Plutarch, Alexander, and the Discovery of Naphtha

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PLUTARCH OPENS his *Life of Alexander* with a justly celebrated statement of the aims of the biographer. In contrast to the historian, the biographer is concerned solely with those incidents that reveal the virtues or vices of his subject. We should therefore be surprised to encounter an extended passage in the *Life* that is not motivated by a desire to illuminate Alexander's character. Yet in ch.35 Plutarch makes a lengthy digression on the nature of naphtha, occasioned by its discovery by Alexander's men when they reached Babylon. At first sight this description appears to be just the sort of thing that Plutarch would regard as outside the limits of biography. But it can be shown that for Plutarch the nature of this substance helps to illuminate, to a degree not previously appreciated, the character of Alexander. Specifically, the volatile and flammable nature of naphtha is remarkably like the nature of Alexander as portrayed by Plutarch. This is not, I think, to be regarded as exclusively metaphorical; rather Plutarch is showing us that he conceives of character (at least partly) in material and physiological terms.

Nor should this be particularly surprising. The attempt to find a correlation between character and physical features is a persistent element in Greek medicine and thought,[1] and Plutarch himself lived at a time when the study of the 'science' of physiognomy was beginning to flourish.[2] The most influential of the ancient physiognomical writers, the sophist Polemo of Laodicea,[3] was a younger

[1] E. C. Evans, "Galen the Physician as Physiognomist," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 287–98; R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (New York 1964) 1–66; H. Flashar, *Melancholie und Melancholiker in den medizinischen Theorien der Antike* (Berlin 1966). See also the useful collection of texts (from Homer to Eustathius) in R. Förster, *Scriptores Physiognomonici Graeci et Latini* II (Leipzig 1893) 237–352.

[2] E. C. Evans, "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century A.D.," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 96–108; *Physiognomics in the Ancient World, TAPhS* N.S. 59.5 (1969) 11 *et passim*.

[3] Philostr. *VS* 1.25; H. Jüttner, *De Polemonis rhetoris vita operibus arte* (Breslau 1898); W. Stegemann, *RE* 21 (1952) 1320–57; G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1969).

contemporary. In fact in his treatise *De physiognomia* Polemo gives a (scurrilous) description of Plutarch's intimate friend, the Gallic hermaphrodite Favorinus of Arelate.[4] And there is evidence from Plutarch's works that he was influenced by physiognomical theory and described the subjects of his *Lives* at least to some degree in accordance with physiognomical principles. Elizabeth C. Evans attempted to demonstrate this with reference to the *Lives* of Sulla and Alexander.[5] While her treatment of Sulla is satisfactory (though brief), the discussion of Alexander is inadequate. For the 'heavenward gaze' and the long hair, which she discusses in detail, are not mentioned in the *Life*, while the important features that Plutarch does mention (Alexander's complexion, *ἡ τοῦ σώματος κρᾶσις*) are not treated.

Plutarch lets us know at the very start (1.3) that he is familiar with one of the fundamental tenets of the physiognomical writers, namely that character is most clearly revealed in the face and the expression of the eyes: *ὥσπερ οὖν οἱ ζωγράφοι τὰς ὁμοιότητας ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν ὄψιν εἰδῶν οἷς ἐμφαίνεται τὸ ἦθος ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ἐλάχιστα τῶν λοιπῶν μερῶν φροντίζοντες, οὕτως ἡμῖν δοτέον κτλ*. This is stated also in the conclusion of the oldest surviving physiognomical treatise, attributed in antiquity to Aristotle (*Phgn.* 814b = Förster I 90.11–12), and the importance of the eyes for detecting character is mentioned frequently in the later physiognomical writers.[6] Here of course we are in the realm of metaphor, as Plutarch is explicitly drawing a parallel between painters' concentration on facial appearance and the biographer's emphasis on *πράξεις*, inasmuch as both appearance and actions give appropriate indication of character.[7] But Plutarch does not entirely

[4] I 160.6ff. Here and below I cite the physiognomical writers by volume, page, and line numbers in Förster's edition (*supra* n.1). Polemo—or rather the Arabic translator of Polemo's lost treatise—does not give Favorinus' name, which is supplied only by the anonymous Latin *De phys.* II 58.3; J. Mesk, *WS* 50 (1932) 58–59. For Favorinus see Philostr. *VS* 1.8; K. Ziegler, *RE* 21 (1951) 675; E. Mensching, *Favorin von Arelate* I (Berlin 1963); A. Barigazzi, *Favorino di Arelate, Opere* (Florence 1966).

