

# “Your God will be my God”: How John Zonaras Rewrote Plutarch’s *Alexander*

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**I**N HIS *JEWISH ANTIQUITIES*, Josephus reports the reaction in Jerusalem to news that an angry Alexander was intending to march against the city following his victories along the coast (11.325–328):

Alexander, after taking Gaza, was in haste to go up to the city of Jerusalem. When the high priest Jaddus heard this, he was in an agony of fear, not knowing how he could meet the Macedonians, whose king was angered by his former disobedience. He therefore ordered the people to make supplication, and, offering sacrifice to God together with them, besought Him to shield the nation and deliver them from the dangers that were hanging over them. But, when he had gone to sleep after the sacrifice, God spoke oracularly to him in his sleep, telling him to take courage and adorn the city with wreaths and open the gates and go out to meet them, and that the people should be in white garments, and he himself with the priests in the robes prescribed by law, and that they should not look to suffer any harm, for God was watching over them. Thereupon he rose from his sleep, greatly rejoicing to himself, and announced to all the revelation that had been made to him, and, after doing all the things that he had been told to do, awaited the coming of the king.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of historical fact, Alexander did not visit Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. R. Marcus, *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities* IV (Cambridge [Mass.] 1937).

after his capture of Gaza in 332 BCE.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the visit has been part of the historical record for two millennia. It entered the Greco-Roman tradition via Josephus, who followed a source that was perhaps as old as the second century BCE.<sup>3</sup> The episode, however, is absent from the accounts of Alexander produced in antiquity and re-enters the Greek tradition only in the third century CE, when Origen refers to it in his treatise *Against Celsus*. Thereafter it becomes a regular part of apologetic, chronographic, and historical writing, and around the beginning of the eighth century it enters the tradition of the so-called *Alexander Romance*.

Given this context, it is not surprising that John Zonaras, who wrote his *Epitome of Histories* in the twelfth century, also narrates a version of ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ (4.15, I 304–306).<sup>4</sup> Following a well-established historiographical tradition, Zonaras combined Jewish and Roman history into a universal account of the Byzantine past, and for Jewish material he relied heavily upon Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*.<sup>5</sup> What is unique about Zonaras

<sup>2</sup> Scholars consider the visit to be unhistorical; see for example R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven 2008) 49–52; A. Tropper, *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented* (Leiden 2013) 126–130; P. Briant, *The First European: A History of Alexander in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2017) 61–67; O. Amitay, “Alexander in Ancient Jewish Literature,” in R. Stoneman (ed.), *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* (Cambridge 2022) 109–142, at 121–122.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Momigliano, “Flavius Josephus and Alexander’s Visit to Jerusalem,” *Athenaeum* 57 (1979) 442–448. For surveys of the Jewish tradition and its relation to Josephus’ account see R. Stoneman, “Jewish Traditions on Alexander the Great,” *StudPhilon* 6 (1994) 37–53; O. Amitay, “Alexander in Jerusalem: The Extra-Josephan Traditions,” in P. Spilsbury et al. (eds.), *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* VI (Leiden 2017) 128–147.

<sup>4</sup> Citations of Zonaras are to book and chapter, then volume and page in the edition of L. Dindorf, *Ioannis Zonaræ Epitome historiarum* (Leipzig 1868–1875).

<sup>5</sup> Zonaras was likely working from an epitome of *Jewish Antiquities*; see T. Kampianaki, *John Zonaras’ Epitome of Histories: A Compendium of Jewish-Roman*

is that he elected to introduce a lengthy biography of Alexander as preface to his account of Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem. Relying on an ancient source, as he does throughout his history when writing on ancient events, Zonaras turned to Plutarch’s *Alexander* for material and epitomized the work from start to finish.

This epitome of the *Alexander* is well known to scholars, but its form and function have been insufficiently studied and thus Zonaras’ approach has been inadequately understood. In a study of Zonaras’ interpretation of Plutarch, Theofili Kampianaki characterizes the epitome by drawing attention to the sayings of Alexander that Zonaras takes over from Plutarch, and she characterizes the passages he omits as casting the Macedonian king in a bad light. Overall, Kampianaki sees Zonaras’ aim as an attempt at “polishing Alexander’s image.”<sup>6</sup> This assessment is not incorrect, but it is incomplete because it treats the epitome as a stand-alone biography and does not consider its integration into Zonaras’ narrative or how his literary and religious environment affected his reinterpretation of Plutarch’s text. This approach is not uncommon: scholars typically interpret Zonaras as having inserted the biography of Alexander into his text without integrating it into his narrative. Anthony Kaldellis describes Zonaras as arranging his material from Plutarch and Josephus “sequentially by source, in paratactic formation”;<sup>7</sup> Kampianaki characterizes the epitome of the *Alexander* as “a self-

*History and Its Reception* (Oxford 2022) 11 n.33, with further bibliography. This article’s opening quotation is from *AJ*; subsequent quotations come from the epitome in the edition of B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi antiquitatum Iudaicarum epitoma* (Berlin 1896), the title of which I abbreviate *AJE*.

<sup>6</sup> T. Kampianaki, “Plutarch and Zonaras: From Biography to a Chronicle with a Political Leaning,” in S. Xenophontos et al. (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plutarch* (Leiden 2019) 248–264, at 256–259; cf. A. Kaldellis, “Alexander the Great in Byzantine Tradition,” in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 216–241, at 224, who describes Zonaras as emphasizing “anecdotes revealing [Alexander’s] character and pithy sayings.”

<sup>7</sup> Kaldellis, in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 224.

contained, parenthetical unit”;<sup>8</sup> Corinne Jouanno reads the visit to Jerusalem as having been inserted into a chapter otherwise drawn entirely from Plutarch.<sup>9</sup> Such readings fail to appreciate the larger scope of this section of the history. Zonaras has, in fact, inserted a biography of Alexander into a section otherwise drawn entirely from Josephus, not the other way around.

Moreover, although Zonaras changes sources mid-narrative, he does so with purpose. Having encountered Alexander while relating the conflict between Jerusalem and Samaria (*AJE* 11.302–325), Zonaras alerts the reader that he will pause to provide a summary of Alexander’s deeds and character and then “get back to the continuation of his narrative” (4.8, I 284). This statement gives the impression that the Plutarchan material constitutes a digression, which in turn supports characterizations such as those cited above. But in fact, Zonaras has more to say. Immediately following the notice of a change in topic, he writes:

And furthermore, this king visited Jerusalem and did something worthy of wonder with respect to the high priest and the people, and he himself described a certain divine vision, as Josephus reports. My account will go on and relate those things after telling the story of Alexander.

Rather than sitting paratactically alongside material from Plutarch or intruding into it, the visit to Jerusalem frames the epitome of the *Alexander*. This framing is the key to understanding not only why Zonaras has inserted the biography into his history, but also how he has rewritten it to fit his purpose. Zonaras himself, in the preface to his work, explains that he has included an account of Alexander “especially because he visited Jerusalem after defeating Darius at Issus and paid special honor

<sup>8</sup> Kampianaki, *John Zonaras’ Epitome* 46–47.

