

# THE ORIGIN OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE MACEDONIANS

## DOCUMENTATION ACCORDING TO ANCIENT GREEK LITERARY TEXTS

**Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarchus, Arrian, Demosthenes, Polybius, Isocrates, Strabo, Hesiod**

### INTRODUCTION

This survey is written to prove historical facts that are actually indisputable and beyond the shadow of any doubt. However, since today there is on-going discourse on the self-evident, it might be useful that we should remain and explore these issues for a while. One of my recent studies on the origin of Alexander and the Macedonians, based on the works of great authors of ancient Greece has led to the documentation of the –more or less known- arguments on the issue. And since the semiotic value of the word is a far more serious issue that one could assume, and even more significantly when it concerns an historic and highly controversial word as Macedonia, it is essential to take a close look on what is recorded by the historians of antiquity<sup>1</sup>.

### I. THUCYDIDES (464 – 395 BC)

Starting from the beginnings of the references on the term *Hellenes/Greeks* we see that Thucydides, one of the greatest historians and political philosophers of all times reports that before the Trojan War, there is no mention of the term Hellenes and that the first time we meet the term is in Homer as a definition of those from Phthiotis under Achilles who participated in the expedition against Troy – “the first Hellenes”<sup>2</sup>. In Homer, Thucydides continues, the Hellenes are referred to in the same sense as the *Achaeans, Argaei (from Argos), Danaans*. It should be pointed out that the term “barbarians” is not met in the Homeric epics since the term “Hellenes” had not yet been singled out (and later established) “as the exact opposite definition” to distinguish Hellenes from ‘barbarians’<sup>3</sup>, as the great historian concludes.

In the context of this duality within ancient Greek literature (Hellenes- barbarians) barbarians were those who were not Hellenes. In the light of this concept, all the historic sources available show that Macedonians were Hellenes and not barbarians. And it would be strange if it weren't, since the birthplace of the Hellenes, Phthiotis is only a few kilometers south of Macedonia. From Phthiotis the name spread within a large area which included the entire Hellenic world. It would have been incomprehensible to spread everywhere except the neighbouring Imathia and Pieria (cradles of Macedonia), which were –anyway- much closer than e.g. Athens, the eternal metropolis of the Hellenic civilization.

The forgery of the theory of the non Hellenic origin of the Macedonians was based on the fact that during the highest period of prosperity of the Hellenic world, the Hellenes of the centre, as Alexander Rangavis supports, distinguished themselves from those who lived

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations are not necessarily in chronological order.

<sup>2</sup> Hellen was the son of Deukalion. (Sons of his were Doros, Xouthos and Aeolos).

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides *Historiae*, Lib. A, III “... ουδέ μη βαρβάρους εἶρηκε δια το μηδέ Ἑλληνάς ποῦ ἀντίπαλον εἰς ἓν ὄνομα ἀποκεκρίσθαι”

in the periphery (from Macedonia, Epirus), because these were classified in a lower rank of political and social development due to intermarriage with other races. Rangavis pinpoints that the Dorian invasion and the Delphi Amfiktyon contributed to the expansion of the name Hellenes to “the entire Hellenic race<sup>4</sup>”.

Back to Thucydides, in the history of the Peloponnesian War, and at the point where the expedition of the people of Thrace, under Sitalces against Macedonians is described, the geographical coordinates of “lower Macedonia ... of current Macedonia” as the historian names it are accurately defined<sup>5</sup>. As results from studying Thucydides’ description, old maps and current geography, the region is defined as being the area around the Pieria basin, the mouth of Axios river as far as the Pangaio mountain and beyond the Strymon river; the area includes Pella, Chalcidice, Vottia (next to Chalcidice), Eordea (Aridea), Almopia, Grystonia (Gyrtonia), Mygdonia, Anthemous (near Polygyros) and other Greek areas<sup>6</sup>. Worth mentioning is that Thucydides says that Macedonians include nations “over” as the Lyngistai<sup>7</sup> and Elimiotas<sup>8</sup> who are allies and - submissive- to the lower, “current” Macedonia as he describes it.

In old maps, these areas are located north of current Pieria and NE of Magnesia, within Greek territory. To the north of Lygkestia we find Paeonia (border area between Greece and FYROM, within the Greek territory), of which, as Thucydides says, the Macedonians conquered a narrow strip along the Axios river to Pella and as far as the sea. It is noteworthy that the Paeonians -probably those who had not been conquered by the Macedonians- are described by Arrian as barbarians, together with the Thracians, Illyrians, and Agrians<sup>9</sup>. The conclusion is that Macedonia at Thucydides’ time, “*in which Alexander<sup>10</sup> and his son Perdikkas reigned*” was the area the centre of which was Pieria, Imathia and Chalkidice<sup>11</sup>.

## II. HERODOTUS (485 – 421 BC)

A truly catalytic testimony regarding the national identity of Macedonians as a Hellenic race is in Herodotus in his description of the preparation for the battle in Plataeis (479 BC.), which put an end to the Persian ambitions to conquer Greece: on the eve of the battle Alexander A, son of Amyndas and king of Macedonia and unwilling ally of Mardonius, as a subordinate of the Persians<sup>9</sup>, he secretly, at night, approached the Athenian outposts and gave them valuable information regarding the strategic plans of Mardonius. He did this, as he said because “**was himself a Hellene and from an old family and would not want to see Greece enslaved**”. He begged the Athenians that in the case they won that they should care for his liberation<sup>10</sup>. Herodotus’ narrative through

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander R. Rangavis: Dictionary of Greek Archaeology, Volume A, entry ‘Ελλάς’.

<sup>5</sup> Thucydides Historiae, Lib. 2, XCIX.

<sup>6</sup> What is referred to by Thucydides coincides with the extensive writings of Strabo on Macedonia in his work Geographica– Kaktos, Lib.7 (see below under VIII).

<sup>7</sup> West of Imathia. About Lyngistai Strabo says that ‘they were governed by Arravvaios, from the breed of Vakhiaades, whose grand-daughter was Eurydice, mother of Philip, son of Amyntas’ ‘Geographica. Lib.7, 8. Note: Vakhiaades was a Doric tribe from Corinthus.