[5] Sulla: *TAPA* 72 (1941) 104–05, repeated almost verbatim in *Physiognomics* (*supra* n.2) 56–57. Alexander: *Physiognomics* 57–58. *Cf.* also Förster II 276–78, 339–40.

[6] *E.g.*, Polemo I 106.20; Adamantius I 305.9; anon. Lat. *De phys.* II 31.3. *Cf.* also *Anth. Pal.* 7.661; Cic. *Orat.* 18.60; *de Or.* 3.57.216; 3.59. 222; *Leg.* 1.9.27; *Pis.* 1.1; Pliny, *HN* 11.37.145; Philostr. *VA* 2.30; Quint. 11.3.75; Gell. 1.9.2; *Anecd. Ox.* 3.78.14 Cramer.

[7] Compare 1.2 *ἔμφασιν ἤθους* (of actions) with 1.3 *οἷς ἐμφαίνεται τὸ ἦθος* (of facial features); *cf.* also 4.1 *ἐμφαίνουσιν* (of Lysippus' statues of Alexander).

ignore description of personal appearance.[8] For the most part these descriptions are very brief and not at all specific,[9] but Plutarch gives an unusually full account of Alexander's physical characteristics.

We are told that Lysippus best captured those of Alexander's characteristics that his successors[10] tried to copy: *τήν τ' ἀνάτασιν τοῦ αὐχένος εἰς εὐώνυμον ἠσυχῇ κεκλιμένου καὶ τὴν ὑγρότητα τῶν ὀμμάτων* (4.2). For the "slight tilting of the neck" compare the following, from the anonymous Latin *De phys.* (II 99.9ff): *cum autem manuum ac pedum motus cum totius corporis consentiunt motibus et cum humeri moderate et tranquille inferuntur cum* leni inclinatione cervicis, *magnanimum hominem dicunt et fortem: huiusmodi leonis incessus est.* This then is one of the signs of the brave, magnanimous, leonine man. Alexander's courage needs no further documentation. His magnanimity (*μεγαλοψυχία*) is referred to, *e.g.*, at 4.8, 30.11, 42.10. His leonine character, which is particularly developed in the Romance and in later portraiture, is also a feature of Plutarch's treatment (*e.g.*, 2.4–5, 13.2, 40.4) and is dealt with below in an Appendix. The famous "melting look of his eyes," which was apparently unique to Alexander (and his imitators), is not referred to by the physiognomical writers. The *ὑγρότης* that they do mention[11]—and that is variously the sign of the just man, the gentle man, the ingenious man, the adulterous man, the drunkard, and the androgyne—is rather a watering of the eyes (as opposed to *ξηρότης*) and is not here pertinent.

Plutarch continues his discussion of Alexander's appearance by stating that Apelles did not depict accurately his complexion, but painted him too dark:[12] *ἦν δὲ λευκός, ὥς φασιν· ἡ δὲ λευκότης*

[8] A. Wardman, *CQ* N.S. 17 (1967) 414–20; *Plutarch's Lives* (Berkeley 1974) 140–44. Wardman denies that Plutarch is "in any sense under the spell of physiognomical theory." But the reason Plutarch makes a point of mentioning a discrepancy between character and appearance (*Phoc.* 5.1) is precisely that he regarded it as so unusual.

[9] *E.g.*, *Pomp.* 2; *Alc.* 1; *Per.* 3; *Cic.* 3. Very different is Suetonius' practice: J. Couissin, "Suétone physiognomiste," *REL* 31 (1953) 234–56; Evans, *Physiognomics* (*supra* n.2) 52–56.

[10] That is, Alexander's successors. I. Scott-Kilvert, *The Age of Alexander* (New York 1973) 255, erroneously translates, "many of Lysippus' followers." *Cf. Quomodo adul.* 53D. For Lysippus' portraits see M. Bieber, *Alexander the Great in Greek and Roman Art* (Chicago 1964) 32–37; E. Schwarzenberg, *Entretiens Hardt* 22 (Vandœuvres-Genève 1976) 249–56.