<sup>9</sup> C. Jouanno, “L’image d’Alexandre le Conquérant chez les chroniqueurs byzantins (VI<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles),” *Kentron* 17 (2001) 93–106, at 103: “Il constitue d’ailleurs l’unique élément hétérogène d’un chapitre pour le reste entièrement tiré de Plutarque.” See also C. Jouanno, “La réception du Roman d’Alexandre à Byzance,” *Ancient Narrative* 1 (2002) 301–321, at 311 n.45, for a similar characterization.

to the high priest” (Preface 3, I 7). And so, as Thomas Banchich writes, “it is Alexander’s sojourn in Jerusalem that makes the Macedonian conqueror historically relevant.”<sup>10</sup>

But why did Zonaras preface Alexander’s sojourn in Jerusalem with a lengthy biography adapted from Plutarch? Something “worthy of wonder” would occur there, he tells us, and he felt the need to prepare both his reader and his Alexander to understand it. Preparing the reader meant a retelling of Alexander’s story in a form that fit Zonaras’ narrative and his times; preparing Alexander meant a reshaping of the historical figure to match what would be required of him in Jerusalem. Plutarch’s Alexander, as a pagan, a priest, and perhaps even a god, was not the sort of person to appreciate the holy city or submit to a foreign deity. Zonaras, I argue, has transformed Alexander so as to create the sort of person who could do those things.

The purpose of this article is to characterize Zonaras’ epitome of the *Alexander* by considering its larger context, which is Medieval, Eastern Roman, and Christian. We must recognize, however, that Zonaras was certainly not dependent only on Josephus and Plutarch for his conception of Alexander, since the story of the conquest of Persia—with many other adventures, including ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’, added to it—was well known in Byzantium in a variety of forms. The received image of the Macedonian king must have affected how Zonaras understood what occurred in Jerusalem and how he read—and in turn, modified—Plutarch. Before studying the changes that he made to the *Alexander*, therefore, I will establish their context by examining Zonaras’ version of the visit and the image of Alexander as he likely knew it.

*The visit to Jerusalem in Josephus and Zonaras*

In the continuation of the passage quoted at the beginning of this article, Josephus describes Alexander’s reception in Jerusalem. Alexander is angry as he approaches the city because the

<sup>10</sup> T. Banchich and E. Lane, *The History of Zonaras: From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great* (Abingdon 2009) 27 n.16.

high priest declined to abandon his allegiance to Darius and send aid to the Macedonians (*AJE* 11.317–320). This refusal to support Alexander is the “former disobedience” mentioned in the opening passage. Alexander is marching against Jerusalem, therefore, with the intention of punishing the Jews. The high priest, however, follows the instructions he received in the dream, and when Alexander sees the crowd dressed in white and the priests wearing their colorful robes, his attitude changes immediately. Rather than attack, he performs an act of obeisance (προσκύνησις) and honors the high priest with a formal greeting. Then he reveals that he saw the high priest in a dream while still in Macedonia. After being welcomed into the city, Alexander goes up to the temple, performs a sacrifice in the proper manner, and learns of a prophecy from the Book of Daniel that says he will destroy the Persian empire.<sup>11</sup> The episode closes with a joyful Alexander granting concessions to the Jews (*AJE* 11.329–339).

This summary of Josephus works well enough for Zonaras, and since Zonaras is following the epitome of *Jewish Antiquities* so closely in this part of his history, we might safely assume that he included the visit to Jerusalem mainly because he found it in his source. His adaptation of the scene, however, reveals that Zonaras was also influenced by attitudes towards Alexander and the Jews that developed after the time of Josephus. Thus, even as he relied on an ancient source, Zonaras updated it to fit a contemporary perspective, one which was significantly different from the Jewish and early imperial perspective of Josephus. In Josephus’ account, Alexander performs *proskynesis* to the delight of the Jews but to the surprise of his own men. One of his generals, Parmenion, asks Alexander why he performed *proskynesis* to the high priest, when everyone else was expected to

<sup>11</sup> On prophecy related to Alexander in the Book of Daniel see Amitay, in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 109–111.

perform *proskynesis* to Alexander.<sup>12</sup> The king replies, “I did not perform *proskynesis* to this man, but to the god for whom this man has the honor of being high priest” (οὐ τοῦτον ... προσεκύνησα, τὸν δὲ θεόν, οὗ τῆ ἀρχιερωσύνη οὗτος τετίμηται, *AJE* 11.333). He goes on to describe the dream in which he saw the high priest, who promised that he would lead Alexander’s army personally and deliver to him the Persian empire. Since he has now met the high priest in person, Alexander expects that the promise will be fulfilled: “I believe that, since I’ve made this campaign with divine guidance, I will defeat Darius and destroy the Persian army” (“νομίζω θεία πομπῆ τὴν στρατιὰν πεποιημένος Δαρεῖον νικῆσαι καὶ τὴν Περσῶν καταλύσειν δύναμιν,” 11.335). In Josephus, then, the God of the Jews becomes part of the divine apparatus that is supporting the Macedonian conquest of Persia. Even so, the passage’s overall message is open to interpretation. Was Alexander humbling himself before a foreign god? Was the standing of the Jews enhanced by Alexander’s visit and the respect shown for their religion? Ory Amitay surveys possible meanings and concludes that the scene conveys “a multivalent message directed at a variegated audience.” Considering the first-century CE context of *Jewish Antiquities*, Amitay suggests that taken as a whole, the scene helped to define “the place of the Jews in the Roman empire.”<sup>13</sup>

Zonaras, however, writing in a different political and religious context, appears to have found a different—and more certain—meaning in Alexander’s act of obeisance and his prophetic dream. As he transferred Josephus’ story into his history, he instilled this meaning by making a subtle change. After describing the dream to Parmenion, Zonaras’ Alexander makes a claim

<sup>12</sup> Parmenion’s logic relies on an anachronism, since *proskynesis* to Alexander was not practiced until after the defeat of Persia.

<sup>13</sup> Amitay, in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 122–123; see also S. J. D. Cohen, “Alexander the Great and Jaddus the High Priest According to Josephus,” *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/3) 41–68; C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “Alexander the Great’s Worship of the High Priest,” in L. T. Stuckenbruck et al. (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London 2004) 71–102, at 79–86.

slightly different from that of Josephus' Alexander: "I believe that, since I've made this campaign with God, I will defeat Darius and conquer the Persian empire" ("σὺν θεῷ τὴν στρατείαν νομίζω πεπονημένος τὸν Δαρεῖον ἠττήσῃν καὶ τὴν Περσῶν ἀρχὴν κατακτήσασθαι," 4.15, I 306). Zonaras has transformed Josephus' general notion of acting "with divine guidance" (θεία πομπή) into the more specific idea of acting "with God" (σὺν θεῷ), and he has moved the phrase forward in the sentence, perhaps for emphasis. In the twelfth century, Zonaras' Alexander recognizes the importance of God and considers him to be a, if not the, guarantor of his success. The act of *proskynesis*, therefore, takes on a new meaning in Zonaras. Rather than elevate the status of the Jews as it did for Josephus, *proskynesis* in Zonaras represents Alexander's submission to the God who was, from Zonaras' perspective, identical with the God of the Christians.