<sup>8</sup> South of Kastoria (lake Elimaia)

<sup>9</sup> Amyntas has surrendered during the campaign against Darius Ystaspis. Allies of the Persians were those accused of **medism** (in the sense they had treacherous dealings with the Medes) from Viotia, Thessalia and Argos.

<sup>10</sup> “...αυτός τε γαρ Ἕλληρ γένος εἰμί τωρχαίον, και αυτ’ ελευθέρης δεδουλωμένην ουκ αν εθέλοιμι οράν την Ελλάδα”, Herodotus, Lib. 9, – Calliope, chapter 44 - 45, p.174 - 176, Archaioi Syggrafeis, Zitros

the mouth of Alexander A, great grandfather of Alexander the Great<sup>11</sup>, is no doubt an absolute –juristic, we could say- proof on the issue in question, that is, on the origin of Alexander and the Macedonians.

In the eighth book of Herodotus *Historiae* (Ourania) there is reference to the kings of Macedonia from the beginning of the dynasty until the aforementioned Alexander A. According to this description, he was the son of Amyntas, son of Alcetas, whose father was Aeropus, son of Philip who was the son of Argaeus, who was son of Perdiccas, from Argos, who first climbed to the highest step of rule in Macedonia.<sup>12</sup>

### III. PLUTARCHUS (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D – died circa 120 A.D)

#### ... ON THE ORIGIN OF ALEXANDER

On the origin of Alexander- the most controversial among terminology issues-Plutarchus has a crystal clear answer: he was a descendant of mythical Hercules, through Karanus/Caranus<sup>13</sup>, on his father side – and Aeacus, through Neoptolemus<sup>14</sup> on his mother's<sup>15</sup>. The whole discussion could stop here, unless one considers the origin of Hercules, Aeacus and Neoptolemus in dispute. However, it is worthwhile looking into the exciting narrations of ancient Greek writers in order to find other, equally clear answers on the same question regarding the origin of Alexander.

Since the talk is on names, we should ponder parenthetically, on the name of Alexander, whose etymological origin derives –according to the prevailing view- from the verb “*αλέκω*” (repel, ward off) and the noun “*ανήρ*” (man). Alexander is -par excellence- a name proper to a leader, since a leader's first quality is to keep away and eliminate enemies. Alexander's Greek name as well as his father's, mother's, teachers', his generals' etc., are by themselves proof on the Hellenic descent of the leader, the dynasty and on the whole, the people of Macedonia.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the –likewise Greek- name of Bucephalus, which was given to his horse, as Arrian describes, because although the horse was black, it had “*a white spot in the shape of the head of an ox*”<sup>16</sup>. Conclusively, the entire terminology known to us from historical sources is proof that the language of Macedonia was Greek, and it would have been odd had there been another spoken language of which there is not even the slightest trace, neither in the names (nor even the horse's ...).

#### ...HIS EDUCATION

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander A was father of Amyntas B, sons of whose were Alexander B, and Philip father of Alexander the Great

<sup>12</sup> Herodotus, *Historiae* 8, Ourania139, Hatzopoulos, *The Greeks*.

<sup>13</sup> Karanus from Argos descendant of Hercules conquered a town near Edessa which he named Aigai and there he started the Macedonian dynasty. Arrian agrees with this

<sup>14</sup> Neoptolemus was son of Achilles

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 2, q. 2 (references without source in this chapter are from *Plutarchi Vitae Parallelae, Alexander-Caesar, Ekdoseis Archaia Ellinikis Grammateias, The Greeks, Odysseas Hatzopoulos*)

<sup>16</sup> Arrian, *Alexander's Anabasis*, Lib. 5,19, *The Greeks, Odysseas Hatzopoulos*

The teachers and those who nursed Alexander, as the great biographer says, were Greeks and the education he received was Hellenic: in charge of the team of his educators was Leonidas, a relative of Olympias and second in rank was Lysimachus from Akarnania<sup>17</sup>. However, the predominant educator and formulator of Alexander's outstanding character was “ο των φιλοσόφων ενδοξότατος και λογιώτατος Αριστοτέλης”, “the most renowned and learned among philosophers, Aristotle”, for whom Alexander had –in the beginning, at least- great respect and affection<sup>18</sup>.

### ...HIS READINGS

Alexander, “by nature studious, fond of learning and studying”, [“φύσει φιλόλογος και φιλομαθής και φιλαναγνώστης”], was notably fond of literature and Iliad in particular, a copy of which, with comments by Aristotle, he always carried with him under his pillow “μαζί με το σπαθί του έβαζε κάτω από το προσκέφαλο”.<sup>19</sup> The books that accompanied him in his expeditions were works by Filistos, many of Euripides, Sophocles' and Aeschylus' tragedies as well as Telestus' and Filoxenus' dithyrambs, [“ήταν τα έργα του Φιλίστου, πολλές από τις τραγωδίες του Ευριπίδη, του Σοφοκλή και του Αισχύλου, καθώς και οι διθύραμβοι του Τελέστου και του Φιλόξενου”]<sup>20</sup>. Alexander's affection for Pindarus –as known- saved the lives of the poet's descendants from death, as they were excluded from those who were killed or sold as slaves after the destruction of Thebes<sup>21</sup>.

### ... HIS PRINCIPLES

His education was based on the Greek ideals of virtue, knowledge<sup>22</sup>, dignity and bravery and for this reason “**he desired not pleasure nor wealth, bur virtue and glory...and important deeds**”. For the same reason he wanted his rule “**to be free of money, luxury and pleasures, but rich in struggles, wars and ambitions**”<sup>23</sup>. He thought it servile to live in lavishness and royal to respect the laws and undergo hardships at a time when the entire non-Hellenic world and particularly the Persians and eastern/oriental nations praised the power of authority and money, indulged in pleasures, accumulated wealth, and as Herodotus scornfully depicts, their leaders engrossed in luxury, even during war expeditions.