[11] Adamantius and Ps.-Polemo I 336–37, 346, 389–90, anon. Lat. *De phys.* II 123.

[12] This shows incidentally that Plutarch's source here is literary rather than artistic; *cf.* Wardman, *CQ* 17 (1967) 417. Bieber (*supra* n.10) 32 and Evans, *Physiognomics* (*supra* n.2) 57, are wrong to regard Plutarch's description as based on Lysippus' portraits.

ἐπεφοίνισσεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τὸ στῆθος μάλιστα καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον (4.3). This correction of Apelles is of importance to the physiognomist for, according to the Aristotelian treatise, too dark a complexion is a sign of cowardice.[13] On the other hand, a fair complexion, as long as it is not excessively pale or uncompounded, is the sign of the brave and spirited man and the man of good disposition (Adamantius 386.9–11 and 411.1–2; *cf.* Ps.-Polemo 411.14–15). The tendency of his complexion to ruddiness about the chest and face is also not without physiognomical significance. Reddish color about the chest is a sign of those who are quick to anger: οἷς δὲ περὶ τὰ στήθη ἐπιφλεγές ἐστι χρῶμα, δυσόργητοι ([Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a = Förster I 74.15). For Alexander's anger see, *e.g.*, 9.8, 49.7, 51.1, 62.5, 70.4, 74.3. A reddish tinge to the face is the sign of a modest man: οἷς τὸ πρόσωπον ἐπιφοινίσσον ἐστίν, αἰσχυντηλοί εἰσιν ([Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a = Förster I 76.2–3). Plutarch illustrates his subject's modesty in ch. 21 and 22.

The last element in Plutarch's description of Alexander is for our purposes the most important. We are told that Alexander's breath was sweet-smelling, as was his body generally. This characteristic (which is, presumably, a sign of divinity) is in itself not nearly so interesting as the reason Plutarch[14] gives for it: αἰτία δ' ἴσως ἡ τοῦ σώματος κρᾶσις, πολύθερμος οὖσα καὶ πυρώδης· ἡ γὰρ εὐωδία γίνεται πέψει τῶν ὑγρῶν ὑπὸ θερμότητος (4.5). But Plutarch goes even further than this and gives Alexander's bodily heat as the explanation, not only of his pleasant smell, but of his character as well: Ἀλέξανδρον δ' ἡ θερμότης τοῦ σώματος ὡς ἔοικε καὶ ποτικὸν καὶ θυμοειδῆ παρεῖχεν (4.7).[15] In other words, Alexander's 'character' is of the hot and dry[16] type later to be known as 'choleric'. While the systematization

[13] Arist. *Phgn.* 812a = Förster I 72.16. Similarly Adamantius I 386.8–9 and Ps.-Polemo I 386.17.

[14] That the explanation is Plutarch's and not his source's is stated correctly by J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1969) 11–12, following Wardman. To the passages mentioned by Hamilton to illustrate the association of fragrance with divinity add *De Is. et Os.* 357A; *De vit. aere al.* 831D; Theognis 9; Ap. Rhod. 4.430; Moschus 2.91.

[15] A. E. Wardman, "Plutarch and Alexander," *CQ* 5 (1955) 96–107. I am much indebted to Wardman's article, which shows the importance of this passage and of τὸ θυμοειδές in Plutarch's portrait of Alexander. My own arguments tend to support the view of Wardman, who concentrates on the psychological aspects of τὸ θυμοειδές and misses the physiognomical implications.

[16] The 'dry' aspect is supplied in 4.6, where Plutarch 'explains' Alexander's εὐωδία by pointing out that fragrant spices are produced mostly by hot and dry regions (οἱ ξηροὶ καὶ

