneman 1991, 12), the famous anecdote about Onesicritus telling about Alexander's exploits at the court of Lysimachus (Plut. *Alex.* 46), and the general agreement of later writers that many of the sources they used were hardly reliable (cf. for instance the aforementioned comments by Arrian on his sources and detailed discussions on their credulity, as well as comparisons of content). It may also be worth noting that the same authors who label some of their predecessors' stories 'fabrications' or 'fictions' (πλάσματα; Strab. 15.1.9 about the inventions of the 'flatterers of Alexander'; in 15.1.57 he says that Megasthenes is 'going beyond all bounds to the realm of myth'⁷) do not hesitate to include episodes that form the matter of romance, rather than history, in their accounts (e.g. the miraculous events surrounding Alexander's birth and the meeting with the Amazon queen). However, since it is very hard from our point of view to discern which of such notions were plausible and probable for the ancient reader, one should not jump to hasty conclusions about the frame of mind of the authors.

Some aspects of the legend seem to be more attractive for art than for literature and the other way round. For instance, apotheosis as such is hardly present in the literary tradition, even though comparisons of Alexander to various deities appear in Greek and Latin texts. The pretence at divinity or emulation of the gods and heroes may be, however, regarded as a negative trait, especially in the Roman tradition (e.g. Sen. *Ben.* 7.3.1; Val. Max. 9.5). A question which should be asked in regard to the representations of divine attributes in art is whether they symbolize a union or identification (i.e. syncretism) of Alexander with the gods or just a comparison: art is bound to represent ideas in a far more compact way than literature, hence there is no way in which, lacking direct textual reference, we may distinguish between the intentions. The character of the deification of the Hellenistic rulers, as well as literary mentions of the 'god Alexander', seem to point at syncretism rather than comparison, also the ages long tradition of identifying various oriental deities with their Hellenic counterparts (the *interpretatio Graeca*) corroborates the suggestion. The more interesting in this context is the silence of the known redactions of the Romance on the subject of Alexander's posthumous apotheosis, while his alleged divine ancestry is widely exploited.

The discrepancy between the popularity of various specific topics between Hellenistic art and the 3rd century AD version of the literary legend,

⁷ *The Geography of Strabo* 7, transl. by H. L. Jones, London 1930.

as well as their possible relationship, might also constitute a tool for a better understanding of the early reception of Alexander's figure, if thoroughly studied and properly interpreted. For instance, while the narrative elements of the history/romance are absent from Hellenistic and early Imperial art, they do appear in late antiquity, as shown by the example of the 'nativity' motif, whose earliest known execution in art is the Baalbek mosaic⁸, which presents similarities to contemporary scenes showing the birth of Achilles (cf. the mosaic from the Villa of Theseus in Paphos: Daszewski 1972, 208-217). Also other legendary *topoi*, very popular in the 3rd century-onward recensions of Alexander's mythologized biography, find their place in the art of the period; a good example is the legend concerning Alexander's divine origins. While in the Hellenistic art the main attribute pointing at the king's descent from Zeus and at the Siwah revelation are the 'horns of Ammon' on the Lysimachus coins but also on rare renditions in sculpture in round, such as the Copenhagen head (Nationalmuseum, inv. no. P 378), the Severan and Late Imperial periods exploit the motif of Olympias and the serpent on the 3rd century Macedonian 'Koinon' agonistic issues, and on the 4th-5th century contorniates (Dahmen 2007, 31, Pl. 23.1-2 and 37-38, Pl. 28.4 resp.). The conception of Alexander by a god or his representative is present in both the historians (Plut. *Alex.* 2) and in the early versions of the *Romance*, in the story of Nectanebo (Ps.-Call., rec. γ , 1.10)⁹. The serpent crawling up Olympias' arm is also shown on the Baalbek nativity mosaic.