### ... DODECATHEON – THE TWELVE GODS

His frequent visits to the Greek oracles<sup>24</sup> and sacrifices to the twelve Olympian gods highlight the Hellenic origin of Alexander. In Asia he founded, as Plutarchus says, altars of gods who were revered for centuries and where **Greek sacrifices**<sup>25</sup> were offered.

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<sup>17</sup> Ch. 5, q. 7, 8. Lysimachus compared Alexander with Achilles, Philip, Pileas, and himself with Phoenix, teacher of Achilles

<sup>18</sup> Ch. 8, q. 4: ‘Αριστοτέλην δε θαυμάζων εν αρχή και αγαπών ουχ ήττον του πατρός, ως δι’ εκείνον μεν ζων, δια τούτον δε καλώς ζων’.

<sup>19</sup> Ch. 8, q.2.

<sup>20</sup> Ch. 8, q. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. 11, q. 12.

<sup>22</sup> And particularly science – Alexander was very good at medicine (Ch. 8).

<sup>23</sup> Ch. 5, q. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ch. 14, q. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ch. 62. q. 8.

## ... THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Alexander's great love for physical exercise, sports and military training resulted from the Greek education he received. And to those who urged him, when he had not yet succeeded his father on the throne, to take part in the Olympic Games<sup>26</sup> he replied that he would certainly do it if he had kings as competitors (Alexander was very proud of his royal descent and utterly convinced about his divine origin). And this concerns the known argument that it could not be possible to talk about his participation in the Games, since only Greeks took part, had he not been considered Greek<sup>27</sup>.

## ...BATTLES

As referred above, the Greeks called barbarians all those who were not Hellenes.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, according to them the ancient world was divided in two categories: the Hellenic and the barbarian<sup>29</sup>. From the events that took place during the first years of Alexander's reign, Plutarchus cites the wars of the great warrior against the **barbarians** to the north and, **by contrast**, the battles against the Greeks<sup>30</sup> -and this by no means gives reason to support that Macedonians were not Greeks. These battles are referred to in the same sense as we see them described by Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War: battles of Athenians and Spartans to establish their leadership over the Greeks. This does not mean that Athenians and Spartans were not Greeks. The same happens with the Macedonians who claimed leadership in the Hellenic domain and were equally Greek, as Athenians and Spartans.

## ...THE EXPEDITION TO THE EAST

When describing the expedition to the east, the first reference is on how the crucial decision was made: with a resolution at Isthmus the Greeks decided to campaign against the Persians and Alexander was proclaimed in chief<sup>31</sup>. It goes unsaid that he who led the Greek army would not be Greek himself.

### a. The Granicus river

Alexander announced the first significant victory at Granicus river by sending the Athenians three hundred shields from captives on which the famous epigram was written "*Alexander, son of Philip and the Hellenes, except Lacedaemonians from the barbarians living in Asia*" - "*Αλέξανδρος Φιλίππου και οι Έλληνες πλην Λακεδαιμονίων από των βαρβάρων των την Ασίαν κατοικούντων*"<sup>32</sup>. It is apparent that if Macedonians were not Greeks, there would be no sense writing such an epigram<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> He ran very fast

<sup>27</sup> Only Greeks were rendered honours in Olympic Games; his great grandfather Alexander A was already honoured.

<sup>28</sup> The etymology of "barbarian", Gr. *varvaros* signifies ignorance as far as language is concerned and foreign (repetition of the sound "var/" which means nothing in Greek).

<sup>29</sup> Thucydides *Historiae*, lib. A III p. 62, Govostis pub.

<sup>30</sup> Ch.9, q.3.

<sup>31</sup> Ch.14.2

<sup>32</sup> Ch. 16, q. 18

<sup>33</sup> This was how epigrams were written :( e.g. *Pausanias son of Kleovrotus, Lacedaemon, who freed Greece from Medes with Greeks who wanted to share the danger of battle. Alexander did not add the term Macedon as Pausanias as did with Lacedaemon*).

### **b. The Omen in Lycia**

After he conquest of Sardis, Halicarnassus and Miletus as Plutarchus relates, Alexander was hesitant about the further course of the expedition. And as he had particularly believed -as is known- in omens, he thought the following event as a turning point for designing his strategy: the bed of a fountain in Lycia near the town of Xanthos suddenly changed, flooded and from the bottom rose a copper plate with ancient scripture saying that *the Persian domination would end when it is conquered by the Greeks*. Encouraged by this omen, Alexander made instant decisions and marched victoriously along the entire coast as far as Phoiniki and Kilykia<sup>34</sup>. It is apparent that this excerpt from the narration is proof of the origin of Alexander (and of the entire army) as how would he be encouraged by this incident if he did not consider himself Greek (and his army for that matter)?

### **c. ALEXANDRIA**

After the conquest of Egypt -“εβούλετο πόλιν μεγάλην και πολυάνθρωπον *Ελληνίδα* συνοικίσας επώνυμον εαυτού καταλιπείν<sup>35</sup>”- he wished that he built a big city that would be **Greek** and be named after him. The dissemination of Greek civilization was the purpose of Alexander’s expedition and proof is-among other- his decision to create this large, Greek -as he wanted it- city. The design and construction of Alexandria is described by Plutarchus in a fascinating way<sup>36</sup>.

### **d. On the sanctuary of Zeus Ammon**

The next episode finds Alexander, after the magnificent and mystical march of the army in the desert, before the priest of the temple of Ammon Zeus, who in his effort to address him courteously “oh! Child” [*Ελληνιστί βουλόμενος προσειπείν μετά τινος φιλοφροσύνης «ω παιδίον»*], out of barbarism he pronounced the last letter as “s” instead of “n” which was interpreted as ‘oh, son of Zeus’ [“ω παι Διός”]<sup>37</sup>, another piece of evidence of the divine descent of Alexander. What, indeed, would be the point of the courteous address in Greek by the priest of Ammon, if Alexander had not been Greek?