and terminology of the doctrine of the four humors were not yet fixed in Plutarch's day, the hot and dry element of the body had long been identified with the bile, and the bile with anger.[17] Within a generation or two of Plutarch's death Galen was to describe, without mention of the bile, the character of those who suffer from the δυσκρασία of cardiac hyperxerothermy: εἰς δὲ τὰς πράξεις ἕτοιμοι καὶ θυμικοὶ καὶ ταχεῖς ⟨καὶ⟩ ἄγριοι καὶ ἀνήμεροι καὶ ἰταμοὶ καὶ ἀναίσχυντοι καὶ τυραννικοὶ τοῖς ἤθεσι, καὶ γὰρ ὀξύθυμοι καὶ δύσπαυστοι.[18] With the exception of ἀναισχυντία, this description coincides remarkably with Plutarch's portrait of Alexander. This portrait, then, is consistent with the theoretical writings of the physiognomists and physicians who are concerned to show the interdependence of *eidos* and *ethos*. Now Plutarch in his *Lives* depicts each of his heroes as having a particular nature that disposes him to act in a particular, excessive manner, contrary to the golden mean of virtue.[19] In the case of Lysander, for instance, Plutarch shows us the Spartan general attempting to transcend his innate melancholy by redirecting (we might almost here speak of 'sublimating') his tendency toward cupidity for the benefit of his homeland.[20] Similarly Alexander must

διάπυροι τόποι); *cf. Quaest.conviv.* 1.6.1 (623D–F). Old men also are dry and therefore particularly susceptible to drink: *Quaest.conviv.* 3.3 (650C–D).

[17] Yellow bile is hot and dry already according to the author of the Hippocratic *Nat. hom.* 7 (*ca.* 400 B.C.; *cf.* C. Fredrich, *Hippokratische Untersuchungen* [Philologische Untersuchungen 15, Berlin 1899] 51ff). Bile = anger goes back to Homer: LSJ *s.vv.* χολή and χόλος. That individuals have natures determined by the preponderance of one or another of the humors is hinted at in the Hippocratic *Hum.* 16 (not taken into account by Flashar and Klibansky *et al.* [*supra* n.1]), under the influence of *Aër.* 10 *et passim.*

[18] *Ars medica* 11 (I 334 Kühn = Förster II 285.10–13). Plutarch himself uses the term δυσκρασία 'unpleasantness of climate' at 58.1. There it is one of the many adversities of fortune that Alexander must conquer, just as (so I will argue below) he must transcend his own φύσις. It should be noted that εὐκρασία is a hypothetical mean which does not actually occur; Flashar (*supra* n.1) 110. Like the medical writers, Plutarch variously employs κρᾶσις and its compounds of a permanent, constitutional condition (*e.g.*, *Alex.* 4.5) or of a temporary, diseased state (*e.g.*, *Dion* 2.4).

[19] For Plutarch's indebtedness to Peripatetic ethics see especially A. Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (*AbhGött.* 37, 1956) 57–103.

[20] Plutarch explicitly characterizes Lysander as melancholic (*Lys.* 2.5, citing the Aristotelian *Pr.* 30.1; *cf. Lys.* 28.1). One of the characteristics of the melancholic disposition is greed (Aretaeus of Cappadocia 3.5 [*CMG* II 39–41 Hude]; Klibansky *et al.* [*supra* n.1] 62–63). But Plutarch goes out of his way to show (*Lys.* 16–17) that those actions that might be construed as being inspired by greed were in fact the result of Lysander's desire to accommodate his friends, and throughout the *Life* (2.6, 16.1, *Comp.* 3) Plutarch excuses Lysander by stating that his acquisitiveness was all for the good of Sparta, whither he sent all he received.

constantly struggle to keep his fiery nature under control. Alexander's success in this struggle Plutarch shows us immediately. No sooner has he told us (4.7) that Alexander's bodily heat rendered him spirited and fond of drink than he continues (4.8–11) with examples of Alexander's *sophrosyne*.

How then does the excursus on naphtha illuminate Alexander's nature? Both Alexander and naphtha are obviously of a fiery and volatile nature. But the fiery nature of Alexander is two-sided: he is equally susceptible to the destructive flames of anger and to the kindling of ambition.[21] Naphtha too has this double nature, and it is the purpose of the first half of the excursus to display this. Plutarch begins with two anecdotes. The Babylonians, eager to show Alexander the φύcιc καὶ δύναμιc of the naphtha, sprinkled some of it over the road leading to Alexander's quarters. Then at dusk they set a torch to one end, and with the speed of thought the flame shot to the other end and the entire street was engulfed in flames (35.3–4). The emphasis throughout the brief account is on the incredible speed with which the flame travels and its brilliance. Speed is certainly characteristic of Alexander, as it is of 'cholerics' generally.[22]