Though subtle, the change introduced by Zonaras is surely intentional, for it reflects both the image of Alexander as it appeared in the Middle Byzantine period and the interpretation of the visit to Jerusalem as it developed over time. In brief, Byzantine versions of 'Alexander in Jerusalem' reflect the Christian outlook of their authors and readers by usually (though not always) eliminating the overtly Jewish elements of the scene and taking for granted that the deity in the story is their own God. Scholars have surveyed the literary and historical transformation of Alexander in the early Christian and Byzantine periods and shown how he was adapted for an evolving worldview that included Christian religion and Roman monarchy.<sup>14</sup> A better understanding of how Zonaras read and adapted Josephus for his version of 'Alexander in Jerusalem' emerges from a survey of the evolution of the episode within the larger tradition.

<sup>14</sup> See U. Moennig, "A Hero Without Borders: 1 Alexander the Great in Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greek Tradition," in C. Cupane et al. (eds.), *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond* (Leiden 2016) 159–189; C. T. Djurslev, *Alexander the Great in the Early Christian Tradition: Classical Reception and Patristic Literature* (London 2020); Kaldellis, in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 216–241.



*The visit to Jerusalem in the Byzantine tradition*

After being narrated by Josephus, the episode is absent from Greek literature until it reappears in *Against Celsus* 5.50, where Origen attempts to prove that the Jews were always favored by God. His very brief version condenses events considerably but does include the detail that Alexander was said to have performed *proskynesis* to the high priest (φασὶ καὶ τὸν Ἰουδαίων ἀρχιερέα ἐνδύοντα τὴν ἱερατικὴν στολὴν προσκεκυνῆσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου). The lesson of Origen’s version is that Alexander honored the Jews rather than harming them, even though they would not forsake Darius, and this demonstrates their special status.<sup>15</sup> The rationale, as in Josephus, is that Alexander recognized the high priest from his dream and understood that he would conquer the Persian empire. But having made this point, Origen adds further commentary that places the scene in a wider context. After describing the scene in Jerusalem, he adds:

In turn we Christians say that the Jews especially found favor with God and were loved by him more than the other peoples, and that this arrangement and grace were transferred to us, after Jesus shifted the power held by the Jews to those gentiles who believed in him.

The logic of Origen’s claim shows how, when Alexander’s actions were interpreted in a Christian context, the Macedonian king could naturally be viewed as performing *proskynesis* to a man who was high priest of the Christian God.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See Djurslev, *Alexander the Great* 128–133, and “Christianising Alexander Traditions in Late Antiquity,” in *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture* 86–108, at 99–100.

<sup>16</sup> Such an assumption about a historical text could easily, and probably unconsciously, be borrowed from Christian approaches to Scripture; cf. P. D. Vasileiadis, “Aspects of Rendering the Sacred Tetragrammaton in Greek,” *Open Theology* 1 (2014) 56–88, at 58: “The Christian understanding of God carries the fundamental notion that He is the one and same in both the HB/OT and the NT texts.” See also I. Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies in the Epitome Historion of John Zonaras* (Thessaloniki 1998) 25–26; J. Peltonen,

Eusebius, in the next century, carries this logic one step further. While documenting a succession of high priests ending with Jaddus, he writes: “In the time of this Jaddus, Alexander of Macedon founds Alexandria, as Josephus reports, and after arriving at Jerusalem performs *proskynesis* to God” (ἀφικόμενός τε εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα τῷ θεῷ προσκυνεῖ, *DE* 8.2.67).<sup>17</sup> In this brief remark, Eusebius streamlines the action by eliminating Jaddus as intermediary and ignoring the complexity of interpretation (was Alexander submitting to a foreign god, or elevating the status of the Jews?). There is no indication that the deity mentioned here (τῷ θεῷ) is any other than the God worshipped by Eusebius and his Christian readers. We find a similar approach in Cosmas Indicopleustes in the sixth century, who argued that God had been active on behalf of the pagan Greeks, even though they did not believe in him (*Christian Topography* 12.14 Wolska-Conus). As evidence of God’s presence in ancient times, Cosmas adduces the visit to Jerusalem, which occurred “four hundred years or more before the advent of Christ, in the time of Alexander of Macedon.” In recounting the story, Cosmas claims that Alexander “made sacrifices to God” (θυσίας ἔθυσσε τῷ Θεῷ), clearly meaning the same God that he and his readers worshipped.<sup>18</sup>

Zonaras, I suggest, was expressing the same point of view when he reinterpreted θεία πομπή as σὺν θεῷ. But if he was inspired by other authors, we need not assume that he drew

*Alexander the Great in the Roman Empire, 150 BC to AD 600* (London 2019) 181–188.

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius transmits a variant of the tradition that has Alexander visiting Jerusalem after founding Alexandria. In his *Chronicle*, he appears to have dated the visit after the capture of Tyre, and he also reports that Alexander sacrificed to God. The passage survives in Jerome’s translation: *Alexander capta Tyro Iudaeam inuadit. a qua fauorabiliter exceptus deo uictimas immolat et pontificem templi honoribus plurimis prosequitur* (*Chron.* p.205 Helm).

<sup>18</sup> Capitalization of θεῷ as found in the editions of both E. O. Winstedt, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Cambridge 1909), and W. Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie chrétienne III* (Paris 1973).

directly from these apologetic texts. After reappearing in the Greek tradition, ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ became well known and is attested in a variety of sources between the third and twelfth centuries.<sup>19</sup> It continued to evolve, however, in ways that made Alexander’s actions even less ambiguous. With respect to the deity, for example, some versions not only make assumptions about the identity of God, such as we find in Eusebius and Cosmas, but they even assert that Alexander adopted monotheism. Jouanno, in a comprehensive study of the *Alexander Romance*, finds this idea entering the tradition with the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*, a chronographic text translated into Latin during the seventh or eighth century from a fifth-century Greek original that is now lost.<sup>20</sup> The brief mention of the visit is similar in form to what is found in Eusebius, but there is an important expansion in how Alexander himself expresses his conception of the God he encounters in Jerusalem (p.270.1–5 Frick):

*ut enim condidit Alexander Alexandriam contra Egyptum, ueniens in Hierusolima domino deo adorauit dicens: Gloria tibi, deus solus omnia tenens, qui uiuis in saecula. fuit autem tunc in Hierusalem princeps sacerdotum Iaddus.*

For after Alexander had founded Alexandria in Egypt, he came to Jerusalem and venerated the Lord God, saying, “Glory to you, the only God, who controls everything and lives forever.” At that time Jaddus was high priest in Jerusalem.

Perhaps wishing to resolve the interpretive ambiguity such as we find in Josephus, or alternatively, perhaps not noticing any ambiguity at all, the author of the fifth-century chronograph (assuming the Latin accurately reflects the Greek) assigned a very specific and unmistakable meaning to Alexander’s act of obeisance.