### **e. At Gaugamila**

For the description of the decisive battle of Gaugamela, where the army finally defeated the Persian king, Plutarchus refers to the testimony of Callisthenes, according to which Alexander *appealed to the gods and wished, if indeed he descended from Zeus, that they offered their help and support to the Greeks*<sup>38</sup>.

Moreover, when later Alexander sat on the Persian royal throne, Dimaratus from Corinth was overwhelmed and on the verge of tears, said: *“what great joy the Greeks who died before seeing Alexander on the throne of Darius, were deprived of”*<sup>39</sup>. Why would the Greeks rejoice in such a way that the comment would be recorded in Plutarchus’ narration if Alexander wasn’t Greek?

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<sup>34</sup> Ch. 17, q. 4-5

<sup>35</sup> Ch. 26, q. 4 – 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ch. 26, q. 4-14.

<sup>37</sup> Ch. 27, q. 9

<sup>38</sup> Ch. 33, q. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ch. 37, q. 7.

## **f. THE DISSEMINATION OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE**

At the time Alexander had started adopting elements of the way of life of the Babylonians, he had already realized that the amalgamation of the cultural features would facilitate communication and relations between the local people and his army, in order that stability would be ensured and sustained after his death. For this reason, Plutarchus says, he selected thirty thousand children and ordered that they should be taught Greek<sup>40</sup>. Honestly, how and why would Alexander proceed in doing such an action, had he not been a Greek himself? The dissemination of the Greek language was a cultural offer with axiomatic educational value for the nations of the region. With this decision the foundations were laid for the formulation and dissemination of the Koine Greek (Hellenistic Greek) language which prevailed throughout the Greek world after Alexander's death, as is commonly known.

## **g. For the glory of the Athenians**

Toward the end of the biography, we see one of the most vivid testimonies in Plutarchus' work regarding the Greek origin of Alexander: after the army entered India and during the crossing of Ydaspis river (on the other side of which was king's Porus army, ready for battle) on a stormy night, *-ραγδαίου εκχυθέντος όμβρου-*, the level of the water had risen, the beds had eroded and a large amount of water made the soil on which Alexander and his soldiers treaded, slippery and full of crevices. At that moment –Plutarchus says– they heard Alexander exclaim: **“Athenians, would you ever believe how many risks I take for your glory?”**<sup>41</sup> What better confirmation would even the most skeptical observer need to convince him/herself that Alexander fought consciously as a Greek for the glory of Greece<sup>42</sup>, which was expressed by the grandeur that Athens, the metropolis radiated?

## **IV. ARRIAN/ARRIANUS (2nd century AD)**

From the works of Arrian, which is full of evidence on the Greek origin and upbringing of Alexander and the Macedonians, we only quote a few references, since it would be impossible to include all in such a selective approach as this:

Moreover, it should be noted that while the references on the Macedonians in the narration of the event are more than the reports on other clans, Macedonians are presented as one of the Greek entities as the others (e.g. “Macedonian horsemen three hundred and horsemen from Thessaly two hundred, from Ileia one hundred and fifty”, Lib. A – 29).

## **a. The Greeks who allied with the Persians**

After the battle of Granicus Athenian envoys begged Alexander to liberate the Greeks who had fought with the Persians and were captured. Alexander, however, as Arrian says, “thought it was not safe to stop being feared by the Greeks who did not hesitate to campaign against Greeks, on the side of the barbarians, while the expedition against the

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<sup>40</sup> Ch. 47, q. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ch. 60, q. 6, ‘Ω Αθηναίοι, άρα γε πιστεύσαιτ’ αν ηλίκους υπομένο κινδύνους ένεκα της παρ’ υμίν ευδοξίας?’

<sup>42</sup> ‘For the glory of Greece’, as concisely verbalized in the film ‘Alexander the Great’ by American director Oliver Stone in 2004.

Persians was in progress”<sup>43</sup>. How would it be possible that those who took the side of the Persians to fear Alexander’s wrath, if he himself were not Greek?

### **b. In Macedonia and other parts of Greece**

After the battle at Issos where Darius was thoroughly beaten and driven in disorderly retreat, according to the colourful and detailed description of Arrian, the Persian king sent a letter to Alexander in which he asked to make peace and alliance and that his captive family be returned (mother, sister in law and children).

Alexander, by return, asked that he came and asked for his family himself and made clear that he was now the sole sovereign of Asia; moreover, he forbid Darius to address him as equal. Alexander’s epistle, as recorded by Arrian, begins by accusing Darius that “**your ancestors came to Macedonia and other parts of Greece and harmed the Greeks, although they had done no wrong to the Persians. And I, Alexander, after becoming head of the Greeks, and intending to punish the Persians, made passage to Asia...and marched against you because those you sent attempted to annihilate the peace I achieved among the Greeks**”<sup>44</sup>.

This excerpt from Alexander’s own letter, as Arrian describes- is sufficient to stop any argument.

### **c. Punishment on behalf of the Greeks**

On entering Susa, Alexander, Arrian reports, took the possessions of the Persian king, among them the copper busts of the two *Tyrranicides* -**Harmodius**/*Harmódios* and **Aristogeiton** / *Aristogeítôn* (assassins of the tyrant) who killed Pisistratus’ son Hipparchus - which Xerxis had taken with him from Greece and sent them back to Athens where they were placed in Kerameikos<sup>45</sup>; their immediate execution resulted in the overthrow of the tyranny. (It is known that the overthrow of the tyranny was considered a turning point in the history of Athens and thus, the two *tyrranicides* were honored even more than the most glorious heroes). In another point in the narration, where it is apparent that Alexander wanted to avenge the afflictions suffered by Greece due to the expeditions of the Persians, the historian reports that as soon as he arrived in Pasagrades, he set the palaces to fire against the advice of Parmernion, who did not want Alexander to be seen as arriving in Asia as an invader and conqueror. Alexander, however, says Arrian, replied that he wanted to punish the Persians because they attacked Greece, dug Athens, burned the sanctuaries and caused the Greeks many calamities. “**Punishment on behalf of the Greeks**”<sup>46</sup>. How could this be legitimate, unless Alexander were not Greek himself?