That Plutarch intends us to regard the effulgence of the flame as parallel to the 'brilliance' of Alexander's exploits is, I think, made clearer in the next anecdote. This rather repulsive incident (35.5–9) also illustrates the frightening and dangerous aspect of naphtha. A certain Athenian named Athenophanes wished to divert the king at his bath with a cruel spectacle. He suggested testing the efficacy of the naphtha on Stephanus, a young singer of singularly ludicrous countenance. "If," Athenophanes joked, "the naphtha can cause *him* to light up, it would seem that it has irresistible and remarkable power (ἄμαχον καὶ δεινὴν αὐτοῦ τὴν δύναμιν εἶναι)." The experiment on the inexplicably compliant Stephanus turned out to be all too successful, and Alexander feared for the boy's life. Fortunately, however, there were enough bystanders with buckets of bath-water that the jest, though disabling, was not fatal.

[21] "θυμόc, meaning anger, occurs several times as an explanation of evil. . . . In a good sense θυμόc. . . accounts for much of the best in Alexander," Wardman (*supra* n.15) 103.

[22] Alexander: *e.g.*, 4.10, 11.5–6. According to the later medical writers, 'cholerics' are quick in every respect, even having rapid digestion: *cito digerentes* (Ps.-Soranus, Vindician), *veloces, agiles* (Bede), *fervidi erunt in ira et celerius declinant* (*Sap. art. med.*). *Cf.* also Galen, cited above (n.18).

This anecdote has interesting associations with other passages in the *Life*. Most obviously, of course, Alexander is himself irresistible and remarkable.[23] But this passage also evokes an earlier jest that, Plutarch tells us, was frigid enough to put out the conflagration that destroyed the temple of Artemis at Ephesus.[24] In both cases the conceit is that metaphorical frigidity (ugliness of appearance, tastelessness of style) is capable of extinguishing a literal fire. But in this case the literal fire is explicitly connected with Alexander, for the fire at Ephesus coincided with Alexander's birth. This appears to be yet another of the indications that Plutarch gives of Alexander's fiery nature: the night before her marriage Olympias dreamed that her womb was struck by lightning and consumed with flames (2.3); Alexander's temperament is hot and fiery (4.5); at the town of the Malli the inhabitants were terrified by *cέλαc τι καὶ φάcμα* which appeared about Alexander's body (63.4; *cf. De Alex. fort.* 2.343E). Just as naphtha is at the same time wonderful and dangerous, so Alexander's fiery nature makes him at once readily susceptible to drink and to destructive anger and capable of performing the most brilliant deeds. There is an interesting doublet to this anecdote a few pages further on. Chapter 38 describes the burning of the palace at Persepolis, at the instigation of Thais and wine. The structure of the two anecdotes is identical: Alexander is at his relaxation in a large company. An Athenian[25] makes a suggestion involving entertainment of an incendiary nature. The fire is lit with Alexander's consent but soon threatens to get out of control. The fire is put out, again with Alexander's consent. The difficulty of

[23] *δεινός*: *e.g.*, 33.6. *ἀνίκητος*: 3.9, 14.7; F. Pfister, *Historia* 13 (1964) 39–47; Hamilton (*supra* n.14) 34–35. *Cf.* also 7.1, where Ziegler follows Reiske in reading *δυσνίκητον*.

[24] 3.6: "It is not surprising," joked Hegesias of Magnesia, "that the temple burned down, as Artemis was away, assisting at Alexander's birth."

[25] Both Thais and Athenophanes are stated to be Athenians. I would guess that the latter's patriotic name and the nationality are Plutarch's inventions, designed to enhance the parallel with the anecdote about Thais: Strabo's version (16.743) omits the rôle of Athenophanes. (The name Stephanus is also likely invented as foreshadowing the crown Alexander wears at 38.5 and that mentioned in 35.10.) Athens represents to Alexander an incentive to glorious deeds: 13.2, 16.17, and especially 60.6, where Plutarch quotes (from Onesicritus) Alexander's complaint at the Hydaspes: "O men of Athens, would you believe what risks I run for the sake of a good repute among you?" Alexander's motive at Persepolis is given as *φιλοτιμία* (38.5), which, like anger, is often said metaphorically to be kindled: *Ages.* 5.5; *Cleom.* 2.2; *Ti. Gracch.* 8.10; *Caes.* 58.4; F. Fuhrmann, *Les Images de Plutarque* (Paris 1964) 83 n.1, 87–88. Anger: J. Geffcken, *Kynika und Verwandtes* (Heidelberg 1909) 27ff.

extinguishing the burning naphtha suggests the extraordinary effort required of 'cholerics' to keep their fiery natures under control. Alexander's behavior at Persepolis illustrates just that effort. Immediately after this comes an abrupt transition: chapters 39–42 give numerous examples of Alexander's generosity (even [39.6] to one who seems to have aroused Alexander's anger!) and self-control (42.10 ἐγκράτεια).