In the extant tradition that predates Zonaras, the move

<sup>19</sup> Most of the references are collected by C. Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses du Roman d’Alexandre* (Paris 2002) 379 with n.319.

<sup>20</sup> Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 379–380. On the *Excerpta* see further R. W. Burgess, “The Date, Purpose, and Historical Context of the Original Greek and the Latin Translation of the So-called *Excerpta Latina Barbari*,” *Traditio* 68 (2013) 1–56.

towards monotheism finds its fullest expression in Recension ε of the *Alexander Romance*. Composed in the seventh or eighth century, this version of the *Romance* is the first to be “fully assimilated to the Byzantine, Christian perception of the world, its history, its geography and its rule according to God’s will.”<sup>21</sup> It is also the first version of the *Romance* to include ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ (Recension ε 20 Trumpf), though in a highly original form that makes it uncertain whether the author was relying on Josephus as a source.<sup>22</sup> In this version, the high priest is absent, replaced by a college of priests who collectively impress Alexander with their appearance, though he does not claim to have seen any of them in a dream or to have been promised victory. Alexander asks one of the priests whom they worship, and this brief dialogue follows (20.4):

Priest: “θεὸν ἡμεῖς ἓνα δεδουλεύκαμεν, ὃς ἐποίησε τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα τὰ ὀρώμενά τε καὶ ἀόρατα. οὐδεὶς δὲ αὐτὸν ἐρμηνεύσει ἀνθρώπων δεδύνηται.”

“We are the servants of one God, who made heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. And no human has been able to interpret him.”

Alexander: “ὡς ἀληθῶς μεγάλου θεοῦ ἄξιοι θεραπευταί, ἄπιτε οὖν ἐν εἰρήνῃ, ἄπιτε. ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἔσται μου θεός, καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη μου μεθ’ ὑμῶν καὶ οὐ μὴ διεξέλθω ὑμᾶς καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὅτι τῷ ζῶντι θεῷ ὑμεῖς δεδουλεύκατε.”

“As you are truly worthy servants of a great God, go in peace, go. For your God will be my God, and my peace is with you, and may I not pass through you as I pass among the other nations, because you are servants of the living God.”

Alexander’s declaration “your God will be my God” was likely intended to represent his conversion to monotheism.<sup>23</sup> In a later

<sup>21</sup> Moennig, in *Fictional Storytelling* 165. On the date of the recension see R. Stoneman and T. Gargiulo, *Il romanzo di Alessandro I* (Milan 2007) lxxx.

<sup>22</sup> Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 379.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 379–380: “alors que le héros de la recension ε manifeste d’emblée le désir d’adopter la religion juive: ‘Votre dieu sera mon dieu’, déclare-t-il, et c’est un vertu de sa conversion au mono-

passage, Alexander makes his position even clearer: he is said to have ascended a tower in Alexandria, where he “declared all the gods of the earth and on Olympus and in the sea to be nothing, and he proclaimed a single God who is unknowable, unseen, inscrutable, conveyed by the Seraphim and glorified by the thrice-holy formula” (24.2). He follows this declaration by calling on God as “God of gods and creator of things seen and unseen” (ὁ θεὸς θεῶν καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων) and asking him to be his helper in what he intends to accomplish.

The ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ of Recension ε represents a significant departure from Josephus, since Alexander’s respect for God does not depend on a dream-vision or a promise of future success, but rather represents a spontaneous acknowledgement that the Jews worship a powerful deity who replaces all other gods. Also interesting in terms of the author’s perspective is the statement of the Jewish priest, whose words echo the opening of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed: “We believe in one God, father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things seen and unseen” (πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων). The statement has other parallels, too, and in general there is overlap between the language of Recension ε and Christian and Scriptural texts.<sup>24</sup> In Recension ε, not only Alexander but even the Jews are adopting a Christian perspective.

These overt moves toward monotheism, with their imaginative rewritings of the scene in Jerusalem, show Zonaras’ adaptation of Josephus to be rather restrained. There are, however, other texts that are closer in form to Zonaras’ history and the established tradition in which he worked. These are histories in the form of chronicles, which, starting in the seventh century,

théisme qu’il fait la paix avec les Juifs et les traite avec une générosité.” Alexander’s declaration might be an echo of Ruth’s statement to Naomi in the Bible: “ὁ θεὸς σου θεὸς μου” (*Ruth* 1:16). On Ruth as an archetypal convert see I. Pardes, *Ruth: A Migrant’s Tale* (New Haven 2022) 42–63.

<sup>24</sup> See Amitay, in *Flavius Josephus* 146–147; Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 380–381.

make ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ a regular part of Byzantine universal history.<sup>25</sup> In doing so, they also codify the notion that Alexander, even unwittingly, worshipped the same God as the Christians. The earliest of these texts, the *Chronicon Paschale* from the seventh century, illustrates the general mindset very clearly. The author notes the visit to Jerusalem twice, each time as a supplement to Jaddus’ appearance on a list of Jewish high priests. In the first instance, Jaddus is said to be the one “in whose time Alexander founded Alexandria and after coming to Jerusalem performed *proskynesis*” (καθ’ ὃν Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἔκτισεν, καὶ ἔλθὼν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ προσεκύνησεν, p.357 Dindorf). In the second instance, the author (like Eusebius) elides the intermediary, even as he is writing about Jaddus: “In the time of this man [Jaddus], Alexander of Macedon, the founder, founded Alexandria in Egypt, and after coming to Jerusalem, performed *proskynesis* to the Lord God” (κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ προσεκύνησεν, p.390). The addition of “the Lord” in the second instance reflects the author’s understanding of the deity that Alexander venerated and demonstrates the natural assumption that Byzantine historians were making when they wrote about this episode.<sup>26</sup>

‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ is related with similar brevity and assumptions in three other chronicles prior to Zonaras, which show awareness of the basic elements found in Josephus but also a tendency to condense greatly. Following are Alexander’s interaction with Jaddus and God in these three texts.

George the Synkellos (p.314 Mosshammer):

καὶ τὸν ἀρχιερέα Ἰαδδοῦς ἐτίμησε θύσας τῷ θεῷ, ὡς παρ’ αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκουμένην ὁμολογῶν προσειληφέναι.

<sup>25</sup> C. Jouanno, “Alexander Romance and Byzantine World Chronicles: History Cross-Fertilized by Fiction and the Reverse,” in R. Stoneman et al. (eds.), *The Alexander Romance: History and Literature* (Groningen 2018) 225–243, at 234–235, suspects that the chronicles inspired the appearance of ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ in Recension ε of the *Alexander Romance*.

<sup>26</sup> Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 380 n.327, sees the formula κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ as reflecting Alexander’s perspective.

And he honored the high priest Jaddus, after sacrificing to God, since he confessed that he had acquired the whole world from him.

Symeon the Logothete (*Chronicon* 46.19 Wahlgren):

εἶθ' οὕτως ἀνήλθεν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ὑποτάξας αὐτὴν καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως λαβὼν συμμαχίαν καὶ ὡς θεὸν τιμήσας καὶ προσκυνήσας ὑπεχώρησε πρὸς Πέρσας.