### **d. Callisthenes**

In the fourth book, in the part where Arrian refers to Alexander’s deviant behavior to the habits and morals of the Persians, he mentions the honest words of the bold philosopher Callisthenes from Olynthus, a student of Aristotle, in reply to what Anaxarchus has said,

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<sup>43</sup> Arrian, *Alexander’s Anabasis*, Lib. A, 29, The Greeks, Odysseas Hatzopoulos Publications

<sup>44</sup> Arrian, *Alexander’s Anabasis*, Lib. B, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*: Lib. 3, 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*: Lib. 3, 18.

defending Alexander's demand that people should kneel before him, a demand encouraged by sophists and prominent Medes and Persians in his court. "... **the son of Philip, descendant of Hercules and Aeacus, whose ancestors came to Macedonia from Argus and became rulers of the Macedonians by law and not force...And if we should think like the barbarians because we are in a barbarian land, I demand that you remember Greece, for the glory of which you marched all this way, in order to place Asia under the dominion of the Greeks. Think, when you return to Greece, will you force the Greeks "who feel freer than anyone else, to kneel before you"? Or will you pull back from the Greeks and add this disgrace to the Macedonians? Or, maybe, you will separate the ways and be honoured by Greeks in the Greek way, and in a barbarian way by the barbarians**"<sup>47</sup>?

Regarding the issue of worship, Plutarchus writes about Callisthenes that *by strongly and philosophically repudiating worship (kneeling) ....he saved the Greeks from shame and most of all, Alexander, who aborted*<sup>48</sup>...'.

Reports are categorical, as they explicitly refer to the Greeks.

#### **e. For the freedom of the Greeks**

When he sent back to Greece the Macedonians who were no longer able to fight due to old age, illness or injury, with his most devoted comrade in charge, general Kraterus, he asked him **"to lead the soldiers back and to undertake the affairs of Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly and safeguard the freedom of the Greeks"**<sup>49</sup>.

#### **f. A Greek in Harmozeia**

In Indica, the book where Arrian describes Nearchus' passage from the Indus River to Susa, through the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf (an exciting travel book), there is a remarkable excerpt, characteristic of the far and wide presence of the Greeks:

After months of hardships, the audacious expedition continued. *"They started again at dawn, passed one hundred stadiums and anchored near the river Anamis in an area called Harmozeia. There, one could find everything in abundance, except olives. The crews disembarked in order to rest, happy that their hardships were over. They remembered their troubles in the sea, the land of fish eaters, the deserted lands they marched through, the brutality of the tribes they encountered, but also their own problems. Some scattered and moved inland to explore the area. They came across someone who wore a **Greek chlamys (tunic), behaved as a Greek and spoke Greek. The first who saw them burst into tears. It seemed so unexpected, after so many calamities that they should set eyes on a Greek and hear the Greek language. They asked him where he came from and who he was. He told them that he had left the camp of Alexander and that Alexander himself was not far away. Applauding and hailing, they took him to Nearchus. He told Nearchus everything. The camp was only five days journey by sea.***"<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Idem: Lib. 4, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Plutarchi Vitae Parallelae, Alexander – Caesar, CH. 54. Q. 3, Publication, *The Greeks*

And this way he saved the Greeks from great shame and Alexander from even greater, because he prevented kneeling ...' (translation by the writer). Worth noting is that Callisthenes, later, paid for his courage with his life.

<sup>49</sup> Arrianus, Alexander's Anabasis Lib. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Arrianus, Alexander's Anabasis, Indica, 32.

### **g. The Macedonians captains of the triremes (*triērarchoi*).**

In his description of the preparations for Nearchus' voyage through the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, Arrian refers to the captains of the triremes (*triērarchoi*), quoting the cities they came from. As regards Macedonians<sup>51</sup> the cities quoted are in the regions of Pieria, Imathia, Chalkidice (Pella, Amphipolis, Orestiada, Eordea, Pydna, Mieza, Aeges, Alcomenes Veroia, Tymphy – near Ioannina, Alorida). In a random, such as this report of Macedonian cities, it is no doubt worth mentioning that they are all within the boundaries of the geographical map as described by Thucydides who places Macedonia totally within the Greek dominion and at a considerable distance to the current northern border.

### **V. DEMOSTHENES (385 – 322 A.D.)**

Demosthenes' most notable feature was predominantly the intensity of his anti-Macedonian feelings which determined above all his other characteristics his political stigma. His perceptiveness and political wisdom led Demosthenes - long before his fellow citizens- to realize the inevitable predominance of the Macedonians. His longing for a revival of the grandeur of Athens which tormented the great orator -a passionate patriot in an era of recession, slackness and absence of interest for common affairs- and his adherence to the ideal of liberty and democracy, made him the greatest enemy of Philip in whose policy he saw the final end of the Athenian hegemony and the biggest threat to the democratic regime. The above mentioned are vividly described in his relevant rhetoric – three Olynthians and four against Philip- his monumental political texts, with astounding –parenthetically- parallelisms to our current political conditions. In his third rhetoric against Philip, however, Demosthenes' vehemence for the Macedonian ruler leads him to the articulation of characterizations<sup>52</sup> that were used as basis for the concoction of theories on the non-Greek origin of the dynasty of the Macedonians.

Nevertheless, the study of all the speeches of Demosthenes does not allow any doubt that his allegations are due to his rhetoric passion and do not invalidate historic truth. In no other speech is there any other such reference and it is obvious that the orator sees Philip not as a foreign enemy but as a rival of Athens, in the same sense as Sparta was (before and after the end of the Peloponnesian war). It is historically proven that such transgressions, as a rule served the promotion of strictly party purposes in a politically turbulent and decadent Athens and that Demosthenes' allegations were aimed at Philip only and not the people of Macedonia. In conclusion, it was typical that Demosthenes accused even **Athenian fellow citizens as barbarians** when he judged that they did not respect the values, principles and ideals of Greece.

