

## Ethnicity and Cultural Policy at Alexander's Court

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In the more than half a century since William Woodthorpe Tarn proclaimed the "Brotherhood of Mankind,"<sup>1</sup> there has been a narrowing interpretation of Alexander the Great's vision. Recent scholarship has replaced most of Alexander's Grand Plans with "minimalist" interpretations.

Tarn's conception of *homonoia* was never accepted by some scholars, and within five years of its publication in the Cambridge Ancient History, Ulrich Wilcken attacked it as unsupported by the evidence.<sup>2</sup> Despite Wilcken's criticism, Tarn's views of Alexander as a social philosopher settled into the public consciousness, and into some scholarly opinion, as well.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the full force of criticism turned on Tam. The "revisionist" school of Alexander historiography, led by Ernst Badian, was characterized by severe source criticism and proved that the "*homonoic*" vision of Alexander was mainly a product of Tarn's unacceptable squeezing of sources. An analysis of the *language* of Arrian at 7.11.9-the famous prayer of reconciliation at Opis-shows that, in comparison with uses of similar constructions elsewhere in Arrian, the "concord" or "harmony" referred to in Alexander's prayer<sup>4</sup> is limited to the Persians and Macedonians and is not inclusive of the whole human race.<sup>5</sup>

What was left of Alexander's Grand Plan was an idea introduced by Wilcken in 1931 to replace Tarn's World Brotherhood.<sup>6</sup> Wilcken argued that, while the king had no intention of uniting all the races of Europe and Asia into a great concord, he did, in fact, attempt to join the ruling peoples of those continents-the Macedonians and Persians-into a commonality of shared power. This view-called "Fusion" has persisted for more than a half century, generally accepted at one time by many persons, myself included.

But in 1978 A.B. Bosworth presented a paper at a meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians, the full version of which appeared in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1980) under the title "Alexander and the Iranians." Bosworth argued persuasively that there was little evidence even for a fusion between Persians and Macedonians. In an analysis of Alexander's activities toward the end of his life-where most of the evidence for Fusion has seemed to reside-Bosworth showed, for example, that nearly all the Iranian auxiliaries incorporated into the army were kept as separate units. The Asians were used mainly as a political counterweight to threaten Macedonians who were disaffected from their king. Other evidence for uniting the races of Europe and Asia must be seen as *ad hoc* solutions to immediate problems, not as a part of a general Policy.<sup>7</sup>

I accept the views of Bosworth on this issue. But what are we left with? Has the position about Alexander's Grand Scheme become so minimalist as to leave nothing but a piece of military history and a serendipitous adventure story?

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<sup>1</sup> I. Tarn in CAH 6 (1926), *Proc. of the British Academy* (1933), and *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1948), esp. 2: 399 ff. Earlier versions of the present paper were presented at the 1989 annual meeting of the Friends of Ancient History in Baltimore, and at the 1990 meetings of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association in Salt Lake City. I wish to thank Ernst Badian, Ian Morris, and Edward Anson, who were commentators at those meetings, for their suggestions, criticism and encouragement. What appears here is part of a continuing larger study of ethnicity in the administration of Alexander. I am pleased to offer it in its present form as a tribute to my teacher, Stewart Oost, who neither admired Alexander nor believed he had any impulse beyond conquest.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., *Alexander der Grosse* (1931), English trans. by G. C. Richards, notes by E. N. Borza (New York, 1967), 22 1.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., C.A. Robinson, "The Extraordinary Ideas of Alexander the Great," *AHR* 62 (1957) 326-44.

<sup>4</sup> The publication by Stadter and Boulter of a microform concordance to Arrian has greatly simplified textual analysis of this type.

<sup>5</sup> The version Arrian gives us probably is verbatim or near-verbatim of what Alexander actually said. Of course, one must consider seriously that whatever Alexander said may not have been what he intended, which is one of the main points of the present paper.

<sup>6</sup> *Alex. the Great* (1967) 246-56.

<sup>7</sup> Bosworth's views have not persuaded everyone, especially those for whom old habits die hard; e.g. N.G.L. Hammond in *Alexander the Great. King, Commander and Statesman* (1980) and elsewhere.

There is, in fact, one surviving theme that runs through the literature and is also one of the most enduring public views of the great king's achievement: Alexander spread Greek civilization by means of his passage through Asia. It is this perception of Alexander's mission that forms the subject of the present essay.