Thus, he next went up to Jerusalem, and after subduing the city and receiving an alliance from the high priest, and then honoring and performing *proskynesis* to him as though to God (*or to a god*), he withdrew towards Persia.

George Kedrenos (I p.265 Bekker):

ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ἐλθὼν καὶ ταύτην ἐλὼν, ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως Ἀδδὼ τιμηθεὶς, θύσας τῷ θεῷ ὡς παρ' αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκουμένην προσειληφώς.

After going to Judaea and capturing it, he was honored by the high priest and sacrificed to God, in the belief that he had acquired the whole world from him.

Both George the Synkellos and George Kedrenos make Alexander acknowledge God as the author of his success, as in Josephus, and indeed report that success as though it has already occurred, thus telescoping Alexander's eventual victory and weaving a notion of thankfulness into the scene. Symeon, on the other hand, preserves Jaddus as the object of veneration but declines to explain why Alexander might have venerated him. Without being as specific as the *Excerpta* or the *Alexander Romance*, Symeon implies a spontaneous recognition of the importance of Jaddus' deity.

There is only one more text to consider, the chronicle of George the Monk, written in the ninth century. With respect to 'Alexander in Jerusalem', George's version (*Chronicle* 1.19 De Boor) has the most in common with Zonaras, though the episode is more elaborate than in any other chronicle or even Recension ε of the *Alexander Romance*.<sup>27</sup> It also preserves many of the details from Josephus that are typically eliminated and thus, while thoroughly Christian in outlook, maintains a Jewish-centered

<sup>27</sup> The full episode has been translated by R. Stoneman, *Legends of Alexander the Great* (London 2012) 25–33.

narrative. On the one hand, George was certain that the God he worshipped was active in pre-Christian times. When Alexander begins his campaign, for example, George states without argument that “in the fourth year of his reign, God roused Alexander, king of Macedonia, against the Assyrians, Persians, Medes, and Parthians.” And at the end of the story, when Alexander is pleased to learn about the prophecy of Daniel, George has him “go up to the temple and sacrifice to God under the guidance of the high priest” (ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερόν ἀνελθὼν θύει μὲν τῷ θεῷ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ὑφήγησιν). George, then, has projected his understanding of God into the story, as we have seen done across the tradition.

On the other hand, he is careful not to strip away the Jewish elements as the other versions do. In narrating the encounter between Alexander and Jaddus, for instance, George spends considerable space describing the high priest’s vestments, even adding many details and background information not found in Josephus. When he comes to the golden plate inscribed with the divine name, he explains to his readers the concept of the Tetragrammaton and Jewish reverence for it.<sup>28</sup> In the interaction between Alexander and the high priest, George, alone among the Christian Greek versions, has Alexander perform *proskynesis* to the divine name and then greet the priest (ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος . . . προσεκύνησε τὸ θεῖον ὄνομα καὶ τὸν ἀρχιερέα ἠσπάσατο).<sup>29</sup> In response to the onlookers’ surprise, George’s Alexander provides an ex-

<sup>28</sup> The Tetragrammaton is described in Exod 3:14–16, and also by Josephus, *AJ* 2.275–276, though it is not clear what source George used for his account; see N. Andrade, “The Jewish Tetragrammaton: Secrecy, Community, and Prestige among Greek-Writing Jews of the Early Roman Empire,” *JSS* 46 (2015) 198–223.

<sup>29</sup> George’s account thus matches *Jewish Antiquities*, since Josephus also says that Alexander performed *proskynesis* to the divine name (προσεκύνησε τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὸν ἀρχιερέα πρῶτος ἠσπάσατο, *AJ* 11.331), whereas the divine name as object of veneration has been removed from the epitome (προσεκύνησε καὶ τὸν ἀρχιερέα πρῶτος ἠσπάσατο, *AJE* 11.331). Zonaras follows the epitome.



planation similar to what we read in Josephus: “I venerated not the man, but the god who is honored by that man and who has promised me help against my enemies” (οὐ τὸν ἀρχιερέα προσεκύνησα, ἀλλὰ τὸν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ θεὸν τιμώμενον καὶ μοι τὴν βοήθειαν κατὰ τῶν ἐναντίων ὑποσχόμενον). Then, however, he makes an interesting claim: “I saw the god in a dream, dressed the same as this high priest” (ὤφθη μοι κατ’ ὄναρ κατὰ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦδε τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ὁ θεός). Although an innovation among the historical texts, the substitution of God for the high priest in the dream was likely already present in Origen.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, it parallels the frequent conflation of the high priest with God as the object of *proskynesis*. George’s Alexander does not utter the statement that closes his speech in Josephus and Zonaras—that he launched his campaign “with divine guidance” or “with God”—and he does not make an overt move towards monotheism. But given the framing of this episode, with mentions of God at the start and finish, the author and his contemporary readers must have assumed that Alexander saw their God in his dream, even if he did not recognize the full significance of his vision.<sup>31</sup> Thus, with his emphasis on the Jewish setting and the direct appearance of God in the prophetic dream, George transmits an episode that melds Josephus’ account with the thorough Christianization of the Byzantine tradition.

*The problem of Plutarch’s Alexander*

The recurrence of ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ in a variety of texts indicates that the episode was well established in the Middle Byzantine period. I do not, however, mean to imply that Zonaras was influenced by any particular version. But it is nonetheless vital to read Zonaras’ version against the tradition since the other authors’ consistent assumption that their own God was central to the episode demonstrates how Zonaras

<sup>30</sup> On Origen’s version see Djurslev, *Alexander the Great* 132.

<sup>31</sup> An epiphany story may lie behind Josephus’ version of the dream; see Cohen, *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/3) 49–55; T. H. Kim, “The Dream of Alexander in Josephus *Ant.* 11.325–39,” *JStJ* 34 (2003) 425–442.

would have interpreted events (either independently or under the influence of wider reading) and helps to explain his modification of Josephus. His insertion of “with God” allowed him to remove the ambiguity found in Josephus by making Alexander move seamlessly from being angry at the Jews to venerating the high priest, then to explaining that the high priest stands for God, and finally to declaring that he was campaigning with God. Zonaras, we might say, has done his best to remain faithful to his source, while nonetheless adapting the story to match his own expectations and those of his Christian readers.

But his interpretation of Josephus would have been an obstacle to his incorporation of Plutarch. The Alexander of Plutarch’s biography is not the sort of character who could move so quickly from anger at the Jews to the veneration of God. Alexander’s life and career were closely intertwined with the practice of his own religion, and he was, in addition to being a king and soldier, a priest. He was also rumored to be the son of a god, and perhaps even a god himself. This is not the sort of person to be easily impressed or converted. Moreover, in selecting the *Alexander* as the source for his own abbreviated biography, Zonaras was taking on a special challenge, since among the ancient writers, Plutarch, in the words of Fred Naiden, “is the only one who endows Alexander with any personal religious life, and that is decidedly Greek or Macedonian.”<sup>32</sup> Zonaras might have asked himself, as Parmenion asked Alexander, how could this pagan, a king who presented himself as divine, perform *proskynesis* to the Jewish high priest and claim God as guarantor of his success?