Propagandists of the theory of the non-Hellenic origin of Macedonia should be aware (and most of them are not) that Demosthenes' anti-macedonian passion was so strong that

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<sup>51</sup> In the same quotation there is also reference to the *triērarchoi* from the rest of Greece

<sup>52</sup> "...not only is he not Greek, he is neither a barbarian from coming from a good land, but a disastrous Macedonian, from a place where you could not even buy a decent slave'(translation by the writer), Demosthenes Orationes, Philippica 3, 31, The Greeks, Kaktos Publications

he did not hesitate to summon the Athenians to ally even with Persians against Philip<sup>53</sup> (and this at a time when Isocrates, the great teacher of rhetoric had his hopes on the Macedonian kings asking them to unite, under their leadership, against the Persians- a campaign that was finally accomplished under Alexander).

In the context of this destructive dispute between parties the fact that Demosthenes supported that Philip was not Greek is minimal compared to his tremendous misbehavior that led him to favour an alliance even with the Persians, the age-long and most dangerous enemies of the whole of the Hellenic world at the time.

In the light of the above mentioned it is apparent that isolating a few words from the rhetoric stream of Demosthenes' orations and withhold the rest (a standard method of perverting the truth) shows –besides all else- a total indigence of arguments.

## VI. ISOCRATES (436 – 337? B.C)

### a. Transfer the war in Asia...

In one of his letters which was written a little before the battle of Chaeronea<sup>54</sup>, Isocrates fervently urges Philip: “... *to conciliate Athens with Sparta, Thebes and Argos and bring concord to the Greeks*<sup>55</sup>... *put an end to the insanity and greediness which characterizes their relations and to transfer the conduct of war to Asia*”. From the letter one realizes that a large part of the public opinion in Athens pressed toward the promotion of the idea of the campaign against the Persians under Philip as Isocrates writes to him – “...*no other accomplishment would be better, more useful and more appropriate for the Greeks under these historic circumstances*”<sup>56</sup>. And further: “*and be sure that you will then acquire insurmountable glory and suitable to your accomplishments when you cause the barbarians ...to be slaves to the Greeks and when you force their king they call great to do as you order him to. Then nothing will prevent you from becoming god*”<sup>57</sup>.

It would certainly not be possible for Isocrates – the most celebrated teacher of rhetoric and the greatest supporter of the moral magnitude of the Athenian political system- to speak about a war of the Greeks against the barbarians had Philip not been Greek and had Macedonia not been an inseparable part of Greece<sup>58</sup>.

### a. Athens as a protector of the ancestors of the Macedonian kings

Worth mentioning is also the fact that when Isocrates praises the glory of Athens he indicates that the city has always been the protector of all Greeks. In support of this he

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<sup>53</sup> Demosthenes Orationes, Philippica 3, 51, The Greeks, Kaktos Publications

<sup>54</sup> 338 B.C.

<sup>55</sup> ... εις ομόνοιαν καταστήσαι τους Έλληνας ... και εκ την Ασίαν τον πόλεμον εξενεγκείν.

Isocrates, Ad Philippum (III) 2, Archaioi Syggrafeis, Zitros Publications

<sup>56</sup> ... ούτε καλλίωνων έργων ούτ' ωφελιμώτερον τοις Έλλησιν ούτ' εν καιρώ μάλλον πραχθησομένων.

Isocrates, Ad Philippum, III 3, Archaioi Syggrafeis, Zitros Publications

<sup>57</sup> Idem, Ηγού δε τόθ' έξειν ανυπέβλητον αυτήν και των σοί πεπραγμένων αξίαν, όταν τους μεν

**βαρβάρους αναγκάσης ειλωτεύειν τοις Έλλησιν ... Ουδέν γαρ έσται λοιπόν έτι πλην θεόν γενέσθαι.**

<sup>58</sup> The idea is developed in detail by Isocrates in Panegyricus published long before the above epistle (380 B.C).

traces back to the years before the Trojan War, because, as he adheres, **“those who want to defend their country must draw proof from so far back”**<sup>59</sup> (and this, parenthetically, to answer to those who undervalue History when their allegations are about to prove groundless). Consequently, in this retrospect the great teacher-orator illustrates how the descendants of Hercules (and ancestors of the Macedonian kings chased by the Peloponnesians under Euristheas “acknowledged Athena as the only one capable of recompensing the services their father had offered to humankind”. Our ancestors (i.e. the Athenians), Isocrates continues marched against them (Peloponnesians), beat them and ended this abuse (hubris)<sup>60</sup>: therefore the special respect Macedonian kings and particularly Alexander always fostered for Athens.

## VII. POLYBIUS (204 – 122 B.C.)

### a. He subjected Asia to the Greeks

In the ninth book of *Historiae* Polybius refers, inter alia, to the alliance of Aetolians with the Romans against Philip V of Macedonia, Achaeans and Akarnanans and their allies (210 B.C.). Speaking before the assembly of Lakedaemonians, the representative of the people of Akarnania Lyciscus tries to prevent Spartans from going into alliance with the people from Aetolia and Romans against Macedonians and Achaeans: to Chlenaias from Aetolia who had previously spoken in favour of the alliance of the Spartans with the Romans, he says: **“You accused very harshly Alexander who punished the Thebans because he thought he was treated wrongly. You did not, however, mention that he took revenge from the Persians for the insult they caused to the Greeks nor did you mention that he rid us all from common and great calamities, by enslaving the barbarians and by taking away from them the means with which they destroyed Greece...and finally (Alexander) subjected Asia to the Greeks”**<sup>61</sup>. In the same speech Polybius says that Lycias wondered: **“... what kind and how big an honour do the Macedonians deserve, who spend most of their lives fighting against the barbarians for the safety of the Greeks? Who doesn't know that Greece would be facing great dangers had we not Macedonians and the dutifulness of their kings as our pillars of strength?”**<sup>62</sup>

### b. To Achaeans and Macedonian compatriots ...

In the same oration Lysias concludes while addressing Lakedaemonians: “you were then fighting with fervour for the rule and glory against your **fellow countrymen, the Achaeans and the Macedonians**...but now the issue is the slavery of Greeks by the foreigners (i.e. Romans)<sup>63</sup>.”