Plutarch continues the digression on naphtha by approving (εἰκότως) the suggestion, made by those who are wont to rationalize myth,[26] that naphtha was the substance Medea used to murder Creon and his daughter. The reference is to Euripides' treatment of the legend, as is clear from the phrase τὸν τραγῳδούμενον στέφανον καὶ τὸν πέπλον (*cf. Med.* 784–89, 1159–60). Plutarch had earlier in the *Life* quoted from Euripides' play: it is said (λέγεται 10.6) that when Pausanias, the man who later assassinated Philip, complained to Alexander of Philip's indifference to his plight, Alexander replied by repeating a line from the play,[27] thus clearly associating himself with Medea. Immediately after this, however, Plutarch assures us, without explicitly committing himself as to Alexander's responsibility for Philip's murder, that Alexander punished those who took part in the conspiracy and was angry with Olympias for her brutal treatment of Cleopatra. But it seems most unlikely that Plutarch wishes us to think that Alexander had a hand in his father's murder; he seems content to let the blame rest with Olympias. If that is the case, the Euripidean verse is for Plutarch an example of a flare-up of Alexander's fiery temper. This he managed to control to such an extent that, not only did he refrain from attacking Philip, he actually punished those responsible for the murder.

Plutarch goes on to give the explanation these rationalists offer (35.11–12). The tiara and robe that Medea sent to Creon's daughter were not themselves the source of the fire, nor did the fire break out on its own; rather the objects, smeared with naphtha, burst into flame when fire was brought too close. For the aura of fire has

[26] The Stoics, according to Hamilton (*supra* n.14) 94, probably rightly. See now D. Babut, *Plutarque et le stoïcisme* (Paris 1969) 371 *et passim*. There seems to have been some confusion in Byzantine times as to whether 'Median fire' was named for Medea or for Media, the region which was famous in Hellenistic times for its production of petroleum: R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* I² (Leiden 1964) 41.

[27] 288 τὸν δόντα καὶ γήμαντα καὶ γαμουμένην.

different effects on different substances: in the case of certain substances, fire simply produces light and heat, "but in the case of those substances that are dry and volatile, or that possess a sufficiently oily and moist nature, the rays become concentrated and, bursting into a furious blaze, quickly transform the substance." That this is the explanation of the unnamed rationalists is clear from the accusative + infinitive construction; that it is not a direct quotation from one particular author is clear from the vague reference to its authorship. It stands to reason, therefore, that these words are Plutarch's adaptation to suit his own context. In particular, the reference to "those substances that are dry and volatile (*ξηρότητα πνευματικὴν . . . κεκτημένοις*)" seems to have no connection with Medea and the moist, oily naphtha. Indeed it appears to have no other function than to remind us of the similarity between the behavior of naphtha and that of Alexander, the 'dryness' of whose nature has been shown above. This is reinforced by the unique word Plutarch chooses to describe the ignition of the material: *πυριμανοῦντα*.[28] For 'fury' is the extreme manifestation of Alexander's 'spirited' nature. At the Granicus river, for instance, *ἔδοξε μανικῶς καὶ πρὸς ἀπόνοιαν μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμῃ στρατηγεῖν* (16.4). For the sake of *variatio* Plutarch later (16.14) uses the expression *θυμῷ μᾶλλον ἢ λογισμῷ* of Alexander's behavior in the same encounter. But when he uses the stronger form of expression Plutarch goes out of his way to make it clear that Alexander only "gave the impression of acting furiously." In fact, Alexander maintained his fiery nature well under control and used it to good effect, as the result of the battle testifies.