Caution must be the methodological byword. One must make a clear distinction between what our ancient sources believed was Alexander's thinking on the matter of hellenism, and what Alexander himself actually accomplished. Ancient writers, like modern ones, wrote with the advantage of hindsight. They understood that western Asia was transformed as the result of Alexander's passage. They also knew that Alexander and his court were in many respects quite highly hellenized. It was thus easy to connect the two in a cause-and effect relationship. (On this issue, scholarly method seems not to have advanced very much during the past eighteen centuries.)

Let us, therefore, set aside for the moment our recognition of Alexander's great achievement of conquest, and our knowledge that his passage resulted in, among other things, the establishment of Greek culture in its Hellenistic form around the eastern rim of the Mediterranean, and that this remained an enduring cultural feature of the region until the Islamic conquests. Let us, instead, review the evidence to see precisely what Alexander *intended* in the way of hellenization, and what he consciously instituted as policy.

First, the matter of the Hellenic origins of the Macedonians: Nicholas Hammond's general conclusion (though not the details of his arguments)<sup>8</sup> that the origin of the Macedonians lies in the pool of proto-Greek speakers who migrated out of the Pindus mountains during the Iron Age, is acceptable. As for the Macedonian royal house, the Argead dynasty was probably indigenous, the story of their Temenid Greek origin being part of the prohellenic propaganda of King Alexander 1. This is a position I have already argued in print and do not wish to take up further here.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the truth about the origins of the Macedonian people and their royal house, it does not affect what follows. We have suspected from literary sources for some time that the Macedonian court had become highly hellenized. at least by the time of King Archelaus at the end of the fifth century B.C. And now the recent remarkable discoveries of Greek archaeologists working at Vergina and elsewhere confirm the cultural debt owed by the Macedonian gentry to the Greeks who lived in the south. There can be no remaining doubt about the degree to which at least some Macedonians on the highest levels shared a version of Greek culture.

Moreover, Alexander himself, tutored by Aristotle and raised in a court in which a manifestation of hellenism was a component of diplomacy, was a lover of Greek culture. But we must make a distinction between Alexander's personal predilections-his cultural baggage, as it were-and what he intended as policy.

Whether Alexander had a strategic policy for his empire is a matter that cannot be considered here. The question is complex and tangled in source problems, and one often despairs that it can ever be answered. But it may be possible to examine the evidence for hellenization. That is, did Alexander consciously attempt to hellenize, keeping in mind, of course, the distinction mentioned above between his personal cultural attitudes and what he intended for others to do?

Of the cultural features of Alexander's court, very little need be said. The king's train included a number of Greeks, and court practices were often hellenized,<sup>10</sup> resulting from the influence of Greeks in the king's train and also from those features of Macedonian life already hellenized. Although it is undeniable that a Macedonian court somewhat hellenized may have influenced policy and helped spread Greek culture, it is difficult to prove. One suspects that the extent to which Greek culture was propagated in this manner was as a byproduct of imperial conquest and administration rather than as the result of direct policy. On this point we look forward to the development of Greek frontier studies comparable to the successful accomplishments of our colleagues in Roman frontier studies. The recent work of Frank Holt on the Bactrian frontier, for example, suggests that Greek culture in the early Hellenistic period did not permeate

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<sup>8</sup> As expressed in *History of Macedonia I and II* (Oxford, 1972-79) passim, and more recently in *The Macedonian State* (Oxford 1989) chap. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See my "Origins of the Macedonian Royal House," *Hesperia*, Suppl. 19 (1982) 7-13, [see article 5 in this volume] and *In the Shadow of Olympus. The Emergence of Macedon* (Princeton, 1990) 80-84 and 110-13.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., the Macedonian version of the symposium; see my "The Symposium at Alexander's Court," *Archaia Makedonia* 3 (1983) 4555, [see article 9 in this volume] and "Anaxarchus and Callisthenes. Academic Intrigue at Alexander's Court," *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson* (Thessaloniki, 1981) 73-86 [see article 10 in this volume].

native traditions very deeply, a conclusion similar to that reached by Stanley Burstein in his study of Egyptian Meroë.<sup>11</sup>

None of this adds up to a *policy* of hellenization. Perhaps we can see something in the relationship between Alexander and the Greeks themselves. There is one feature of Alexander's administration that has not been much examined, and that is the ethnicity of the persons who surrounded the king. If, for example, it could be shown that Greeks were often selected to hold important posts in imperial administration, one might conclude that that very selection and Alexander's dependence upon those Greeks were tantamount to a policy of hellenization.