His insisting reference to the compatriot Macedonians –on the same level as the Lacedaemonians- and in contrast to the aliens/foreigners, clearly shows the ethnicity of

<sup>59</sup> πολύ δε προ των Τρωϊκῶν, - εκείθεν γαρ δίκαιον τας πίστει λαμβάνειν τους υπέρ των πατριῶν αμφισβητούντας... Isocrates Panegyricus, 54, Archaioi Syggrafeis, Zitros Publications

<sup>60</sup> Isocrates Panegyricus, 56-57-58, Archaioi Syggrafeis, Zitros Publications

<sup>61</sup> ‘... υπήκοον εποίησεν την Ασίαν τοις Έλλησι’, Polybius *Historiae* 9, 34.3 The Greeks, Kaktos

<sup>62</sup> ‘... τίνος και πηλίκης δει τιμής αξιούσθαι Μακεδόνας, οί τον πλείω του βίου χρόνον ου παύονται διαγωνιζόμενοι προς τους βαρβάρους υπέρ της των Ελλήνων ασφαλείας; Ότι γαρ αιεί ποτ’ αν εν μεγάλοις ην κινδύνοις τα κατά τους Έλληνας, ει μη τους Μακεδόνας είχομεν πρόφραγμα και τας παρά τούτοις βασιλέων φιλοτιμίας, τις ου γινώσκει; Polybius *Historiae* 9, 35 2 and 3.

<sup>63</sup> ‘τότε μεν γαρ υπέρ ηγεμονίας και δόξης επιλοτιμείσθε προς **Αχαιούς και Μακεδόνας ομοφύλους**... νυν δε περί δουλείας ενίσταται πόλεμος τοις Έλλησι προς αλλοφύλους’ ; Polybius *Historiae* 9,37, The Greeks, Kaktos

Macedonians. Worth noting is the fact that a big part of Polybius *Historiae* 9 is full of similar references.

## VIII. STRABO (46 BC – 24 AD)

In his work **Geographica**, the most significant geographical manual from antiquity – which along with Ptolemaios’ work comprises the main sources of ancient geography- Strabo, demarcates the boundaries and the shape of Macedonia:

**“Macedonia is Greece”** (*Ἔστι μὲν οὖν Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ Μακεδονία*)<sup>64</sup>, writes the great geographer-historian and continues by defining the boundaries in a remarkable manner as to detail, accuracy and the overall scientific approach:

Strabo’s description speaks of a parallelogram defined from west by the Adriatic Sea and from east as far as the riverbed of Hebrus. The northern boundary is the mountain range of Vertiskos-Skardos-Orvilos-Rodopi-Aemos, seen as a straight line and the southern boundary is Egnatia Odos (Via Egnatia) (starting at Dyrrachium)

All the above mentioned mountains are on the northern and eastern border of contemporary Greece, except Skardos which is on the border of Albania- FYROM. The straight line between these mountains, referred to by Strabo, appears to include –during his times- a small part of FYROM, south of Tetovo on the southwestern border with Albania. It should be highlighted that the area in question is described as a deep, wild and impenetrable ravine thus never inhabited. Therefore it is beyond logic to justify any historical or territorial demand.

Modern geographical maps confirm Strabo’s description and have no correspondence with the known endless propaganda maps –the peak of unjustified claims- originating from the north and alleging the ternary penetration of Halkidiki into the Aegean Sea.

Among the numerous references on Macedonia it is worthwhile mentioning Strabo’s – quoting Ekataios from Miletus- who says that before the Greeks “almost the entire Greece was inhabited by barbarians” (and quotes Pelops from Phrygia and Danaos from Egypt). “in today’s land (he continues) which is without doubt Hellas, there are big parts inhabited by barbarians: people from Thrace in Macedonia and some parts of Thessaly, people from Thesprotia, Kassopea, Amphilohia, Molottia and Athamanea, tribes from Epirus in Akarnania and the northern parts of Aetolia”<sup>65</sup>. It should be noted that he

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<sup>64</sup> Strabo *Geographica*, Lib. 7, 9.11 “Ἔστιν μὲν οὖν Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ Μακεδονία.... ὅτι ἡ Μακεδονία περιορίζεται ἐκ μὲν δυσμῶν τῆ παραλία τοῦ Ἀδρίου, ἐξ ανατολῶν δὲ τῆ παραλλήλῳ ταύτης μεσημβρινῆ γραμμῇ τῆ δια τῶν ἐκβολῶν Ἐβρου ποταμοῦ καὶ Κυψέλων πόλεως, ἐκ βορρᾶ δὲ τῆ νοουμένη εὐθεία γραμμῇ, τῆ δια τοῦ Βερτίσκου ὄρους καὶ Σκάρδου καὶ Ορβήλου καὶ Ῥοδόπης καὶ Αἴμου. Τα γὰρ ὅρη ταῦτα, ἀρχόμενα ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδρίου, διήκει κατὰ εὐθείαν γραμμὴν ἕως τοῦ Εὐξείνου, ποιοῦντα χερρόνησον μεγάλην πρὸς νότον, τὴν τε Θράκην ὁμοῦ καὶ Μακεδονίαν καὶ ἡπειρον καὶ Ἀχαΐαν. Ἐκ νότου δὲ τῆ Ἑγνατία οὐδὲ ἀπὸ Δυρραχίου πόλεως πρὸς Ανατολὰς ἰούση ἕως Θεσσαλονικείας. Καὶ ἔστι τούτο τὸ σχῆμα τῆς Μακεδονίας παραλληλόγραμμον ἐγγιστα’. Strabo adds that some include the area as far as Nestos in Macedonia because Philip cared for these lands, therefore he annexed them and gained income from the quarries and the produce of the area, (translation by the writer) *Geographica*, Lib. 7, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Strabo *Geographica*, Lib. 7, 1. ‘ὅπου γε καὶ τῆς ἐν τῷ παρόντι Ἑλλάδος ἀναντιλέκτως οὐσης τὴν πολλήν οἱ βάρβαροι ἔχουσι, Μακεδονίαν μὲν Θράκας καὶ τινὰ μέρη τῆς Θετταλίας κλπ...’

repeats that Macedonia is “beyond doubt” a part of Greece. The excerpt following the description places it in the same category as Akarnania and Aetolia. As understandably results, the above excerpt contains enough evidence to annul any propagandistic allegations of Demosthenes against Philip II (see above, V).