The complete absence of such topics in Hellenistic art, as well as the lack of narrative representations, can point in two directions. One seems obvious, but may be misleading, and first and foremost is improvable unless new textual sources are found: that in the early period of the formation of the *Romance* such subjects simply did not exist, at least in the 'official' version of the legend (which would in turn raise the question about their origin

⁸ Ross (1963) argues that the preserved mosaic was part a larger cycle illustrating Alexander's early life episodes from Pseudo-Callisthenes, which in turn became the model for medieval illustrations of the *Romance*.

⁹ This legend spawned in the modern times yet another cultural myth, concerning the burial of Alexander: according to local Arab tradition an alabaster sarcophagus from Alexandria was considered to have belonged to the king, the deciphering of the hieroglyphic inscription, however, identified it with Nectanebo II, which in turn produced a scholarly dispute (scholarly myth, one would like to say) about the possibility that Alexander had been buried in his legendary father's tomb, otherwise known to be empty (for the bibliography of the argument see: Nawotka 2004, 518-519).

in the historic writings¹⁰). The other can be better argued from the point of view of history of art. It would appear that one of the changes that art underwent during the centuries that divide the Hellenistic age and the late Roman empire is the gradual substitution of syncretic, concise thinking with the need of episodic narration, which in time became more and more equipped with inscriptions that would allow the viewers to understand the complexity of the presented images. In the Hellenistic time, with its overwhelming tendency towards erudition and elite culture (Bulloch 1989, 1-4; Hunter 2007, 479-481), the very concept was to include as much meaning and allusions as possible in a work of literature or art, and the deciphering of these meanings was one of the objectives of reception. This tendency continued into the time of the Second Sophistic (c. 50-230 AD), but by the mid-3rd and 4th centuries AD this ability was lost for a majority of the general public, hence especially in the case of less known myths, their artistic representations had to become more explicit – or inscribed – to make them understandable. This tendency may also account for the inclusion of narrative topics into art: they conveyed the story which was to be told in an easier, more comprehensible manner than the epitomizing, ‘contracted’ representations characteristic for the earlier periods. In other words: for the Hellenistic viewer Alexander with the ram horns or in Dionysus’ disguise could be enough to convey a broad range of associations whose explanation may have been found in the early texts on the same topic.

To show an example of such thinking in literature, one may point at a work outside the *Romance* tradition itself, but crucial for the understanding of Hellenistic ways of imagining monarchy and its origins, as well as Alexander’s place in the forming of the Ptolemaic dynasty, i.e. Theocritus’ *Idyll. XVII, the Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus*. In the second passage of this poem (13-33) a scene on Mount Olympus is described, in which Alexander is presented together with Heracles as sons of Zeus, while Ptolemy Soter (the addressee’s father) is equalled with them in the encomiastic way. This excerpt is hardly an *ekphrasis* but seems to deserve an in-depth analysis from the point of view of its possible connections with contemporary iconography. For the purpose of the present paper it is enough to say that it is possible to derive certain ideas about how Alexander may have been portrayed in the early Hellenistic time from this fragment, and

¹⁰ Many of them seem to originate in Egypt (the descent from Nectanebo is paralleled by the descent from Darius in the Persian versions of the *Romance*), and Jasnow (1997, 96) suggests that Demotic heroic tales might contain elements of the Alexander legend, but the discussion on the subject lies beyond the scope of the present study.

our knowledge of the actual portraiture corroborates the assumptions which the text allows to make (e.g. the representations with the attributes of young Heracles and as the son of Zeus/Ammon).