The remainder of Plutarch's digression is taken up with the question of the origin of naphtha. There is uncertainty regarding the *γένεσις* of the substance, just as there is, in Plutarch's account (2–3.4), regarding that of Alexander. Unfortunately, the first explanation Plutarch gives is lost owing to textual corruption. What

[28] The word seems not to occur elsewhere. Ziegler (*RhM* 84 [1935] 374–75) emended to *πυριγονοῦντα* because of *λιπαρὰν καὶ πυριγόνον* in the next sentence. But this word is not elsewhere attested and is otherwise no improvement. I must admit that I have little confidence that I understand correctly *πνευματικήν*. My rendering 'volatile' is a guess; Hamilton (*supra* n.14) 94 and Scott-Kilvert (n.10) 293 translate 'dry and porous'. If it is a technical term, it may have the same meaning as *πνευματῶδες* at *Quaest.conviv.* 4.2.2 (664E), itself a difficult passage. In 'psychological' terms, *πνεῦμα* seems to be synonymous with *θυμός*; *cf. Alex.* 6.6 (of Bucephalas).

the theory was cannot now be reconstructed but, like the unnecessary reference to dry and volatile substances earlier, it may have pointed to a further connection with the nature of Alexander. At any rate, the second (and approved) explanation is that naphtha springs up from a region whose soil is oily and ignigenous. "For indeed," continues Plutarch, omitting mention of oiliness, "the region around Babylon is quite fiery," using the same word he had earlier used in his characterization of Alexander's 'disposition'.[29] As illustration of the heat of Babylonian soil Plutarch tells us that Harpalus, when he tried to adorn the palace with all manner of plants, was successful in propagating everything but the psychrophyte ivy. With this incident Plutarch concludes his digression on the nature of naphtha.

It is reasonable to ask why Plutarch has taken up space to illustrate the innate hostility between ivy and τὸ πυρῶδες in a work which purports to be about the character of Alexander. Again, I think, this anecdote does serve to illuminate Alexander's character. The connection between ivy and the god Dionysus is so natural and automatic in Greek thought that, for instance, in the Attic deme of Acharnae the god was called simply *Κιccόc*.[30] And the hostility between the dry Alexander and the moist[31] Dionysus seems to have been a prominent feature of the tradition surrounding Alexander, and Plutarch alludes to it occasionally. This hostility deserves extended investigation; here I can only refer to the pertinent passages. Most explicitly, Plutarch reports (13.4) Alexander's conviction that the murder of Cleitus and the failure to advance into India were caused by the anger of Dionysus, which was provoked by Alexander's destruction of Thebes. The tradition may very likely also have given as a reason for Dionysus' opposition to Alexander's conquest of India the god's jealousy and fear of having his own Indian exploits overshadowed. As to the murder of Cleitus, Plutarch tells us (50.7) that it followed upon Alexander's sacrifice to the Dioscuri. We learn

[29] The κρᾶcιc of Alexander is πυρώδης (4.5), as is that of the soil near Babylon (35.14 and 15).

[30] Paus. 1.31.6. Sophocles gives ivy the epithet οἰνωπός, in obvious allusion to its Dionysiac association (*OC* 674; *cf.* 678–80). Plutarch was familiar with this passage, as he quotes *OC* 668–73 at *An seni* 785A. For the connection between Dionysus and ivy see *Alex.* 2.9; *Quaest.conviv.* 3.2 (esp. 649E); *Quaest.Rom.* 112; W. F. Otto, *Dionysus*, transl. R. B. Palmer (Bloomington 1965) 152–57; E. Simon, *Reallexikon f. Antike u. Christentum* IV (1959) 612–16.

[31] πάcης ὑγρᾶc φύcεωc . . . κύριον καὶ ἀρχηγόν (*sc.* Διόνυcον), *De Is. et Os.* 365A. See Otto (*supra* n.30) 160ff.; E. R. Dodds, ed. *Euripides, Bacchae*[2] (Oxford 1960) xi–xii.

from Arrian (4.8.2) that Alexander was slighting Dionysus, to whom sacrifice was due, when he sacrificed to the Dioscuri.