## IX. HESIOD

The life span of the poet of the *Theogony* is not known with certainty; existing evidence place it “before the last third of the VII century”. More specifically, research has led to the assumption that he lived long before 620 B.C. and therefore it is the oldest source of this report.

In his work *Eoiae* (Ἠοΐαι)<sup>66</sup> a large-scale genealogic poem –from the mothers’ side- the Doric and Aeolian aristocratic/heroic breeds are rhapsodized and the ancient memories of the matriarchal period in history are depicted with lucidity: in line 2(5) of *Eoiae* it is said that Thyia, daughter of Deukalion -and sister of Hellen- gave birth to two sons of Zeus: **“Magnes and Macedon, who fought on horseback and had their palaces in Pieria and Olympus”**<sup>67</sup>.

The lineal family relations of Macedon to Hellen well as the dwelling in Pieria and Olympus leave no doubt on the issue. On the other hand, this gives the first evidence that the inhabitants of Macedonia are of Doric origin (as are the people of Magnesia), an historic finding confirmed by other later sources.

Although this does not have any close- at least relation with the present work, it should be noted that in *Eoiae* we find the oldest reference on the origin of the term “Graecus” “based on which Latinus<sup>68</sup> called all the Greeks *Graeci* as reported by the historian Bekker<sup>69</sup> (according to P. Lekatsas):

## THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

Researchers and scholars of the Old Testament, a significant historical source, converge in supporting that the reference to the “Lord of Greece” in Daniel refers to Alexander. Actually, in the quotation in reference to the Persians (*τώρα θέλω επιστρέψει να πολεμήσω μετά του άρχοντος της Περσίας. Και όταν εξέλθω, ιδού, ο Άρχων της Ελλάδος*

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<sup>66</sup>Epic poem, *The catalogues of Women* or simply *Catalogue* which is part –or continuation – of *Theogony*.

<sup>67</sup>He had two sons, Magnes and Magedon who fought on horseback – Magnes and Macedon, who fought on horseback and had their palaces in Pieria and Olympus: Hesiod, *Theogony -Opera et Dies – Scutum – Eoiae*, Daedalos Publications, Ioannis Zacharopoulos, First Edition 1941, translation and comments by P. Lekatsas: The excerpt is from *Catalogue-Eoiae* which has been saved in fragments, line 2(5).

<sup>68</sup>As to the Latins, according to the genealogy of Hesiod, they descend from the hero Latinus, son of Circe and Odysseas (*Theogony*, line 1013).

<sup>69</sup>*Catalogue, Eoiae*, line 1(4 Rzach): And in the palaces the daughter of glorious Deukalion, Pandora lying with father Zeus, who rules all gods, gave birth to Graecus who loved war (this is a younger Pandora, not the one who opened the pithos releasing all the evils of mankind).

θέλει ελθεί' <sup>70</sup> ... και εγώ εν τω πρώτω έτει Δαρείου του Μήδου ιστάμην δια να κραταιώσω και ενδυναμώσω αυτόν), the description of the Greek king who will rule with great strength and will prevail refers to, according to readers of the Old Testament, the campaign of Alexander and the Greeks against the Medes and the Persians in Asia.

The account is completed with the following, literally prophetic diction about Alexander: "And as he stands, his kingdom shall be shattered and be divided in the four winds of heaven, and not to his descendant ... as his kingdom shall be divided to others but not to them <sup>71</sup>".

## AND KHALED HOSSEINI

My deliberation on Macedonia and Alexander was unexpectedly supplemented by an excerpt in the best seller of the Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Besides references on the daily life of Afghanistan (before the Russian invasion) such as red eggs, foods with yogurt and cucumber, kite competitions (like those held in the Greek countryside in the past) and other customs, it is explained to the major female character in the novel that one should respect and live according to the 'law' ('par excellence' a Greek moral and political principle and the basis and pillar of the Athenian democracy). And the author presents, in the text, the afghan word *qanoon* <sup>72</sup>: it is obviously the Greek word 'Κανών' (and here we have an additional testimony about the long articulation of long vowels such as omega /"ωμέγα").

It would certainly be quite interesting to carry out a comparative linguistic study between the Greek language and those languages of the lands that the army of Alexander went through; this army disseminated the language and the culture of Greece in the depths of Asia. "For the glory of Athenians" as Plutarchus declares <sup>73</sup>...

## EPILOGUE

The above is only part of the evidence recorded in the narratives of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarchus, Arrian, Polybius, Strabo, and Hesiod; also in the writings of Demosthenes and Isocrates, who indirectly or directly discuss the origin of Alexander and the Macedonians.

The value of historical truth -as recorded in such works- for nations with a long tradition and civilization is sacred and inviolable. For newly established countries that are in search of identity and trying to build an entity at the expense of history, the value of truth is relative and changing. For these latter cases, historical figures such as the above ancient Greek writers hold, since time immemorial, irrevocable verdicts in the minds of all those who know and insist to remember.

<sup>70</sup> Old Testament, Daniel, ch. I' 20.

<sup>71</sup> Old Testament, Daniel, ch. IA' 1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Khaled Hosseini, 'A Thousand Splendid Suns', Riverhead Books, New York 2007 p. 284.

<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that as referred to in the publication *The Greeks* by Odysseas Hatzopoulos (that was the key basis of this survey) the ancient Greek texts are from Oxford Classical Texts, BSB B.G. Verlagsgesellschaft, Loeb Classical Library, Les Belles Lettres, Tusculum Bücherei etc.

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Brussels, April 2011

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