The answer lay in creating an Alexander who was of course not a god, and though religious, not really a pagan either, regardless of how he appeared in Plutarch. Rather than transfer the biography wholesale into his history, therefore, Zonaras transformed the *Alexander* to fit his own twelfth-century worldview. As with his adaptation of the visit to Jerusalem, Zonaras

<sup>32</sup> F. S. Naiden, *Soldier, Priest, and God: A Life of Alexander the Great* (New York 2019) 4.

was not breaking new ground in this approach. Recension  $\beta$  of the *Alexander Romance*, which probably dates to the fifth century, reflects its Christian context by introducing changes to the story that de-emphasize Alexander’s paganism.<sup>33</sup> In a summary of how the author of Recension  $\beta$  accomplished these changes, Christine Sempéré points to the rationalization of the story of Alexander’s birth, an aversion to comparing him to a god, and the omission of accounts of pagan sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> Zonaras followed the same plan in his transformation of Plutarch.<sup>35</sup>

His omission of pagan sacrifice, to take the last point first, can be documented succinctly. Living in the Greek world of the fourth century BCE, Alexander would have been constantly engaged in religious activity, including animal sacrifice performed at critical moments of his life and career. As a Macedonian king, he would have been charged with leading sacrifices and other religious ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> Alexander’s religious practice was, of course, thoroughly pagan. Zonaras, therefore, eliminated all eight instances of sacrifice found in Plutarch.<sup>37</sup> When combined with the omission of other pagan religious practices (see below), the elimination of sacrifice leaves us with an Alexander who is almost completely unengaged in religious activity. From the

<sup>33</sup> On this recension see Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses* 247–303; Moennig, in *Fictional Storytelling* 164.

<sup>34</sup> C. Sempéré, “‘À nos destins promis ce souffle d’autres rives’: la figure du héros dans la recension  $\epsilon$  du *Roman d’Alexandre*,” *Anabases* 3 (2006) 79–97, at 87.

<sup>35</sup> M. Manfredini, “Due codici di *Excerpta Plutarchei e l’Epitome* di Zonara (II),” *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 1–25, argues that Zonaras worked from an epitome of *Alexander*, and he further suggests that Zonaras himself compiled this intermediate text. I assume that Zonaras is working from the *Life*, though if he worked from an epitome, which is neither extant nor attested, it is possible that the transformations I attribute to him were already made by the epitomist, who (according to Manfredini) could have been Zonaras anyway.

<sup>36</sup> Naiden, *Soldier, Priest, and God*, esp. 2–6.

<sup>37</sup> Sacrifice occurs at Plut. *Alex.* 15.7, 25.1–2, 29.1, 31.9, 50.5, 62.8, 63.14, 66.2.

Byzantine Christian perspective, however, there was one type of sacrifice that was acceptable, Jewish sacrifice to God. And so, in his narration of events in Jerusalem, Zonaras preserves Alexander's visit to the temple, where "he sacrificed to God under the direction of the high priest" (ἔθυσσε τῷ θεῷ ὡς ὑπηγεῖτο ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς, 4.15, I 306). This sacrifice remains part of Zonaras' narrative because it was performed to the right deity and in the right way.

Alexander's ancestry and his own divinity, however, could not be handled simply through omitting unwelcome material. We read in Plutarch that Alexander was descended from Heracles on his father's side and from Aeacus on his mother's side, and that this ancestry is firmly established (*Alex.* 2.1). According to myth, both Heracles and Aeacus were sons of Zeus. Aeacus, moreover, was the father of Peleus, who in turn fathered Achilles with the divine nymph Thetis. From his youth, therefore, Alexander knew that he was descended from important legendary heroes who could trace their ancestry back to Zeus. During his own lifetime, he appears to have come to believe that he was not merely a descendant of Zeus but was, like his legendary ancestors, another son of the god. Over time, he may even have adopted the notion that he was divine. The particulars of these developments are complicated, though scholars tend to accept that Alexander believed at least that his father was divine.<sup>38</sup> Evidence for both ideas is found in Plutarch, however, and therefore Zonaras was compelled to confront it. The evidence appears in two places: in the introduction to the *Life* (*Alex.* 2–3), where Plutarch explains Alexander's ancestry, and in the account of Alexander's visit to the temple of Zeus Ammon at Siwah (27.5–11), after which Plutarch directly addresses the question of Alexander's divinity (28). In Zonaras' handling of both passages, we can see how he rationalized, reduced, and omitted material from his source to create a purely human Alexander.

<sup>38</sup> See A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988) 278–290.

Zonaras wastes no time in putting the notion of divine ancestry to rest. These are the opening lines of his version of the biography (4.8, I 284–285):

He was the son of Philip, king of the Macedonians, born to Philip by Olympias, but the story was invented (μυθεύεται) that he was the son of Ammon (who they say is Zeus), who had slept with Olympias in the form of a serpent. But this is fiction (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν μῦθος).

Zonaras introduces the idea of fabrication (μυθεύεται, μῦθος) on his own authority; these words are not used in his source. In fact, they contradict his source, since Plutarch writes about the serpent as though the incident actually occurred: “And a serpent was once seen stretched out along her body while she slept” (*Alex.* 2.6). More concrete action follows, as Plutarch records—and Zonaras omits—that Philip’s attraction to Olympias was cooled because of this vision, out of fear that she might practice magic against him or that she was the partner of a superior being. To interpret what he had seen, Philip consulted the oracle at Delphi and was told “to sacrifice to Ammon and have special reverence for that god” (3.1) but also that he would lose the eye with which “he had seen the god in the form of a serpent lying with his wife” (3.2). Later, when Olympias was sending Alexander off on his campaign against Persia, “she told him alone the secret of his birth and urged him to keep his mind on matters worthy of his origin” (3.3). Zonaras omits this information as well.

In his highly truncated discussion of Alexander’s parents, Zonaras does import from Plutarch the record of two dreams: Olympias sees lightning strike her womb, and Philip, sometime after their wedding, dreams that he is applying to her womb a seal with the sign of a lion (*Alex.* 2.3–5; Zonaras 4.8, I 285). Zonaras presents the first dream as an alternative to his declaration that Alexander’s divine parentage was a fiction (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν μῦθος· λέγεται δὲ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ ... ἐν ὄνειρῳ δόξαι). The implication (as in Plutarch) is that the lightning represented Zeus. Thus, in Zonaras the dream serves as the kernel of an invented story, while in Plutarch it hints at the truth of Alexander’s

conception. The sealing of the womb carries the same meaning for both authors: Olympias is pregnant, since no one seals an empty vessel, and the child inside the womb will have the spirit of a lion. In Plutarch, however, this second dream is narrated between the first dream (where Olympias sees lightning) and the anecdote of Philip seeing the serpent in his wife's bed and being told to honor Ammon. In the source, then, it is part of a cluster of stories that build towards the belief that Philip is not really Alexander's father. In Zonaras, the story of the serpent is introduced before the dreams and then summarily dismissed as false, while the dreams are included only as signs that Olympias has become pregnant with an especially courageous child.