What was the role of the Greeks associated with Alexander during his Asian campaign? What military or administrative assignments were they given? How close were they to the king? Of needs we turn to that magisterial data bank of Alexander's reign, the *Das Alexanderreich* of Helmut Berve, published nearly seven decades ago, but still the most useful compilation of prosopographical evidence relating to the Macedonian conqueror. What follows is based on a computer-assisted study of Alexander's associates, using the data from Berve, with some corrections and modifications. The computer was used to organize several categories of information about these persons, such as ethnic background and *cursus honorum*. A simple sort and list routine enabled the extraction of information about the individuals according to category. The two categories of information used here are: (1) ethnic origin, and (2) the offices or commands held by persons according to ethnicity.

What follows are some of the conclusions arising from this study of ethnicity, with the following caveats: first, there are a number of persons in Berve's list whose origin is uncertain. I have taken this problem into account, although the number is too small to affect much the outcome of the study. Second, I believe that one can make valid ethnic distinctions among the peoples of antiquity. The ancient authors themselves did so regularly, and such distinctions are a necessary component of my method.

On the matter of distinctions between Greeks and Macedonians in particular, I accept the general view expressed by Ernst Badian in his paper, "Greeks and Macedonians."<sup>12</sup> Badian showed that in antiquity, neither Greeks nor Macedonians considered the Macedonians to be Greek. The ethnic distinctions in the present study are: mainland Greek, Asian and island Greek, Macedonian, other Balkan, Persian, other Asian, and a small miscellaneous category for the remainder.

Of the nearly 850 persons listed by Berve, 275 are either certainly or probably ethnic Greeks. Of this number, 126 persons are not associated with Alexander's train, and thus outside present concerns. Of the 149 which remain, sixty-nine-nearly half-are court figures not associated with administration. They are there mainly for what one might call "cultural" reasons. They include sophists, physicians, actors, athletes, musicians, jugglers and other entertainers, and a variety of hangers-on.

Eighty names remain. Of these three are of uncertain ethnic origin. Twenty-four Greeks serve the king in a variety of administrative tasks: some are envoys, some are clerks, some financial officers, some act as the king's agents in local places. They pop in and out of the historical record as Alexander sees the need to employ them. More of these Greeks are Asian than European. Beyond that there is no pattern or apparent policy. The king uses these people because he finds it expedient to exploit individual skills.

The remaining fifty-three Greeks serve specific military functions. Of these, the extraordinary number of twenty-two names are attached to a single unit, the allies from Orchomenos, who are dismissed along with the other Greek allies in 330 B.C. Fourteen other Greeks hold naval appointments, either as ship commanders on the Hydaspes fleet, or in conjunction with Nearchus' ocean voyage.

Four Greeks are in charge of mercenary units, and nine others have unspecified, low-level military assignments. Seven have duties that did not take them beyond Egypt, where a number remained to carry on administrative tasks.

In summary, of the 149 known Greeks with official connections to the king, only thirty-five to forty held positions of rank-some as officers, some as administrators, but only a handful in top positions.

A look at Alexander's satrapal appointments reveals a similar pattern. We know of fifty-two different persons who held satrapies in Alexander's empire over a dozen years. Of these, twenty-four were Persians and Asians, a number of them continuing in posts held earlier under Darius. Twenty-three Macedonian satrapal appointments were made, nearly the same number as Asians. There are only five

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<sup>11</sup> F.L. Holt, *Alexander and Bactria, Mnemosyne* Suppl. 104 (Leiden, 1988), and the papers of Holt and Burstein in *Hellenistic History and Culture*, ed. Peter Green (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> *Macedonia and Greece in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Times*. *Studies in the History of Art* 10, ed. B. Barr-Sharrar and E.N. Borza (Washington, 1982) 33-51.

Greeks who held satrapies. Of these, Nearchus (Berve #544) and perhaps Sibyrtius (#703) were Cretan, Stasenor (#719) was a Cypriote, Cleomenes (#431) was from Naucratis in Egypt, and Thoas (#376) was from Magnesia on the Meander. No mainland Greek ever held a satrapy in Alexander's empire.

An examination of the satrapal offices held at the time of Alexander's death shows that of the twenty-four known satraps, six were easterners, fifteen were Macedonian and three were Greek, in this case stretching the ethnic definition Nearchus (#544) and Sibyrtius (#703) of Crete, and Cleomenes (#431) of Egypt. The pattern is clear: the trend toward the end of the king's life was to install Macedonians in key positions at the expense of Asians, and to retain very few Greeks.

Similarly, of the twenty-four garrison commanders mentioned in Arrian, twenty-one are Macedonian, two are Indian and only one is Greek-Lycidas (#475), who was left in charge of mercenaries in Egypt.