Finally, one of the incidents prophetic of Alexander's death at Babylon involved a man whom neither of the other sources (Arrian, Diodorus) names. According to Plutarch, the man that mysteriously appeared and sat on the king's throne was a prisoner named Dionysius (73.7–9). That this name is significant is indicated by the fact that the man was sent by Serapis, who had miraculously loosened his chains. Plutarch elsewhere identifies Serapis with Dionysus,[32] and the chain trick is indelibly associated with the Theban god. But Plutarch is not here giving a mythological explanation. Rather he is giving a 'scientific' explanation for the antipathy between Alexander and Dionysus. Alexander is forced to drink by his hot, dry nature. Rather than viewing his drinking and his susceptibility to anger as moral failings, as vices punishable by the god, Plutarch turns them into positive virtues! Like every mortal, Alexander is possessed of a κρᾶσις that falls somewhat short of the ideal blend. His virtue consists in his heroic struggle to keep his (inevitably) defective nature under control. The purpose of the digression on naphtha is to illustrate the awesome power of nature and, by implication, the odds that great men must overcome in order to act virtuously.

Appendix: On Alexander's Leonine Character

The following are the characteristics (according to the physiognomical writers) of lions, with volume, page, and line references to Förster's edition, and the location of representative ascriptions of those characteristics to Alexander in Plutarch's *Life*: ἄλκιμος, ἀνδρεῖος, εὔψυχος, *fortis, audax, violentus* (I 12.3, 18.13, 24.8, 74.3, 76.15, 80.10–12, 172.5, 224.17, 262.12, 349.10, 373.2, 375.7, 400.3, II 64.11, 66.6, 70.3, 87.11, 94.7, 100.1, 153.6; *Alex. passim*); μεγαλόψυχος, -νους, -φρων, *magnanimus* (I 64.3, 64.9, 66.5, 70.6, 70.15, 82.11, 172.6, 228.8, 373.2, 375.7, 400.3, II 66.6, 70.3, 100.1; *Alex.* 30.11, 42.10; F. Pfister, *Historia* 13 [1964] 69–70); ἐλευθέριος,

[32] *De Is. et Os.* 362B. Compare the other significantly named Dionysius, *ibid.* 361F. Chains loosened: Eur. *Bacch.* 443–48 with Dodds' note. For the incident at Babylon see Ph.-J. Derchain and J. Hubaux, "Le fantôme de Babylone," *AntCl* 19 (1950) 367–82; S. K. Eddy, *The King is Dead* (Lincoln 1961) 109–10. There seems also to have been in antiquity a tradition *associating* Alexander with Dionysus (A. D. Nock, *JHS* 48 [1928] 21–30) and Serapis (C. B. Welles, *Historia* 11 [1962] 271–98), but I can find no indication of this in Plutarch's *Life*.

liberalis (I 78.17, 172.6, II 111.8; *Alex.* 39, 59.4); θυμικός, θυμώδης, *animosus* (I 349.10, 376.16, II 94.8; *Alex.* 2.5, 4.7); αὐθάδης (I 70.16; *Alex.* 7.1); *iracundus* (I 172.5; *Alex.* 49.7, 50.2, 70.4); *pudibundus* (I 172.6; *Alex.* 21–22); φιλόθηρος (I 54.14; *Alex.* 23.3–4).

In addition, Alexander is frequently associated with lions. Most explicitly, Plutarch recounts the story (2.4–5) about Philip, who dreamed that he sealed with a lion-sign the womb of Olympias. Aristander interpreted the dream to mean that Olympias was pregnant and that the child would be θυμοειδὴς καὶ λεοντώδης. (For this incident see G. W. Dyson, *CQ* 23 [1929] 186–95.) At 13.2 Plutarch compares Alexander, after his brutal treatment of the Thebans, with lions whose fury is sated with slaughter. After he had killed a lion single-handed, a Spartan ambassador quipped (40.4) καλῶς γ', Ἀλέξανδρε, πρὸς τὸν λέοντα ἠγώνισαι περὶ τᾶς βασιλείας.

Finally, one of the ominous portents before Alexander's death involved an ass kicking a lion to death (73.6). The association of the lion with Alexander is obvious. What seems not to have been noticed, however, is that the fulfillment of the omen is referred to in 77.4. There Plutarch reports, only to reject, the theory that Alexander met his end as a result of poison. This alleged poison would seem to be particularly deadly for the hot and dry Alexander—it was nothing other than extremely cold water from the river Styx. And the only vessel that could contain it was the hoof of an ass!

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA
December, 1979