There is a risk of overstating this contrast between Plutarch and Zonaras, for Plutarch does in fact suggest that Alexander's divinity was a fiction. When he reports Olympias' admonition to her son on the eve of the Persian campaign, he also includes an alternative view: "Others say that she rejected [the idea that Zeus was his father] and said, 'Won't Alexander stop slandering me to Hera?'" (*Alex.* 3.4). This anecdote plays on the mythological commonplace that Zeus' jealous wife would regularly punish her philandering husband's human lovers. Though it concisely makes Zonaras' point, it has become unnecessary, since the idea of divine birth has been dismissed out of hand: Zonaras had no need of evidence because he was not making an argument. Olympias' quip was nonetheless too useful to ignore, and so he has transferred it to the direct discussion of Alexander's divinity, which in Zonaras, as in Plutarch, follows the king's visit to the temple of Ammon, the second passage in which Alexander's ancestry is made an issue.

In the development of Alexander's sense of his own divine identity, the visit to Ammon's temple at Siwah in the Egyptian desert is pivotal. Historians are divided as to whether Alexander believed he was the son of Zeus before he arrived, or whether

the visit inspired the idea.<sup>39</sup> We find in Plutarch evidence for both scenarios: Olympias told Alexander that he had a divine father before he left Macedonia, while the prophet of Ammon at Siwah confirmed that his father was Zeus. The episode at the temple is constructed of three anecdotes. In the first, Alexander asks the prophet of Ammon if all his father’s murderers have been punished, to which the prophet responds by warning Alexander to speak carefully, since his father is not mortal. Alexander then rephrases his question to ask if all Philip’s murderers have been punished, and adds a question about himself, “whether it was granted to him to be lord over all people” (*Alex.* 27.6). The prophet confirms that both things are true. Zonaras omits this anecdote, and the reasons seem clear. In answer to the first question, the prophet confirms unequivocally that Alexander has a divine father, and Zonaras has already declared this to be untrue. In answer to the second, the prophet relays the sort of prophecy that is revealed during Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem. Though the visit is not included in Plutarch’s *Alexander*, in terms of chronology it has already taken place, and so Alexander knows his destiny before his visit to Siwah. For Zonaras’ Alexander, great achievement is forecast and guaranteed by the Judeo-Christian God, not the pagan Zeus-Ammon.

The second anecdote involves a slip of the tongue that transmits a divine message. This is a case of *cladonomancy*, which occurs when an oracle is communicated through a chance utterance (*κληδών*). According to W. R. Halliday, this sort of oracle has two essential components: first, the words that are spoken produce some effect “other than the meaning or intention of the person who carelessly uttered them,” and second, “the act of

<sup>39</sup> See A. Collins, “Callisthenes on Olympias and Alexander’s Divine Birth,” *AHB* 26 (2012) 1–14; on the questions posed to the oracle see S. Pfeiffer, “Alexander der Große in Ägypten: Überlegungen zur Frage seiner pharaonischen Legitimation,” in V. Grieb et al. (eds.), *Alexander the Great and Egypt: History, Art, Tradition* (Wiesbaden 2014) 89–106, at 97–100; for an overview of Alexander at Siwah see A. Demandt, *Alexander der Große: Leben und Legende* (Munich 2009) 173–179.

acceptance makes them irrevocable, and that in the sense which best accords with the interest of the person who accepts them.”<sup>40</sup> In the story, the slip occurs when the prophet addresses Alexander, which in Plutarch is interpreted as an important sign while in Zonaras, as with the story of the serpent, it becomes the kernel of another fiction. When the prophet greets Alexander, he attempts to speak Greek and to say, “O, child” (ὦ παιδίον). He mispronounces the ending of παιδίον, however, and says ὦ παιδίος, which means that his greeting may be interpreted as ὦ παῖ Διός, “O child of Zeus.” Plutarch indicates that Alexander was pleased with the slip, which constitutes his acceptance of the oracle and confirms that it did indeed serve his interest. Then, Plutarch says, “word spread that the god had addressed him as the child of Zeus” (*Alex.* 27.9). That is to say, the report of the event is that the god spoke through the prophet’s κληδών to verify that Alexander was the son of Zeus.

Zonaras makes two important changes that cancel the meaning found in Plutarch. First, he omits Alexander’s pleasure at hearing the slip, and therefore the king does not confirm the oracle or appear to take the mispronunciation as a sign. This change alone, according to Halliday’s formula, would negate the prophecy. Second, Zonaras emphasizes the “barbarism” of the mistake. Plutarch writes that the prophet wished to speak Greek “in a spirit of goodwill” (μετά τινος φιλοφροσύνης) but erred in pronouncing the final syllable “on account of a barbarism” (ὕπὸ βαρβαρισμοῦ). The word βαρβαρισμός is not pejorative here but means something like “foreign way of speaking.” Zonaras, who neglects to mention the prophet’s goodwill, emphasizes his butchering of the Greek, writing that the prophet “barbarized” (ἐβαρβαρίσεν) the final syllable and that in turn “the barbarism

<sup>40</sup> W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of Its Methods and Principles* (London 1913) 47. For the identification of this anecdote as an instance of clonomancy see H. Bowden, “The Eagle Has Landed: Divination in the Alexander Historians,” in T. Howe et al. (eds.), *Ancient Historiography on War and Empire* (Oxford 2017) 149–168, at 154.



gave many people the opinion that Alexander’s birth was from the gods, and a story spread that the prophet had said ‘child of Zeus’ to him” (4.10, I 291). Zonaras has added the first of these two sentences to clarify that the opinion about Alexander’s birth arose from the barbarism, not a divinely inspired κληδών, and in the second sentence, which he adapts from Plutarch, he has replaced “god” with “the prophet” when explaining who called Alexander the son of Zeus. In his version, the prophet’s slip is just that, a mistake made by someone who did not have full command of Greek.

As with Zonaras’ changes to ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ and to the introduction to the biography, his changes to this anecdote must be deliberate. And here Zonaras was probably doing more than just negating the confirmation of Alexander’s divine father. Rather, in the encounter at Siwah as presented in Plutarch, Zonaras likely saw Alexander as engaged in a distinctly unchristian practice, of the sort that would make him unfit for an encounter with God. We read in John Chrysostom, for example, a condemnation of cledonomancy along with other practices, including augury, that he considered superstitious.<sup>41</sup> Augury was another tool used by the historical Alexander and is found in Plutarch, but Zonaras has omitted each of the three instances in the *Alexander* where a bird or birds deliver a sign.<sup>42</sup> Dreams, however, were an acceptable medium in the Byzantine period for receiving divine communication.<sup>43</sup> A dream is central to

<sup>41</sup> Chrysostom condemns cledonomancy (κληδονισμός) in his commentaries on 1 Corinthians (PG 61.38), 1 Timothy (62.552), and Galatians (61.623). Cited by M. W. Dickie, “The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye,” in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington 1995) 9–34, at 29.