Alexander's inner circle, his *hetairoi*, would appear to replicate the pattern. Of the sixty-five or so men named as *hetairoi*, nine are Greek, including three mainlanders. Of the nine, four owed their positions to life-long connections with Macedon: Nearchus (#544) and the brothers Erygius (#302) and Laomedon (#464) were in fact raised as Macedonians, and Demaratus (#253) of Corinth had been associated with the court, since the time of Philip II.

Thus we look in vain for the evidence that Alexander was heavily dependent upon Greeks either in quantity or quality. We learn that rather few Greeks beyond the sycophants and entertainers at court were associated with the king either in his inner circle or in important military and administrative positions.<sup>13</sup> There is one exception, however, the faithful and competent Greek *grammateus* Eumenes (#317) of Cardia, but he may be the exception that proves the rule. And if there were any doubt about the status of Greeks among the Macedonians, the tragic career of Eumenes in the immediate Wars of Succession should put it to rest. The ancient sources are replete with information about the ethnic prejudice Eumenes suffered from Macedonians.<sup>14</sup>

There is one other aspect of Alexander's Greek policy, and that is his formal relationship with the Greek cities of Europe and Asia. In European Greece Alexander continued and reinforced Philip II's policy of rule over the city-states, a rule resulting from conquest. As for the island Greeks and the cities of Asia Minor, their status under the reigns of Philip and Alexander has been much debated.<sup>15</sup> Fortunately, for my purposes, the status of these cities, whether as members of Philip II's panhellenic league or as independent towns, is not crucial, as they were in fact all treated by Alexander as subjects. Much of the debate on the issue, while interesting and occasionally enlightening, has sometimes obscured a simple reality: Greeks on both sides of the Aegean were subject to the authority of the king of Macedon.

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<sup>13</sup> There are limits to such a statistics-based argument. We are prisoners of the evidence that has survived, and my use of statistics in this fashion recognizes that the tiny number of Greeks who played important roles in Alexander's court is relative to the total number of names that *have survived*. Some persons friendly to my conclusions have suggested that I should consider using some modern statistical techniques to determine the possible *total* number of those who served Alexander in administrative and other capacities by extrapolating from the evidence we have. I have thought seriously about this, but am unable to develop a sound historical method by which I can make something from nothing. I do not know whether the ethnicities of those who served Alexander would be the equivalent of what was determined from Berve's prosopography, should I attempt to establish some total numbers. Only in the case of the satrapal appointments can we be reasonably certain that we have close to total numbers; *in the case of the satrapies the pattern of a tiny number of Greeks relative to the total is confirmed*. One must act prudently on this issue and report what the evidence says, while admitting that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the extent to which the surviving evidence is an accurate reflection of the actual total numbers.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Plut. *Eum.* 3.1; 8.1; 18.1; Diod. 18.60.1-3, 62.7 and 19.13.1-2. For present purposes I have not cited several pieces of anecdotal evidence from the sources on Alexander that establish the continuing tension at court between Greeks and Macedonians, tension that the ancient authors clearly recognized as ethnic division. A fuller version of this study will consider these incidents to support my view that Greeks and Macedonians did not get along very well with one another and that this ethnic tension was exploited even by the king himself.

<sup>15</sup> E. Badian, "Alexander and the Greeks of Asia," *Ancient Society and Institutions. Studies Presented to Victor Ehrenberg* (Oxford, 1966) 3796. Also see, e.g., V. Ehrenberg, *Alexander and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1938) 1-51; Tarn, *Alexander 2*: App. 7; and AJ. Heisserer, *Alexander the Great and the Greeks. The Epigraphic Evidence* (Norman, 1980), conclusions at 230-37.

The conclusion is inescapable: there was a largely ethnic Macedonian imperial administration from beginning to end. Alexander used Greeks at court for cultural reasons, Greek troops (often under Macedonian commanders) for limited tasks and with some discomfort, and Greek commanders and officials for limited duties. Typically, a Greek would enter Alexander's service from an Aegean or Asian city through the practice of some special activity: he could read and write, keep figures or sail, all of which skills the Macedonians required. Some Greeks may have moved on to military service as well. In other words, the role of Greeks in Alexander's service was not much different from what their role had been in the service of Xerxes and the third Darius.

If one wishes to believe that Alexander had a policy of hellenization-as opposed to the incidental and informal spread of Greek culture-the evidence must come from sources other than those presented here. One wonders-archaeology aside-where this evidence would be.

We have seen that not only has the idea of World Brotherhood been put to rest and the idea of a Fusion of Persian and Macedonian ruling classes made doubtful, but that the value of Greeks to Alexander for policy reasons cannot be sustained by evidence. In short, there is no World Brotherhood, no Fusion, and no evidence of a policy of hellenization, if that hellenization were intended to be accomplished through the medium of ethnic Greeks.