It is impossible to draw any decisive conclusions about the possible shape of the text of the early *Alexander Romance*, of the memoirs of Ptolemy or of the royal ephemera, which probably formed an important source for both the historical and legendary accounts, from the shape of Alexander's portraiture in art. If, however, we combine various textual testimonies predating the known versions of the *Romance*, such as the semi-legendary material associated with the time of the Diadochs (the Onesicritus story in Plutarch, numerous anecdotes quoted in the writings of Polyaeus, Lucian, Claudius Elian, etc.), the mentions of Alexander's attributes in poetry (Theocritus, Posidippus), the later quotations about Dionysiac celebrations in Alexandria in which the statues of both Alexander and Ptolemy Soter were decorated with ivy wreaths (Ath. 201D), with the evident presence of allusions to legendary and mythologized exploits, especially in the East, in extant art, it becomes clear that plastic arts and literature formed two elements of one mental universe. Sculptures and coins show that the main direction of thinking about Alexander and perceiving his life and achievements in art was towards heroization and deification, i.e. magnification of his deeds beyond human measure. Direct accounts of deification as such are not very popular in literary context, even though Stewart (1993, 10) argues quite convincingly that the topic must have been present in the history written by Callisthenes during the expedition; divine or at least semi-divine status is also quite directly implied by the recurring motif of Alexander's descent from Zeus or Zeus/Ammon. At the same time a tendency may be observed of continuing and embellishing the events in literature and historiography; good examples are the narratives of the 'miracles of India'. Stories about strange and wonderful animals or peoples were present in the accounts of early travellers to the East: allegedly already in the *Periplus* of Scylax of Caryanda, dating to the 5th century BC, whose known version, however, the Pseudo-Scylax, comes down from the 4th or 3rd century BC, and Ctesias of Cnidus (late 5th century BC). It was, however, Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya in the early 3rd century BC, who formed the basic corpus of Indian *mirabilia*, which in turn became the source for various descriptions known since the Hellenistic times and later, especially in the Middle Ages, in the texts derived from the Hellenistic *Physiologus*, and also found their way to the various versions of the *Alexander Romance*.

Since the transmission of such motifs is well attested, it may be assumed that other elements of the *Romance* came down to the 3rd century AD the same way from various sources of earlier concepts of the legend. The association of Alexander with solar deities led to the idea of Alexander Cosmocrator in Severan art, as well as in the late ancient, Byzantine and early medieval recensions of the *Romance*¹¹. A close and thorough study of other aspects of the image of Alexander in the Hellenistic times in comparison with extant textual sources may therefore shed some light on what elements of the legend of the great Macedonian as preserved in art were important for the frame of mind of the Hellenistic audience, and possibly imprints of some of these may be found in the text of the *Romance*, which in turn may help to reconstruct the hypothetical shape of the early stages of the textual tradition.

Richard Stoneman (1991, 8-10) describes the formation of the *Romance* as a 'gradual process' and 'accretion', Elizabeth Baynham (1995, 13) concludes her survey of the relationship between historical and legendary accounts with the statement that 'the "real" Alexander seems to retreat further and further into the overlapping layers of "historical" and "romantic" traditions' – a statement that complements the opinion expressed by Arrian, and quoted at the beginning of this paper. It is not unlikely that also art reflected or transformed, and therefore preserved, some of the elements and aspects that contributed to the creation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, otherwise absent from literary sources. In the chronology of the coming into being of the *Alexander Romance* as we know it, three phases can be discerned: 1) the Hellenistic and early Imperial time, from which we have only traces in other works of literature, and a quite extensive body of works of art; 2) 3rd-4th centuries AD, when the earliest recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition emerge, while Alexander-related art shows clear similarities in topics and motifs exploited; 3) Byzantine and Middle Ages period, when the manuscripts and incunabula are often richly illustrated, new episodes are inserted into the earlier version, and the anachronistic paintings that accompany the text are directly connected with it.

In the present paper I tried to show that further study of the iconography of Alexander, and possibly also of his successors, emulators and types inspired by his likeness, may add to our knowledge of the first period: even if it does not provide tools to reconstruct the texts, it offers significant insight

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the Cosmocrator notion gained popularity in such a specific environment as the Jewish versions of the legend of Alexander; on the subject see: van Bekkum 1992, 3-6.

into frame of mind of people whose cultural activities shaped the legend of the greatest king and conqueror of antiquity. I would also argue that much as contributions to identification and chronology as well as publications of new findings are always welcome, a new approach to Alexander's iconography should concentrate on topics, as well as their spreading and influence, rather than attempt at traditional monographic studies, which are bound to be flawed by dubious chronologies and uncertain attributions.

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