<sup>42</sup> *Alex.* 25.4, 26.8–10, 33.2–3. Naiden, *Soldier, Priest, and God* 280–282, has collected all instances of augury in the ancient accounts of Alexander.

<sup>43</sup> See S. M. Oberhelman, “The Interpretation of Dream-Symbols in Byzantine Oneirocritic Literature,” *Byzantinoslavica* 47 (1986) 8–24, and *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation* (Aldershot 2008) 21–38. On dream interpretation as a religious phenomenon in the *Alexander* see C. J. King, “Plutarch, Alexander, and Dream Divination,” *ICS* 38 (2013) 81–111.

‘Alexander in Jerusalem’, as we have seen, and several others occur in Plutarch, where Alexander or others are informed of future events. Zonaras has transferred the most important of these predictive dreams, including those in the introduction, to his new biography.<sup>44</sup> The elimination of cleidomancy at Siwah, then, is part of a pattern of deliberately removing from Alexander’s story interactions with the divine that were considered unacceptable to Christians.

But if Zonaras wished to suppress the idea that Alexander was the son of Zeus or that he engaged in cleidomancy, why did he not simply omit the second anecdote, as he did the first? I suspect that he was attempting to rewrite a familiar episode and change his readers’ impressions. The visit to Siwah had very early become an established part of Alexander’s history. The notion that Alexander thought he was the son of Zeus probably goes back just as far.<sup>45</sup> The story had also entered the tradition of the *Alexander Romance*. In Recension  $\alpha$  of the *Romance*, which is the oldest of the versions and features a still-pagan Alexander, the king questions the god directly and asks for a sign, and when he sleeps that night, he sees a dream of Ammon embracing Olympias (I 30.3–4 Kroll). Zonaras, then, is using his adaptation of Plutarch to resist or correct the pre-Christian Alexander tradition.

After the interview with the prophet, Plutarch concludes the episode with a third anecdote: Alexander is said to have listened favorably to the philosopher Psammon, who opined that “all humans are ruled by god,” but also to have developed his own opinion on this matter, namely that “while god is the common

<sup>44</sup> *Alex.* 2.3–5 (Zonaras 4.8, I 285), Olympias and Philip learn of Alexander’s conception; *Alex.* 24.5, 8–9 (Zonaras 4.10, I 290), Alexander dreams of victory at Tyre; *Alex.* 52.2 (Zonaras 4.12, I 297), Aristander reminds Alexander that the death of Cleitus was predicted in a dream. The dream itself is reported by Plutarch at *Alex.* 50.6, but Zonaras omits it as part of a general condensing of this section.

<sup>45</sup> On the historical tradition see P. A. Brunt, *Arrian: Anabasis of Alexander I* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1976) 467–480.

father of all humans, he makes the best humans his own” (27.10–11). Zonaras omits this anecdote, probably for two reasons. One, while he might have agreed with Psammon (if he read the singular god as his own God), he would have been troubled by Alexander’s implication that he had become closely related to God. Two, after the episode at Siwah Plutarch adds a brief chapter in which he overtly discusses Alexander’s own response to the question of his divinity (28), and Zonaras seems to have been eager to add this passage immediately after discrediting the prophecy.

Plutarch opens this discussion with the observation that Alexander behaved towards foreigners as though he were certain of his divinity, but among Greeks he “made a god of himself” (ἐαυτὸν ἐξεθείαζε, 28.1) only sparingly. He then adds examples to demonstrate that Alexander sometimes did and sometimes did not make a show of his divinity to the Greeks, and he concludes thus: “Alexander, then, from what I have described, was himself clearly not affected or deluded, but he used belief in his divinity to enslave others” (28.6). Plutarch, it should be said, does not seem to have believed in the historical Alexander’s divine parentage or his divinity, and this discussion reflects his views.<sup>46</sup> Zonaras seizes on this skepticism, reducing Plutarch’s discussion to a bare minimum to make Alexander himself reject his own divinity. His version of the passage follows immediately upon the statement that a (false) story circulated about what the prophet at Siwah had said. It continues to play on the notion of barbarism, and in addition it deploys Olympias’ quip from the introduction (4.10, I 291–292):

And he boasted of his divine birth to the barbarians, so that even Olympias said, “Won’t Alexander stop slandering me to Hera?” But with the Greeks he backed away from the story. Once, when he had been wounded by an arrow and blood was flowing from the place where he had been struck, he said, “This flow is blood,

<sup>46</sup> See J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch: Alexander, A Commentary* (Oxford 1969) 73.

not ichor, such as flows from the blessed gods.”<sup>47</sup>

Zonaras, by carefully rearranging and editing his source, manages to put an unequivocal denial of divinity into Alexander’s mouth. His Alexander, therefore, in addition to engaging in no pagan religious practices, actively discourages others from believing he was divine.

### *Conclusion*

In Plutarch’s biography, just a few chapters after this discussion of divinity, Alexander encourages his troops before the battle of Gaugamela, where he will defeat Darius and become ruler of Persia. Despite Plutarch’s earlier claim that Alexander did not flaunt his divine ancestry to Greeks, his exhortation includes a prayer in which he asks his father Zeus for support (ἐπευχόμενος, εἴπερ ὄντως Διόθεν ἐστὶ γεγονώς, ἀμύναι καὶ συνεπιρῶσαι τοὺς Ἕλληνας, 33.1). Zonaras omits this passage entirely. Of course, his Alexander would not claim descent from Zeus, but in fact, he had no need to request assistance from any deity: Zonaras understood—from the tradition and his own reading in Josephus—that by this point in time, Alexander’s victory over Persia had already been promised to him by God.

Zonaras’ readers, however, will not encounter ‘Alexander in Jerusalem’ until Zonaras’ epitome of Plutarch concludes, and so they must wait to learn how Alexander managed to secure God’s help in defeating Darius. As we have seen, Zonaras previewed the visit to Jerusalem before commencing his epitome. To further set the stage, he includes a final anecdote related to Alexander’s divinity at the end. Alexander is planning to fake an apotheosis by drowning himself in the Euphrates, to disappear and thus, to create the impression that he has gone to live with the gods. When Roxane stops him, he complains, “‘You’ve begrudged me, wife, a reputation for having become a god and avoiding death’” (4.14, I 304). Though not found in the extant

<sup>47</sup> Zonaras has merged a quotation from Homer (ἰχώρ οἶός περ τε βέει μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν, *Il.* 5.340) into Alexander’s speech.

version of Plutarch’s *Alexander*, the anecdote may have come from a now-missing section of the *Life* or from another source.<sup>48</sup> In any case, Zonaras concludes his epitome of the *Alexander* as he began, with an overt rejection of Alexander’s divinity. When the main narrative resumes, Zonaras’ Alexander, now fully mortal and liberated from the taint of any divine parentage, is ready to visit Jerusalem and bow before God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See C. Pelling, “Plutarch, *Alexander* and *Caesar*: Two New Fragments?” *CQ* 23 (1973) 343–344; J. Lundon, “*P. Köln* XIII 499 and the (In)Completeness of Plutarch’s *Caesar*,” *ZPE* 185 (2013) 107–110.

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